

Saudi Arabia - New Web Publishing Law

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Saudi Arabia has recently announced new implementing regulations for web publication (the "Regulations") which will come into force after one month from publication in the official gazette. The Regulation applies to owners (whether Saudi nationals or residents of Saudi Arabia) of web publication means operating from Saudi Arabia and foreign websites that are hosted in Saudi Arabia.

The Regulations regulate 13 types of web publications which are as follows:

- Electronic newspapers;
- Media websites (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines...etc);
- Electronic advertising;
- Websites for displaying audio visual materials;
- Broadcast via mobile phone;
- Broadcast via other means;
- Forums (Montadyat);
- Blogs;
- Personal Websites;
- Mailing groups;
- Electronic archive;
- Chatting rooms; and
- Any form of web publishing that the Ministry of Information and Culture decides to add from time to time.

Types 1-6 are subject to license and types 7-12 along with type 13, are subject to registration with the Ministry of Information and Culture. An applicant for a license must; (a) be a Saudi; (b) be no less than 20 years of age; (c) have high school certificate; (d) hold an appropriate license for the same activity; (e) be of good behavior and conduct; (f) have a specific mail address; (g) specify email address; (h) employ editors in chief who have been approved by the Ministry of Information and Culture; (i) have a domain name. An applicant for registration must; (a) be a Saudi or resident of Saudi Arabia ;(b) be of good behavior and conduct; (c) have a specific mail address; (d) specify email address; (e) have an operational website.

The Regulations specify who is liable for the content published on the web. For example, the editor in chief or his deputy and the author are responsible for the content. Furthermore, the licensee must specify who is responsible for content, otherwise he will be liable. The owner of a personal website is responsible for the content.

A person found to be acting in violation of the Regulations is subject to one of the following penalties:

- Obligatory publishing of corrections;
- Fines;
- Compensation for infringement against private rights;
- Partial blocking;
- Temporary blocking for more than two months; or
- Total blocking.

The Regulations provide a grace period of six months from publication in the official gazette for owners to register and obtain a license.