

MSM under fire for selling 'favorable' coverage and cover-ups to Uber, Google

London paper 'sells its editorial independence,' Open Democracy claims.

By CHARLIE COOPER

The London Evening Standard is facing accusations it sold “favorable news coverage” to six major companies, including Uber and Google, in a £3-million deal.

Open Democracy, a political U.K.-based website, accused the paper of offering positive news coverage to the likes of Uber and Google in exchange for corporate partnerships worth hundreds of thousands of pounds, as part of an upcoming campaign called London 2020.

According to the [report](#) published Wednesday, the Evening Standard told corporate partners they would not just get the usual, clearly labeled “advertorial” content, but also news and comment pieces “that will appear to readers as routine, independently written editorial.”

The Evening Standard, which is run by former U.K. Chancellor George Osborne and has a circulation of close to 900,000, issued a statement Wednesday night denying the allegations.

The London 2020 project, set to launch June 5, involves six “themed projects” that will run over the next two years and focus on issues

such as clean air, schools and workplace tech, according to Open Democracy.

The project's six corporate partners have each paid half a million pounds to be involved, it claimed. The plan will include "favorable" news coverage of the firms involved that will not be flagged as commercially-branded content, Open Democracy claimed. Several "unbranded news stories" written by staff reporters are planned to run next month, according to the organization.

The Evening Standard's parent company ESI Media's commercial director, John O'Donnell, gave a statement to [the Drum](#) in response, calling the Open Democracy report a "grossly inaccurate and a wildly misunderstood interpretation of the London 2020 project."

London 2020 is "an editorial campaign designed to instigate positive change and support London in becoming a more environmentally and socially sustainable city fit for the future," O'Donnell said.



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"This will, as with all commercial content, be clearly identifiable as such," he insisted. "Under no circumstances have these clients been guaranteed news coverage for their own ends, nor would they ever be. Properly signposted commercial content within an editorial product is an accepted part of the news industry and is nothing new for publishers."

The Evening Standard [came under fire](#) last year for failing to declare Osborne's £650,000-a-year part time job with BlackRock, the fund manager that holds a £500 million stake in Uber.

Osborne is yet to comment.