

Beliefnet acquired by Fox media empire: Site will retain interfaith character

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Beliefnet, one of the country's leading Web sites devoted to religion and spirituality, is under new management as part of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. and the Fox Entertainment Group.

The deal, announced December 4, gives Beliefnet a new solidity after it emerged from bankruptcy protection five years ago. The site is now profitable and gets 3 million visitors each month.

Financial terms of the agreement were not disclosed.

Beliefnet was approached by Fox, said Steve Waldman, who cofounded the site almost eight years ago. "There was no huge rush to sell the company," said Waldman, who will serve as president and editor-in-chief of the revamped company.

Waldman said the deal would give Beliefnet access to News Corp.'s advertising, video and technology expertise and allow "content collaboration that runs in both directions."

The acquisition adds to News Corp.'s \$64 billion media empire, which includes the 20th Century Fox film studios, the *Wall Street Journal*, MySpace, the Fox Faith film division and HarperOne and Zondervan, two of the biggest names in religious publishing.

Waldman said the site will retain its distinctly interfaith character even as News Corp. expands its mostly Christian media portfolio.

Dan Fawcett, president of Fox Digital Media, said that Beliefnet has been respected for its "unbiased approach to faith and spirituality" by "a broad range of consumers, religious and political leaders, journalists and advertisers."

Ruth Gledhill, religion correspondent for the News Corp.-owned *Times of London*, wrote in her blog: "Rarely has religion been more prominent in the media than today, and News Corp.'s interest in Beliefnet, thought to be a good advertising revenue generator, indicates how seriously this is all being taken." -*Religion News Service, Ecumenical News International*