

Mark W. Tiedemann  
PO Box 160160  
St. Louis, MO 63116

John Read  
Chief, Litigation III Section  
Antitrust Division  
U.S. Department of Justice  
450 5th Street, NW, Suite 4000  
Washington, DC 20530

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Dear Mr. Read,

I am writing to you concerning the Department of Justice action involving major publishers, Amazon.com, and the agency model which has been construed as "price fixing."

My concern is personal and professional. I am a writer. I have published ten novels and, with any luck, will publish several more. I am also, not coincidentally, an avid reader, with a lifetime of fond memories in the company of books. I am also a past president of the Missouri Center for the Book, which is the state affiliate to the Library of Congress Center for the Book, and in that position I dealt, for several years, with the concerns of authors, publishers, and book sellers, all trying to survive and succeed in what has been a rapidly changing marketplace.

One of the primary supports for writers and booksellers alike has been the agency model, without which "price wars" would have made it infinitely more difficult for writers to earn a living and independent bookstores to stay in business. It has provided much-needed stability in the shifting sands of what is at the best of times a marginal business.

What Amazon.com is attempting is nothing less than to gain the upper hand in dictating the future shape of the book market. The advent of e-publishing has everyone working hard to figure out what a sustainable market will look like. For a vendor to dictate to suppliers how much their products should cost, to the best of my knowledge, is unprecedented. For the United States government to side with the aspiring monopolist to undo a system that, while imperfect, at least provides a secure basis on which everyone involved can earn a reasonable living is disturbing. I would urge you to rethink your position.

Amazon.com for its part has been fairly up front about its tactics. They are similar in many ways to WalMart and others that have driven other businesses out of local communities and left consumers with fewer options. They intend to undercut all players with the intent of putting them out of business. Attacking traditional publishing in this way will only hasten that advent. It would have been better, in this instance, for the Department of Justice to stay out of it and let the market deal with this. In my opinion, if Amazon.com wins this, it will set a terrible precedent.

Sincerely yours,

Mark W. Tiedemann