

From: Roxana Robinson [mailto:roxanabrobins@REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 25, 2012 8:44 AM
To: Read, John [John.Read@ATR.USDOJ.gov]
Subject: Tunney Act

john.read@usdoj.gov

To: John Read
US Department of Justice

Re: Tunney Act
U.S. vs. Apple, Inc., et al., 12-cv-2826 (DLC) (SDNY)

Dear Sir,

I am writing to protest the Department of Justice's proposal to prosecute Apple, Inc and a group of book publishers for collusion in response to the competitive tactics of Amazon.com.

As I understand them, anti-trust laws are intended to prevent a single company from becoming large enough to dominate the marketplace. Such domination would enable it to drive out competition, and competition, as I understand it, is the backbone of a capitalist economy, because it makes a wide variety of choices available to the consumer. The mechanism of competition is what keeps prices low and quality high. What I don't understand is why Amazon.com has been permitted to attain a size at which it not only dominates the book-selling industry, and has driven much of its competition out of business, but at which it is also threatening the publishing houses as well. If Amazon controls both sides of the transaction it cannot be good for the consumer. Amazon has already struck a devastating blow to the book industry, by driving so many independent booksellers out of business. If Amazon is allowed to expand its domination, it will be a terrible thing for readers (buyers) and for writers (sellers). As both a reader and a writer, I'm writing on behalf of both.

Amazon has shown itself to be an aggressive and effective mercantile presence, so in that way it's a success. But Amazon has not shown itself to be a responsible publisher of books nor a thoughtful purveyor of them. Amazon sells books the way it sells diapers and garden hoses – as commodities. There is little evidence that the company has any understanding of the intellectual content of the books it offers. In fact, as a bookseller, Amazon is little more than a shipping service, providing speed and convenience, but not much else. Asking the company itself for its opinion on the merits of a book would be like asking UPS for its opinion on a package. Remarkably, among companies that have made a name through identification with a particular product, Amazon demonstrates an absolute lack of engagement in the product itself. Amazon's interest is purely in the methods of selling, not in the actual books themselves. This means that the company is an excellent distributor, but a very ineffective representative of its own product – one whose value is intellectual and, actually, immeasurable.

The consumer will always benefit from an industry that values its own product. In the book industry, valuing the product would mean engaging with it intellectually. It would mean finding the best books available, which would mean researching the range of possibilities. That would mean reading, which is something independent booksellers and book publishers take a professional pleasure in doing. At Amazon, by contrast, there is no hint of intellectual engagement with the product. Amazon doesn't try to offer the best product, only the most product. Offering everything means an absence of critical criteria, and critical criteria – having opinions, defining merit - are part of the intellectual discourse that books themselves represent. Turning over the book industry to Amazon would be like turning over the education system to robots.

Books are not commodities. They are physical manifestations of the life of the mind. Books teach us who we are. Books form our intellectual community, they are at the heart of our discourse. They are at the core of a free democratic society. As readers and as writers, we need publishers and booksellers that understand the value of books. As a healthy society, we need a wide range of writers, a wide range of publishers, and a wide-ranging discourse. If we value books and what they represent, if we value intellectual exchange and the great heritage that books represent, we need a healthy and widely diverse book publishing industry.

Please take steps now to curtail Amazon's monopolistic tactics, and move to allow its competition to survive and thrive. The DOJ has a distinguished history of facing down monoliths in the interests of the consumer. Now, in the interests of buyers and sellers, readers and writers, in the interests of everyone in America who reads, please face Amazon down!

Yours very truly,

Roxana Robinson

New York, N.Y.