

From: Mary Hoffman  
Sent: 06 January 2006 16:57  
To: Alan Shearman  
Subject: HMV/Ottakar's merger inquiry

Dear Mr. Shearman,

I am opposed to the acquisition of Ottakar's by HMV/Waterstone's from two perspectives.

First, as a reader and buyer of books I appreciate the variety offered by local branches of Ottakar's (my own local is in Witney, Oxfordshire) rather than the sameness of the branches of Waterstone's.

Secondly as a writer (with 85 published titles), I deplore the central buying policy of Waterstone's. In my own field, of children's books, that chain is influencing what is published by, for instance having a core list of a few hundred titles, which has been instrumental in the reduction of picture books titles published in hardback. If your title is not on that list (and this is not special pleading because I imagine mine would be on it; I haven't checked), your book has little chance of success. This takes away the autonomy of local booksellers to respond to local needs and interests and to support local authors. It also diminishes the professionalism of bookselling staff such as those at Ottakar's who read widely and write their own recommendations for titles.

It is disingenuous of HMV/Waterstone's to imply that their combined market would be under 25% of the book trade; that takes into account all outlets, including airports and supermarkets. As a proportion of the High Street book trade, they would, if successful, represent a considerably higher percentage of sales. It is not realistic to suppose that another chain could arise to compete with this new behemoth.

I hope you will decide not to allow this bid to go ahead.

Yours sincerely

Mary Hoffman