

Amazon, Microsoft, Yahoo! oppose Google book settlement

August 26 2009, by Chris Lefkow



A Google stand at a Book Fair in Frankfurt in 2007. Amazon, Microsoft and Yahoo! joined with non-profit groups and library associations on Wednesday in opposing the legal settlement which would allow Google to digitize and sell millions of books.

Amazon, Microsoft and Yahoo! joined an alliance Wednesday opposing the legal settlement which would allow Internet giant Google to digitize and sell millions of books.

The three technology heavyweights are among the members of a coalition called the Open Book Alliance which expressed concern about "serious legal, competitive, and policy issues" surrounding Google's book scanning project.

In a statement, the alliance said its members, which include the San

Francisco-based non-profit the Internet Archive, publishers and library associations, will counter the [Google](#) book settlement "in its current form."

Google, whose book project is already facing anti-trust scrutiny from the US Justice Department, an October court review and privacy concerns, dismissed the alliance as "sour grapes."

"This sounds like the Sour Grapes Alliance," it said in a statement. "The Google Books settlement is injecting more competition into the digital books space, so it's understandable why our competitors might fight hard to prevent more competition."

Google reached a class action settlement in October of last year with the Authors Guild and the Association of American Publishers to a [copyright infringement lawsuit](#) they filed against the Internet search giant in 2005.

Under the settlement, Google agreed to pay 125 million dollars to resolve outstanding claims and establish an independent "Book Rights Registry," which will provide revenue from sales and advertising to authors and publishers who agree to digitize their books.

Alliance co-chairs Peter Brantley and Gary Reback said in a blog post on a website created by the coalition, openbookalliance.org, that the settlement "creates an unprecedented monopoly and price fixing cartel."

"Just as Gutenberg's invention of the printing press more than 700 years ago ushered in a new era of knowledge sharing, the mass digitization of books promises to once again revolutionize how we read and discover books."

"But a [digital library](#) controlled by a single company and small group of

colluding publishers would inevitably lead to higher prices and subpar service for consumers, libraries, scholars, and students," they said.

"Public interest demands that any mass book digitization and distribution effort be undertaken in the open, grounded in sound public policy, and mindful of the need to promote long-term benefits for consumers rather than those of a few commercial interests," they added.

Brantley is a director of the [Internet Archive](#), which maintains a digital library of websites and has its own book scanning project, while Rebak is an anti-trust lawyer in Silicon Valley who ironically helped persuade the Justice Department to file its anti-trust case against Microsoft in the 1990s.

Other members of the alliance include the American Society of Journalists and Authors, the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, the New York Library Association, Small Press Distribution and the Special Libraries Association.

The settlement still needs the approval of a US District Court judge, who is to hold a "fairness hearing" on the deal in New York on October 7.

[Microsoft](#), which entered into a 10-year Web search partnership with [Yahoo!](#) last month that set the stage for a joint offensive against Google, also had a project to create a vast digital library but shut it down in May of last year.

Online retail giant Amazon is a major player in the electronic book sector through its popular e-reader, the Kindle.

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