

Authors call on readers in Amazon book battle

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An open letter to readers picking up momentum online Thursday had

racked up more than 60 signatures including those of Lee Child, James Patterson, Hilary Spurling, and Scott Turow.

"We feel strongly that no bookseller should block the sale of books or otherwise prevent or discourage customers from ordering or receiving the books they want," read the letter that bestselling author Douglas Preston has been circulating.

"It is not right for Amazon to single out a group of authors, who are not involved in the dispute, for selective retaliation."

Hachette and online retail colossus Amazon are clashing over terms of a distribution contract for works handled by the publisher.

Hachette has maintained in public statements that it wants to make peace with online retail titan Amazon, but on terms that "value" the role of authors and their publishers.

Hachette criticized Amazon for treating literary works as commodities.

Not picking sides

The open letter maintained that tactics being used by Amazon include "boycotting" Hachette authors by refusing to accept pre-orders for titles, ending price discounts and slowing deliveries.

"Without taking sides on the contractual dispute between Hachette and Amazon, we encourage Amazon in the strongest possible terms to stop harming the livelihood of the authors on whom it has built its business," the letter reads.

"None of us, neither readers nor authors, benefit when books are taken hostage."

The letter urged readers to email their concerns about the situation directly to Amazon founder and chief Jeff Bezos at jeff@amazon.com.

Amazon in May said that it saw little reason for optimism in resolving the dispute, which is believed to be about pricing, and offered to contribute to a fund to compensate authors for lost revenue.

The Wall Street Journal on Wednesday quoted an Amazon executive saying that the online retailer's fight was in the long-term interests of customers because the outcome would affect prices of books.

Amazon has acknowledged it was maintaining less inventory from Hachette and was no longer taking pre-orders from the publisher, and said the talks were part of the normal discussions with suppliers.

Amazon eye on prices

"Negotiating with suppliers for equitable terms and making stocking and assortment decisions based on those terms is one of a bookseller's, or any retailer's, most important jobs," Amazon said earlier this year.

"When we negotiate with suppliers, we are doing so on behalf of customers."

Noticed tactics include suggesting that readers looking for some Hachette titles might enjoy a book from other [authors](#) instead.

Amazon maintained that the face-off with Hachette affects a small percentage, along the lines of a dozen out of every thousand, of the Kindle-maker's book sales.

Hachette Book Group is a subsidiary of French company Lagardere.

Amazon has a reputation for negotiating hard to push down prices for the goods it sells online.

In a turn that may have emboldened Amazon, the US Justice Department triumphed in an e-book anti-trust lawsuit against Apple.

Last year, the judge who found Apple guilty of illegal price-fixing for e-books ordered the tech giant to steer clear of new contracts with publishers that could violate antitrust law.

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