

THE OLIGOPOLY v THE OASIS
OR
UNITY BOOKS STRIKES BACK

Over the last 25 years Unity Books has established a reputation as a respected and independent bookseller.

Not only are we a general mainstream bookshop but we also cater for minority literary tastes intelligently, responsibly and imaginatively.

We are known as a bookshop that is well informed, different, and to some, alternative. We have been described as "fun", "eccentric" and by the more restrained, "welcoming".

We have a large stockholding of books and are seen as a bookseller with titles that aren't available elsewhere. To a small extent this may be true but overall it is a myth but one well worth perpetuating.

Whitcoull's recent buy-up of London Books, Philip King and the Australian chain of Angus & Robertson may change all this.

We will have difficulty competing on price, marketing and exclusivity. Worse, access to books may be restricted because of deals struck by Whitcoulls publishers.

The assumption that Unity can retain its place in the sun as a "deli" bookshop insulated from the developing supermarket approach to bookselling is comforting but dangerous. Plenty of supermarkets have well stocked delis!

So how should Unity meet the challenge coming from the Whitcoull's oligopoly? Let's kick off with our strengths and weaknesses.

STRENGTHS

- * Specialised personal service
- * Knowledge of books and publishing
- * Dedicated staff
- * The boldness to parallel import and get away with it
- * Customer loyalty
- * Good rapport with publishers which leads to us cornering the launches in Wellington
- * Support from authors
- * Good relations with the news media
- * Large stockholding
- * An exclusive place in the Wellington market at present

WEAKNESSES

- * Competition from the new reorganised Whitcoulls chain
- * Lack of capital to stock and promote the shop to its full potential
- * The probability that Whitcoulls will cut out the NZ agents and strike direct deals with overseas publishers
- * Continued and increased international control of publishing by fewer and fewer companies
- * Little coordination between Wellington and Auckland shops which means we are not maximising our buying power by negotiating increased discounts.
- * Our location - we are just on the wrong side of the tracks which means we don't get the passing trade we otherwise might
- * Lack of bold signs clearly identifying the shop from the street
- * High overheads - particularly with rentals and stockholdings. However, the latter point is also an asset
- * Insufficient control over stock and in particular shoplifting

THE FUTURE

Unity must continue to be THE specialist bookshop in Wellington and the best in NZ.

To do this we can:

- * Increase our customer base
- * Use our contacts
- * Develop and streamline our special and mail order business
- * Integrate completely with Auckland in buying, exchanging stock, joint promotions and sharing information
- * Trade on Unity's independence and differences
- * Reduce stock holding by identifying dead areas
- * Investigate the computerisation of stock controls
- * Spot the new trends and be ahead of the pack