

The Honorable Michael K. Powell  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Powell:

Although this was submitted through one of the companies' online forms, this isn't just another form letter that the companies involved wrot.

I have been a customer both of Hughes' DirecTV and of EchoStar's Dish Network. I also am a professor of journalism and frequent consultant to media companies (though never either of these two firms).

As a customer residing in a small market and one who desires many technologically sophisticated services, I can categorically state that allowing these companies to merge would be in the public interest.

There's no chance in the world that every satellite company will ever get around to adding local channels for an Area of Dominant Influence as small as the Champaign-Urbana, Ill., market unless a merger such as this goes through. The result is not local consumers will be forced to maintain 'lifeline' cable service or erect over-the-air antennas. They simply will ignore the local stations altogether -- and with them the local public service that these stations provide.

It's not anti-competitive to allow two satellite providers to merge when their competition is already monolithic local cable company. We recognize that cable service often needs to be provided by what amounts to a monopoly. Competition comes from satellite companies, but they are hamstrung from competing if they are not allowed to pool their resources.

Equally important are technical enhancements that one or the other satellite company may not be able to provide. I moved from Dish to DirecTV because it had exclusive rights to out-of-market NFL football and exclusive rights to integrated TiVo recorder-receivers. Dish, the smaller firm, simply could not compete, even though its service in every other regard was superior. Refusing to allow it to merge would be tantamount to hamstringing the company in areas of competitiveness.

And make no mistake about it: The competition isn't between Echostar and Hughes; it's between little-guy satellite providers and huge cable providers like AT&T and AOL Time Warner. Allowing this merger is, in a very real way, a way to increase, not decrease, competition -- and, for the first time, ensuring that cable companies cannot continue their monopolistic arrogance toward consumers while periodically greasing the palms of the few local politicians who are supposed to serve as the public's advocates in such matters.

Just today I attempted to reach my local cable company to try to order broadband Internet access essential for some of my business interests. The company, which has jerked me around for years about availability, no longer offers the precise type of service I require. A combined EchoStar-Hughes company could provide a much more competitive and much more responsive alternative service than the monopolistic cable or telephone companies currently do.

Don't think of this as a satellite industry. It is a broadband information and entertainment industry. In that industry, all the segments of it are controlled by local monopolies except the national satellite segment, which is forced to have internal competition at a level that prevents it from effectively competing in the broader industry.

This merger is dramatically in the public interest.

Sincerely,

Eric Meyer  
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