

Playboy Focuses on Wal-Mart, Which Doesn't Sell the Magazine

By CONSTANCE L. HAYS SEPT. 29, 2003

The November issue of Playboy takes on Wal-Mart Stores Inc., the world's largest retailer. But no one who shops for magazines exclusively at Wal-Mart is likely to see the article, because Playboy is among the titles it does not sell.

The article, "God and Satan in Bentonville," in the November issue of Playboy, on newsstands Monday, addresses the conservative, no-frills culture at Wal-Mart after a tour of Bentonville, Ark., where it is based.

"Wal-Mart has never been able to square its professed Main Street values -- the greeters at the store doors, the flag-waving patriotism -- with the uncomfortable fact that it's bad news for Main Street wherever it goes," Dan Baum writes in the article. Mr. Baum reports that an independent bookstore in town on the verge of shutting down is owned by a daughter-in-law of Sam Walton, the founder of Wal-Mart.

Its ability to filter content for its customers is among the points the article addresses, with such observations as, "The First Amendment prevents censorship by the government, but Wal-Mart is now so huge that its perfectly legal corporate policies can hinder freedom of choice."

One evangelist interviewed said he moved to Bentonville "to fight Satan," and explained: "Satan is a mimicker. God is here, so Satan is here. Wal-Mart started out good, selling things cheap to people who didn't have a lot of money. But that's how Satan works." He added, "The reason the religious right is here in Bentonville is that it's holding off Wal-Mart."

The retailer cooperated with Mr. Baum by answering his questions and questions from his editors, a spokesman, Tom Williams, said. "We try to respond to

all queries that come to us," Mr. Williams said.

Playboy's Web site, Playboy.com, is inviting women who work for Wal-Mart to pose nude for a feature called "Women of Wal-Mart."

At Wal-Mart, "we don't care for it at all," Mr. Williams said. "We think Playboy is exploiting our name to sell the magazine." Has anyone signed up yet? Mr. Williams said he did not know. But he added, "We are confident a lot of the associates are going to see right through it."

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