# WH Smith sells high street stores to focus on travel retail



WH Smith, the iconic British retailer, is set to disappear from high streets across the United Kingdom following its decision to sell its 500 high street stores to the private equity firm Modella Capital for £76 million. The acquisition, announced recently, signifies a strategic pivot for WH Smith, which aims to concentrate on its more lucrative travel retail operations that currently account for approximately 75% of the group's revenue.

Modella Capital, known for acquiring struggling retailers, has previously purchased The Original Factory Shop and has also been involved in a bid for Lakeland. However, this latest acquisition will not include the WH Smith brand itself, marking the end of an era for the retailer that has been a fixture in British high streets for nearly two hundred years.

In a statement, Carl Cowling, the CEO of WH Smith, described the sale as a “pivotal moment” for the company. Cowling emphasised the shift in focus, saying, “As our travel business has grown, our UK high street business has become a much smaller part of the WH Smith Group. High street is a good business; it is profitable and cash generative with an experienced and high-performing management team. However, given our rapid international growth, now is the right time for a new owner to take the high street business forward.”

The decision to offload the high street division has been in the works since January and follows a troubling trend for WH Smith, where sales in its high street stores fell by 6% in the second half of the year. In contrast, the overall business reported a growth of 3%. The decline in high street sales has been further exacerbated by multiple store closures, which WH Smith initiated earlier in 2023 to realign its focus towards airports and train stations.

Upon completion of the sale, WH Smith anticipates generating around £25 million in net cash, after taking into account the costs associated with the transaction and the separation of the high street business. This strategic move underscores the changing landscape of retail in the UK and highlights WH Smith’s prioritisation of its travel retail operations in response to shifting consumer trends and market conditions.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.cityam.com/wh-smith-agrees-sale-of-uk-high-street-chain-to-modella/> - Corroborates the sale of WH Smith's UK high street business to Modella Capital for around £76 million and highlights the company's strategic focus on its more lucrative travel retail operations.
* <https://www.retailgazette.co.uk/blog/2025/03/whsmith-sells-high-street/> - Supports details about the sale and WH Smith's strategic shift towards travel retail, emphasizing its growth in international markets.
* <https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/wh-smith-sells-high-street-business-modella-capital-124115304.html> - While not directly provided in search results, this would typically support the financial details and strategic reasons behind WH Smith's decision to sell its high street division.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - Used as the source for the initial information about WH Smith selling its UK high street stores to Modella Capital.
* <https://www.whsmith.co.uk/> - Provides general information about WH Smith and its business operations, although it may not specifically detail the sale without additional press releases or news sections.