



**NEWS RELEASE**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SETTLEMENT REACHED TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HOTELS.COM  
AND EXPEDIA RESERVATION SERVICES FOR DISABLED TRAVELERS**

OAKLAND, Calif. – Under a settlement announced today, Hotels.com and Expedia.com, two of the world’s leading online travel companies, have agreed to add features to their online travel reservation systems so that millions of travelers with disabilities can use their online services to search for and reserve hotel rooms that have the accommodations they need.

Plaintiffs in the California lawsuit *Smith v. Hotels.com L.P.* were represented by the public interest law firms of Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) and Public Justice, and a leading class action law firm in Mill Valley, Calif., Chavez & Gertler LLP.

As part of the settlement, Hotels.com and Expedia.com will gather information about hotels’ accessibility features, and will then incorporate that information into their websites so that travelers can both search for hotels with rooms that offer the particular accommodations they need, and make special requests online to book those accessible rooms. Each special request will be given individual attention by a trained customer service representative, who will work with the customer to accommodate his or her needs. These new features will be rolled out later this year.

“For years, travelers with disabilities have been unable to take advantage of the convenience and low cost options of booking hotel rooms online,” said plaintiff Bonnie Lewkowicz. “Now, for the first time, I will be able to reserve a hotel room online that meets my needs, just like anyone else.”

Lewkowicz and co-plaintiff Judith Smith are members of AXIS Dance Company, a not-for-profit company of professional dancers with and without disabilities based in Oakland, Calif. Ms. Smith and Ms. Lewkowicz both rely on wheelchairs for mobility.

“By adding website features to meet the needs of disabled consumers, Hotels.com and Expedia are showing that they are true leaders in the hospitality industry” added Victoria Ni , a staff attorney at Public Justice, a public interest law firm specializing in cutting-edge litigation nationwide. “We hope and believe that other online travel agencies will follow their lead.”

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In 2006, American online consumer travel sales generated \$79 billion. For American travelers, the Internet is an indispensable resource for planning trips and booking lodgings and transportation. Adults with disabilities spend over \$10 billion annually on travel, and almost half of them consult the Internet to support their travel needs.

Wheelchair users need wide doorways and grab bars and accessible bathrooms. People with visual or hearing impairments also need accessible features, such as Braille signage or a text telephone.

“This settlement ushers in a new era in the online travel industry. A wheelchair user who reserves a hotel room online will no longer have to worry that she or he literally might not be able to enter the room after they arrive,” said Kevin Knestruck, an attorney with DRA, a non-profit law center based in Berkeley, Calif., that specializes in high-impact lawsuits on behalf of people with disabilities.

No damages were sought in the case, which was filed in the California Superior Court for Alameda County.

For more information about the lawsuit and settlement, please go to Public Justice's website, at [www.publicjustice.net](http://www.publicjustice.net), or to DRA's website, at [www.drlegal.org](http://www.drlegal.org).

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**Public Justice** is America's public interest law firm, supported by – and calling on -- a nationwide network of more than 3,000 of the nation's top lawyers to pursue precedent-setting and socially significant litigation. It has a wide-ranging litigation docket in the areas of consumer rights, worker safety, civil rights and liberties, toxic torts, environmental protection, and access to the courts. Public Justice is the principal project of the Public Justice Foundation, a not-for-profit membership organization headquartered in Washington, DC, with a West Coast office in Oakland, California. The Public Justice web site address is [www.publicjustice.net](http://www.publicjustice.net).

**Disability Rights Advocates** is a non-profit law firm based in Berkeley, California, whose mission is to protect and advance the civil rights of people with disabilities through high-impact litigation, advocacy and education. Disability Rights Advocates is a national leader in protecting the rights of people with all types of disabilities, including mobility, sensory, mental health and learning disabilities.