

## A new hotel scheme for gouging the customer

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Industry insider is frustrated over bogus, new cancellation policy

I'm interrupting my previously scheduled column to tell you about a hotel policy that really makes me mad. I don't know how long hotels have been doing this or who thought it up, but I think it's fairly new and probably the work of some greedy corporate vice president.

A few weeks ago, my friend Mary Ann made a reservation through the Holiday Inn Express Web site for a room at the Holiday Inn Express in her hometown. She was having some company and was afraid she might not have room for everyone at her house. After one of her visitors canceled his trip, she knew she could accommodate all the guests, so she called the hotel to cancel the reservation. Too bad, she was told. You booked a special rate online, and you can't cancel or change your reservation. Never mind that you called well in advance of the arrival date. You're going to be charged room and tax for all six nights of your reservation, to the tune of about \$750.

After letting a few choice expletives fly, Mary Ann called me to see if anything could be done about the situation. At first, I didn't have much sympathy for her. I knew that despite her protestations to the contrary, there were probably several warnings about the cancellation policy on the Web site. And I was right. I checked the site, and there are notices about the policy, and they're fairly obvious, though they are full of industry jargon. Still, fail to read the fine print, and you have only yourself to blame!

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