

Hotels' Shift to Flat TVs Stretches Budget and More

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Avid followers of politics who watched the recent Democratic convention in a hotel room might have noticed that Senator Barack Obama had put on a few pounds. His face was rounder than it had looked over the last few months.

Actually, the senator is his same svelte self. What had changed was the television that they were watching him on. Many of the nation's hotel chains are bowing to consumer pressure and replacing their old picture tube TVs with new L.C.D. and plasma flat screens, but most have failed to take that one last step: adding high-definition service.

As a result, the widescreen high-definition-capable flat panels in many hotels often show standard definition analog TV. To fill the screen, the old-style squarish images are stretched, resulting in wider-than-normal heads and bodies.

Stretching the image has another undesirable result: it reduces the image resolution, making the picture on the new flat-panel TV look worse than it would have on a standard picture tube set.

The industry is moving to flat-panel TVs because as more consumers buy them, they want the conveniences of their homes to be in their hotels. But hotels have been slow to install HDTV because of the cost.

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