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### **Hotel booking sites settle civil rights case filed by disabled**

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Two leading online travel companies, Hotels.com and Expedia.com, have settled California civil rights action by agreeing to add features to their online reservation systems to allow disabled travelers to search for and reserve accessible rooms.

The settlement, announced on Jan. 26, includes agreement by both firms to gather information about hotels' accessibility features for travelers with mobility limitations and incorporate the information into their Web sites, according to the settlement.

Terms also call for payment of attorney fees and expenses of \$200,000 by Hotels.com to Chavez & Gertler, a Mill Valley, Calif., class action law firm that took on the case.

Public Justice and Disability Rights Advocates (DRA), both public interest law firms, brought the suit, *Smith v. Hotels.com*, No. RG-07327029 (Alameda Co., Calif., Sup. Ct.), in 2007.

The agreement came after both sides engaged in mediation led by a retired state trial judge, Ronald M. Sabraw, in San Francisco, according to the settlement.

The plaintiffs, Bonnie Lewkowicz and Judith Smith, are members of a professional dance troupe, Axis Dance Co. that includes dancers with and without disabilities. Both Smith and Lewkowicz rely on wheelchairs to get around.

Wheelchair users need wide doorways and grab bars and accessible bathrooms, according to the suit. People with visual and hearing impairments also need accessible features, such as Braille signage or text telephones.

"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 Knestrick, an attorney with DRA.