

## Lodging Websites--Are You ADA Compliant?

A recent review of over 60 lodging websites in the San Francisco Bay Area revealed that less than 1% of hotels are in compliance with the reservation requirements of the 2010 ADA Title III Regulations that took effect March 15, 2012.

Can a customer that requires disabled accessibility readily reserve on your website a mobility or hearing accessible guestroom? Is hotel staff able to answer questions about your property's accessibility features? Does your hotel "hard block" accessible rooms when they are reserved? These are just some of the questions that places of lodging should ask themselves to help ensure that their reservation policies comply with the 2010 ADA regulations for lodging reservations.

Travel consultant, Bonnie Lewkowicz recently teamed up with Chicago-based, Open Doors Organization (ODO), a leader in the field of Inclusive Tourism, to work with the lodging industry to help bring their websites into compliance with the reservation regulations. They conducted a preliminary review of more 60 places of lodging in the San Francisco/Bay Area and were surprised to find that the majority of hotel websites were not compliant with all of the reservation requirements.

ODO's work has always emphasized that compliance is good for business and this is no more evident than in the results of their 2015 market study that states that American adults with disabilities now spend \$17.3 billion annually on travel. This figure combined with the trend that hotels are losing non-disabled customers to the likes of AirBnB and VRBO--options that are typically not accessible to customers with disabilities--means that hotels can't afford to lose the loyal market of travelers with disabilities simply because they aren't able to book a room directly on a hotel website.

"Unlike some other ADA requirements particular to physical structures under Title III of the ADA, the reservation regulations are quite clear and shouldn't require a major financial investment to become fully compliant," says Lewkowicz. It is much more cost effective to be proactive than reactive. You don't want your hotel website to be unnecessarily vulnerable to a surf-by lawsuit (the customer only needs to unsuccessfully attempt to book an accessible room on your website and not physically be at your hotel) because it is not in compliance with the reservation regulations that have been in effect for more than 5 years.

The five key provisions of the reservation regulations require a place of lodging to:

1. Modify practices to ensure that individuals with disabilities can make reservations during the same hours and in the same manner as individuals without disabilities.
2. Identify and describe accessible features and inaccessible features in the hotel and guest rooms in enough detail to allow an individual with disabilities to judge whether a hotel meets his or her needs.

3. Ensure that accessible guest rooms are held for use by individuals with disabilities until all other guest rooms of that type have been rented.
4. Reserve, upon request, accessible guest rooms or specific types of guest rooms and ensure that the reserved rooms are blocked and removed from all reservations systems.
5. Guarantee that a specific accessible guest room, once reserved, is held for the reserving customer.

Also, staff must be able to identify and describe accessible features of the facility offered through its reservation system including:

- The accessible room type (e.g. ,deluxe executive suite, deluxe king, etc.);
- The number and size of beds (e.g., two queen beds);
- Available communications features (e.g., visual alarms and notification devices)
- The type of accessible bathing facility (e.g., bathtub with grab bars, transfer shower, or roll-in shower).

To learn more about how Open Doors Organization can help to ensure that your lodging website is compliant with the reservation regulations, contact Bonnie Lewkowicz at (510) 524-2026 or [bonlew57@gmail.com](mailto:bonlew57@gmail.com).