

[TRAVEL WISE]

'E' DOESN'T MEAN EASY

Electronic tickets may leave you disconnected

Gordon Hicks was anxious to get home to Los Angeles following a two-week business trip to the Caribbean. Booked on an American Airlines flight to Atlanta, with a connecting flight to Los Angeles, mechanical problems on the first plane delayed Hicks for seven hours. He would miss his connecting flight to Los Angeles.

On arrival in Atlanta, he (and many other stranded passengers) rushed over to the American Airlines ticket counter. "The agent tried for almost 20 minutes to find me another flight," Hicks recalls, but because of the late hour—10:30 p.m.—none was available. The American ticket

American Airlines agent had to print Hicks a paper ticket and endorse it over to Delta Air Lines. He then rushed down to the Delta counter, but the flight sold out in the 20 minutes he waited in line.

Flying direct or nonstop with an e-ticket poses few problems. In fact, consumers find it convenient dealing with less paper. If a flight is canceled or delayed, however, it could take time to search for another flight because most airlines don't have the interlining agreements that allow one carrier to honor another's electronic ticket.

Travel expert Peter Greenberg, author of *The Travel Detective*, says that if Hicks had had a paper ticket, he would have had a "negotiable and tangible document in his hands and could have avoided standing in line." He could have called American Airlines' 800 number for alternate flights.

Problems can also arise on code-sharing flights. These are flights in which two airlines agree to sell tickets under one airline code. For example, an American airline may have a code-share agreement with an international carrier for certain destinations. A consumer may not be able to discern which carrier his reservation is on without a paper ticket.

If you request a paper ticket, you may be charged up to \$10. In the uncertain travel environment that currently exists, it is worth the cost. —**Michael Bennett**



SCOTT POLLACK

agent called Delta Air Lines and found an open flight scheduled to leave within the hour. "I tried to get the American agent to book it, but she told me she couldn't." The

[PRICELESS RESOURCES]

WE'RE SHOWING YOU THE MONEY

How to pay for college

To facilitate your search for college funds, the Federal Student Aid Information Center is offering two free publications. *The Student Guide 2002-2003* is the most comprehensive resource spelling out how to apply for grants, loans, and work-study programs.

Funding Your Education 2002-2003 is an introductory publication providing general information about how to apply for federal student financial aid programs. To receive these guides or for more on how to pay for college, call the FSAIC at 800-433-3243. —**S.A.**

[ASK YOUR ADVOCATE]

A FIRST-CLASS RULE



If my plane is canceled or delayed, is the airline obligated to get me on any next available flight—not just one of theirs?

—**D. Thompson**
Los Angeles

Yes, only on domestic flights, under what's called Rule 240. If the delay or cancellation is in any way the fault of the airline, it is required to book you on any next available flight within one hour of your regularly scheduled flight time—even if it requires an upgrade on another airline—at no additional cost to you.

"Before deregulation of the airline industry in 1978, Rule 240 was a federal requirement," explains Michael Bennett, president and CEO of Travelnewsradio.com, "where airlines had to post and publicize how they intended to accommodate an inconvenienced passenger. Since deregulation, airlines are no longer required to tell customers unless they are asked." Rule 240 is now incorporated into the "contract of carriage agreement" issued to purchasers of airline tickets. Bennett notes that Rule 240 does not apply to acts of God, acts of war, or labor problems.

If you are involuntarily bumped, however, and will arrive more than one hour, but less than two, off your regularly scheduled time, the airline is required to pay you up to \$200. Over two hours, the airline is required to pay you up to \$400. "Note that these are minimum compensation requirements," says Bennett. "If you feel the need to negotiate further, it is definitely within your rights."

—**Sonia Alleyne**

Mail your finance questions to Ask Your Advocate, BLACK ENTERPRISE, 130 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10011, or send an e-mail to allevynes@blackenterprise.com.

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