

# Consumer News & Views

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## *In this Issue...*

- **Can Consumers Really Trust Those Online Travel Sites?**
- **ACC Opens New Regional Offices in Pennsylvania for Members.**
- **ACC Board of Directors Will Seat Two News Members.**
- **Transamerica Serves the Insurance Needs of America's Consumers.**
- **ACC Annual Business Meeting Scheduled for Friday, June 13.**
- **Apply for the 2013 Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification Program.**

**Can Consumers Really Trust Those Online Travel Sites?** Just when you thought traveling couldn't get any more complicated, along comes all the online travel booking sites! Sometimes the deals appear too good to be true. Are they? While organizations like the American Consumer Council have seen a spike in consumer complaints relating to cancellation fees and refund attempts from disgruntled consumers who didn't read the fine print, overall, it appears the online booking sites are doing a good job of delivering what they promised.



For the most part, consumers are finding the largest third-party travel booking sites -- including Orbitz, Priceline, Hotels.com, Expedia, and Booking.com -- to be reputable, easy to use and willing to answer questions -- including the biggies -- cancellations and refunds.

There are pros and cons to any travel transaction according to travel experts. One big advantage in using online booking sites for air travel is your ability to mix and match flights with different airlines and flight times. The major airlines don't offer

as many options to consumers as the third-party online travel booking sites. This was the experience Jamie Dawson had when she saved over \$180 by using Orbitz to mix-and-match her flight from Los Angeles to Syracuse, New York.

But, there are potential downsides to third-party booking sites. According to travel writer Molly McCluskey, "If you ever need to cancel or modify your reservation, rebook when a flight is canceled, or deal with any glitches that are even a little bit unusual, [consumers] are liable to find a quick fix time-consuming and costly."

Another situation that is frequently described by consumers is this scenario. A consumer will search for a particular hotel and click on a link. They think they've landed on the official hotel website, but unknowingly, they landed on an unrelated site of a hotel booking company that paid the particular hotel to advertise on the hotel's website. It can get confusing.

Here's another example cited in a *New York Times* travel article. "The unsuspecting (and often times, unsophisticated) consumer is promised great deals — and warned that rooms are going fast — but, it turns out these so-called bargains are often worse than what's offered directly by the hotel. Many people have discovered this practice the hard way. Randy Ratliff, a lawyer in Kentucky; Debbie Greenspan, a hospitality expert in Maryland; and dozens of other people have posted comments online saying they were duped when they thought they were booking rooms on hotel websites, only to wind up fighting credit card charges from companies they had never heard of."

So, our advice is simply this. As you plan your summer vacation and shop around the internet for the best hotel rates and airfare deals, read the fine print. Be sure your dates and travel plans are finalized before you click "I Agree." Because, once you click, it's very difficult to get out of that commitment.

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**ACC Opens Pennsylvania Offices in Response to Consumer Membership Growth.** As a result of significant membership growth across Pennsylvania, the American Consumer Council recently established two new regional offices to serve its growing membership. The Northeastern Pennsylvania office was established in March in the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre region. ACC's new regional office is located at 730 Main Street, Suite 101-A, Moosic, PA 18507 in the law office building of Caputo & Mariotti.

ACC also established a regional office east of Pittsburgh in East Monroeville to serve new consumer members in the Johnstown-Altoona-Pittsburgh region. That office is located at: 201 Penn Center Boulevard, Suite 400, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 15235.



Consumers may contact ACC at 1-800-544-0414 or [info@americanconsumercouncil.org](mailto:info@americanconsumercouncil.org) for more information. Each physical ACC office will be staffed by a regional director, membership coordinator and educational coordinator.



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**American Consumer Council Announces Two Nominees to Serve on Board of Directors.** Two members of the American Consumer Council (ACC) will be elected at ACC's annual meeting on Friday, June 13, in San Diego. The qualified individuals are **Barbara Yager**, an attorney in Madison, Connecticut, and **Edward McHale**, an attorney in West Palm Beach, Florida. Candidates for the ACC Board of Directors completed a written document stating their qualifications and intentions to serve on the Board. The document was submitted to ACC's national headquarters by April 4th and witnessed by a second member of the organization.



ACC also invites member representation for its eight standing committees – Education; Sponsorship; Advocacy & Consumerism; Member Services; Regional & State Councils; Marketing; Regulatory & Government Affairs; and, Awards & Recognition.

Any member who wishes to serve on one of ACC's eight standing committees may do so by sending a statement describing their interest and qualifications. Appointments are announced on a regular basis. Officers of credit unions and regulatory officials and their agents are not eligible for service in keeping with ACC's policies relating to conflicts-of-interest.



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For more information, please contact Transamerica Vice President Tom Kazar at:

[http://www.transamericafinancialsolutions.com/contact\\_us.html](http://www.transamericafinancialsolutions.com/contact_us.html)

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**ACC Annual Meeting Scheduled for Friday, June 13.** The annual meeting of the American Consumer Council will be held at the Hilton Hotel Torrey Pines in San Diego, California on Friday, June 21, 2013 at 10:00 am PST. All voting members are invited to participate in the annual business meeting. There is no cost to attend the meeting.

To register to participate at this year's annual meeting, please email the ACC office. If you wish to participate via the teleconference, please request the password for access to the conference call at: [info@americanconsumercouncil.org](mailto:info@americanconsumercouncil.org).

The annual meeting will discuss business matters pertinent to the management and operations of the American Consumer Council including the election of two new directors to the board of directors, and review activities and issues during the past 12 months..

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### **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification Accepting Applications for 2014 Summer Cycle:**

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for the **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification**. Applications for the 2014 Summer cycle are now being accepted through May 30, 2014.

It's a proven fact that consumers want to do business with companies that are eco-friendly and practice Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The process is straight-forward and all applicants are recognized by ACC and the Green USA Institute.

All applicants complete the criteria and submit their responses to ACC's Green Consumer Council for review, assessment and feedback. Program details and the **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification** criteria can be viewed at ACC's website located at: <http://americanconsumercouncil.org/greenc.asp>

