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Saving Hotels the Trouble of ‘Calling Around’

By LISA GUERNSEY

It may be the digital age, but at many hotels employees at check-in counters still use a 20th-century system called the call around. Local hotels phone one another throughout the day, asking if rooms are full and what rates are charged. The answers help hotels determine whether to lower prices that night.

The system is inefficient, says Breana Sniezek, a business student at the Rochester Institute of Technology who has worked in hotels for four years. Not to mention the annoyance of taking the calls from competitors.

In 2007, she vented her frustration to Christopher Geiss and Marc Baumbach, friends at R.I.T. who were studying computer engineering. The two were eager to start a business, and created a private digital network that hotel managers could log in to at any time for the information. Their business plan won \$2,000 in a competition sponsored by the Albert J. Simone Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at R.I.T., and the school of hospitality and management paid for a trip to Marriott headquarters in Washington, D.C., to conduct research.

With help from the Rochester Hotel Association, the threesome got word out about their service, called Hotelproxy.com, and at least 25 hotels are now testing it. The founders of Hotelproxy.com are hoping to expand to another city soon, in between their regular jobs. Mr. Geiss and Mr. Baumbach now work at I.B.M. in North Carolina. Ms. Sniezek will be taking a position with Marriott International in February, after her graduation.

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