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Customer Service, Responsibility, and Systems in International E-Commerce: Should a Major Airline Reissue a Stolen Ticket?

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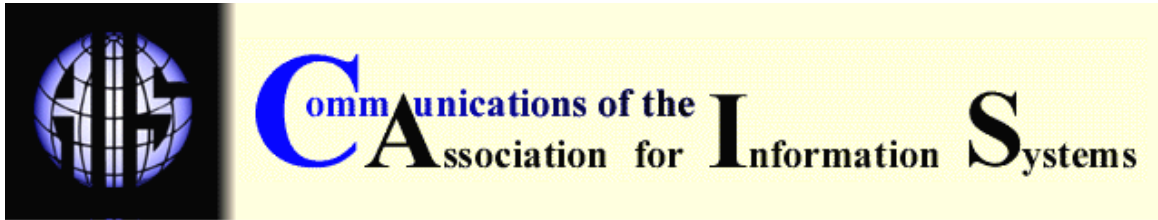
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CUSTOMER SERVICE, RESPONSIBILITY, AND SYSTEMS IN INTERNATIONAL E-COMMERCE: SHOULD A MAJOR AIRLINE REISSUE A STOLEN TICKET?

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ABSTRACT

This case is about customer service and responsibility in international e-commerce. A prominent e-commerce web site sells a ticket on a nonexistent flight, a human reservations agent fails to inform a customer about a well-known problem he is likely to encounter, an international airline's telephone agents in Spain and the United States provide contradictory information, the airline's office in Spain seems unaware of policies on the airline's web site, and later its policies seem unhelpful. The case raises questions related to customer service, trust, responsibility, ethics, and business practices in international e-commerce.

Keywords: e-commerce, e-business, customer service, ethics, trust, responsibility, airline tickets, international issues, finger-pointing

I. INTRODUCTION

Three separate problems with three prominent international travel providers on one trip seemed a bit much. Alice and Fred had planned their December trip from San Francisco to Barcelona, Spain far in advance to combine sightseeing in Spain with Alice's visit with European relatives and Fred's conference in Barcelona. They purchased their tickets in July so that they would be sure they could arrive together in Granada, Spain and so that Fred's return flight would coincide with another family member's return from Europe via Barcelona.

Alice and Fred purchased their tickets from TicMart.com¹, a leading air travel web site. Although they would have preferred using electronic tickets, the TicMart transaction required that they

¹ TicMart.com, Archer Airlines, Burgess Airlines, and Flower Car Rental are all disguised names of major travel providers. TicMart is an e-commerce web site, Archer and Burgess are major international airlines, and Flower is a major international car rental firm.

receive paper tickets and they were charged \$15 for FedEx delivery of each ticket. Including the delivery fee Fred's ticket cost \$967.49 and Alice's cost \$1,055.48.

According to their plan, Alice would leave for Europe on Dec. 3, 2002 and would meet Fred in the Madrid Airport on Dec. 8, 2002 after his overnight flight from San Francisco. From Madrid they would continue south to Granada, Spain and two days later would drive north to Barcelona over the course of five days. Alice would fly home from Barcelona on Dec. 21. Other than the flight from Madrid to Granada her entire itinerary would be on Burgess Airlines, a major international carrier. Fred would fly home on Dec. 25, starting with a flight on Iberia, the Spanish national carrier, and continuing with a transatlantic flight on Archer Airlines, another major international carrier.

Alice and Fred were experienced international travelers. Both traveled abroad frequently for business and pleasure. Each of them had visited almost every country in Western Europe prior to this trip. Alice was familiar with French, Italian, and Portuguese and knew enough Spanish to communicate about typical transportation questions.

II. THE FIRST PROBLEM

On Nov. 5, 2002 Fred received an email from TicMart that said,

"We have been notified by the airline of a significant change to your travel itinerary. Here is your revised schedule. If the following itinerary is acceptable, no further action is necessary."

He examined the new itinerary and found that his flight from San Francisco would depart 20 minutes earlier. This change would cause him no problem, and he was pleased that email provided a convenient way to find out about the change.

Several weeks later he received another notice from TicMart about a schedule change. He was very busy, assumed it must be another minor change, and delayed calling for about a week. Before calling TicMart he called Archer because he wanted to reserve a seat. The Archer agent said that the Archer flight had not changed but that the computer record contained a cryptic notation about "Navidad." (Navidad is the Spanish word for Christmas.) The agent did not know what the notation meant and suggested that Fred call Iberia, whose agent told Fred that the first flight on his return leg, Iberia flight #4184, did not fly on Dec. 25 because Iberia never flew on Christmas morning, as anyone in Spain would know.

Realizing this must be the problem that the email from TicMart referred to, Fred called TicMart, whose agent called Archer and Iberia to identify feasible alternatives. The agent's best alternative was to change the Iberia morning flight to an Iberia afternoon flight that would leave Barcelona at 4:55 PM, after the departure of the last Archer flight to San Francisco on Dec. 25. Fred would have to pay for a hotel room for the night of Dec. 25 and would arrive in San Francisco on Dec. 26, a day later than planned.

Fred thanked the TicMart agent for finding a feasible solution and asked whether he would be reimbursed for the hotel room. After all, Fred had selected his itinerary based on the flight schedule and prices that had been posted on TicMart. Inaccuracy in that information would now cost him at least another \$100 plus a delay of a day. The TicMart agent said that re-scheduling the flights at the same price was the best TicMart would do. Later Fred found this response was consistent with the fifth of a list of disclaimers posted in the terms and conditions section of the TicMart web site.

"5. WARRANTY DISCLAIMER. WE MAKE NO, AND OUR PROVIDERS MAKE, NO WARRANTY OF ANY KIND REGARDING OUR SITE AND/OR ANY CONTENT, DATA, MATERIALS,

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III. THE SECOND PROBLEM

After two days in Granada, Alice and Fred planned to drive from Granada to Barcelona over the course of five days. They planned to sightsee in the morning and leave around 1:30 to drive to a somewhat isolated bed and breakfast on a scenic, but poorly sign-posted rural road about two hours northeast of Granada.

Previously, in November Fred phoned Flower Car Rentals, a major international car rental firm, to reserve a car. Since he and Alice would be in Granada, they would pick up the car at a Flower office in downtown Granada around 1:00 PM instead of going back to the airport.

Around 1:15 PM Alice called the Flower downtown office to say they were running a bit late and would pick up the car around 2:00 or 2:30. This would still give them enough time to find the bed and breakfast before sunset, which would occur around 5:30.

The Flower agent said that a 2:00 PM pickup would be impossible because the office would shut down from 1:30 to 4:30. From previous experience Alice and Fred knew that many businesses in Southern Europe shut in the afternoon, but they somehow had not thought about the possibility that a Flower car rental office would be closed on the afternoon of a business day.

Alice explained that the delay in renting their car would be a significant problem and the agent agreed to keep the office open a few extra minutes. Alice and Fred raced to the nearest main street and hailed a cab that seemed to crawl through the slow Granada traffic, but when they arrived at the Flower office it was open and the office manager was very gracious about keeping the office open beyond the 1:30 closing time.

They felt lucky that the office manager had accommodated them, but wondered why Flower had not warned them about this difference between U.S. and Spanish business practices. The U.S.-based Flower agent Fred spoke to in November took his reservation for a 1:00 PM pickup of a car in Granada, Spain without mentioning that many offices in Spain close for three hours starting at 1:30. Flower is an international company, but this agent might not have known how its overseas offices operate or might not have realized that a 1:00 PM rental reservation at an office that closes at 1:30 provides too little slack or at least deserves a warning not to be late. Perhaps the computer system through which the agent entered the reservation should have prompted the agent to provide a warning.

IV. THE THIRD PROBLEM

The third problem was much more serious than the others. On Dec. 12, several days before their arrival in Barcelona, Alice's purse was stolen. Among other things it contained her paper airline ticket to return home on Burgess. Alice and Fred found a police station and filled out an official police report within several hours. Although Alice had had the foresight to record her passport number and credit card numbers in an email message she sent to herself, she had a difficult time canceling her credit cards. The U.S. contact numbers were listed on the backs of the cards, but those cards were gone. Even with a computer connected to the Internet plus assistance from the helpful desk staff at a well-run hotel, she had difficulty finding correct phone numbers in Spain or the U.S. for reporting stolen credit cards. She also could not find email addresses to contact about the stolen cards.

After arriving in Barcelona on Sunday, Dec. 15, Alice went to the American consulate on Monday, Dec. 16 to obtain a temporary passport that would serve as government-issued identification for the remainder of her trip.

TRYING TO OBTAIN A REPLACEMENT AIRLINE TICKET

Alice had purchased a round trip ticket and held a valid reservation, but obtaining a replacement airline ticket from Burgess proved impossible.

On the evening of Dec. 15 Alice called the Burgess phone number for Spain. The agent understood the situation, including the fact that a police report had been filed. He said he would enter a request for issuance of a duplicate ticket. He said that the process of doing this would probably take a day, and Alice should go to the Burgess ticket office in Barcelona on Tuesday, Dec. 17. He said that the fee for reissuing the ticket would probably be 50 euros (\$52.20).

On the morning of Dec. 17, Alice went to the Burgess office with a printout of the TicMart confirmation of her reservation. Alice explained her problem to a Burgess agent who entered a query at her reservations terminal and said that the computer system contained no information about a request for a duplicate ticket. The agent said that she would contact the Burgess office in the U.S., and that they would make the decision about what to do.

At this point, Alice started taking detailed notes.

Later on Dec. 17, Alice called the Burgess office in the United States. According to her hotel bill, the cost of the call was 13.20 euros, or \$13.78. According to Alice's notes, the agent in that office said there would be no problem in this case. This kind of problem occurred frequently and it was standard practice to issue a duplicate ticket. He said that the fee for reissuing the ticket would probably be \$100.

On Thursday morning, Dec. 19, Alice returned to the Burgess office in Barcelona and was told that the authorization had been denied because she had bought the ticket from TicMart rather than from Burgess. Alice's conversation with the agent left her with the impression that a message on the Burgess computer system had requested that the Barcelona office contact TicMart, but that no one in the office had tried to do this before she arrived. The agent told her to return to the office at 4:00 PM, at which time they might have an answer from the US office. During part of this discussion the agent told Alice that buying a ticket on the Internet was not the proper way to do things, and that going through a travel agent was the right thing to do.

Alice returned to the Burgess office at 4:00 PM on Dec. 19. No reply had been received. The Burgess agent said that if she wanted to take the Burgess flight home on Dec. 21 she would have to buy a new one-way ticket for around 650 euros, or \$679. This was 64% of the cost of her original ticket from San Francisco to a North European city, from there to Granada, and from Barcelona back to San Francisco.

Later, that day, Alice called Burgess USA from her hotel room and was told that reissuing the ticket was TicMart's responsibility because the ticket she had purchased was a "bulk" ticket that TicMart had purchased from Burgess. The Burgess agent was unmoved by Alice's argument that Burgess had the responsibility to help her get on the flight she had booked and paid for.

Nothing in her interactions with TicMart or on her TicMart reservation indicated that she had purchased "a bulk ticket." She believed she had purchased a standard, "advance purchase" ticket of the type she had used many times for domestic and international travel.

Later on Dec. 19 Alice sent two separate emails to TicMart to try to get help with this situation. TicMart never replied.

During the evening of Dec. 19 Alice was angry and worried. She had an early morning reservation on Burgess for Dec. 21. Her paper ticket was gone. Neither TicMart nor Burgess would provide a new ticket. She needed to go home on Dec. 21.

On the morning of Dec. 20 Alice went to travel agency recommended by her hotel and asked for the least expensive flight to San Francisco on Dec. 21. The travel agency found a fare of 454 euros or \$475 on another carrier. On the morning of Dec. 21 Alice boarded the flight in Barcelona and many hours later arrived in San Francisco

V. BACK AT HOME

When Alice logged onto her email at home after arriving in San Francisco one of the first messages she saw was an email from TicMart stating that her Burgess flight leaving Barcelona on the morning of Dec. 21 had been cancelled and that she should call TicMart. The message was dated Dec. 20 and its time stamp was equivalent to 9:06 PM Barcelona time. Alice had purchased her new reservation early on Dec. 20 and had looked at her email several times during the day, but before 9:06 PM.

RE-EXAMINING THE CONFIRMATION FROM TICMART

After devoting her first week at home to getting settled and taking care of holiday guests, Alice began the process of trying to get a refund from Burgess for the homeward leg of her Burgess ticket. To be sure she had the facts straight she reexamined the confirmation TicMart had sent her when she purchased her ticket. Near the bottom of the confirmation was the statement:

“Please note that your fare may carry restrictions. Changes to your itinerary may result in additional fees. Review the fare rules ... to learn more.

She found the login location in the TicMart site and went to a screen that took her to a list of trips she had purchased through TicMart. She clicked on December 2002 trip and received a page that contained the reservation details for her trip. At the bottom of the reservation was a hypertext link saying “Read the fare rules for this trip.” She clicked on the link and received a page that started as follows:

Fare Rules

The rules below, set forth by the airline(s), are used to determine the fare for your selected flight(s). In the interest of full disclosure and fairness, please be aware that any changes you make to your itinerary that are outside these guidelines may change the fare.

fare type	fare rules
1 Web Only fare	HLXABUS

Below this heading was a 2.5 by 3.5 inch window containing a document with the title “Fare Basis Code: HLXABUS” The document covered 16 provisions of the fare basis and addressed issues such as child discounts, penalties, surcharges, blackout dates, and combinability. The entire document was typed in capital letters and was in a small, cramped font that Alice found difficult to read. Only the first provision and part of the second were visible in the window, which had a scroll bar for showing the rest of the document. Alice copied the entire document into a blank Microsoft Word document so that she could read it. It was almost three pages long, and even in a large font she found it difficult to read. For example, when she looked the third and fourth sections of the third provision she found the following:

“3. CHANGES TO THE INBOUND FLIGHT/S/- FARES IN EFFECT ON THE DATE OF ORIGINAL TICKET ISSUE MUST BE APPLIED AND THE NEW ITINERARY MUST MEET ALL RULE PROVISIONS OF THE ORIGINAL FARE TICKETED E.G. MIN/MAX STAY. EXCEPTION- ADVANCE PURCHASE PROVISIONS MAY BE DISREGARDED FOR CHANGES TO INBOUND FLTS. 4. ANY FARE DIFFERENCE RESULTING FROM

DAY OF THE WEEK CHANGE/ROUTING CHANGE/ETC. MUST BE COLLECTED FROM THE PASSENGER IN ADDITION TO THE USD 200.00 CHANGE CHARGE. IN THE CASE OF A FARE DECREASE THE DIFFERENCE WILL BE APPLIED TOWARDS PAYMENT OF THE USD 200.00 CHANGE CHARGE. ANY ADDITIONAL REFUNDABLE AMOUNT WILL BE REFUNDED IN THE FORM OF A NON-REFUNDABLE MCO. CANCELLATIONS ANY TIME TICKET IS NON-REFUNDABLE. WAIVED FOR ILLNESS OR DEATH OF PASSENGER OR FAMILY MEMBER.”

Upon careful reading, the 16 provisions seemed consistent with what she had expected from an advance purchase ticket. None of the provisions said anything about bulk tickets or about what to do about stolen or lost tickets.

By clicking on a second link on her original transaction confirmation from TicMart she received a page entitled “Ticket terms/conditions.” This page said that the air carrier’s terms and conditions apply. Specifically:

“Air transportation, whether it is domestic or international (including domestic portions of international journeys), is subject to the individual terms of the transporting air carriers, which are herein incorporated by reference and made part of the contract of carriage
.....

You have the right to inspect the full text of each transporting air carrier’s terms at its airport and city ticket offices. You also have the right, upon request, to receive free of charge the full text of the applicable terms incorporated by reference from each of the transporting air carriers. Information on ordering the full text of each air carrier’s terms is available at any U.S. location where the air carrier’s tickets are sold.”

The “frequently asked questions” section of the TicMart web site included the following posting:

“If you lose your paper tickets, go to the airline check-in counter at the airport or nearest airline ticket office to fill out and pay for a Lost Ticket Affidavit (LTA). Bring a valid government-issued ID with you.”

INFORMATION ABOUT LOST TICKETS ON THE BURGESS WEB SITE

Next Alice looked at Burgess’s web site to find information about the lost ticket affidavit and the “full text” of Burgess’s terms mentioned by the TicMart site. She found nothing resembling “the full text” of Burgess’s terms and nothing about special conditions concerning Internet tickets. She did find a “frequently asked questions” section that included the following question and answer:

“I lost my ticket! What should I do?

Should your ticket be lost, stolen or mutilated we require you complete a Lost Ticket Application form in order for a refund or replacement ticket to be processed. A fee is assessed to partially offset the extensive research required for processing a lost ticket claim. These applications are available at Burgess ticket offices.”

The “frequently asked questions” mentioned a lost ticket application, but none of the Burgess agents she had dealt with while in Spain, including U.S.-based and Spain-based telephone agents and people in the Burgess office in Barcelona, had mentioned it.

By following the “contact us” link under the heading of “customer care” she found the following:

“In order to apply for a refund on the basis of a lost ticket, please submit the following documents:

- A signed original lost ticket application. Applications may be obtained from any Burgess ticket office, airport office, or from your Travel Agent.
- If the lost ticket was issued by a Travel Agent, please request a copy of the agency coupon and include it in your request.
- If a replacement ticket was purchased, please submit the corresponding original passenger receipt.

We remind you that a \$100 administrative fee will be assessed. Also, please be advised that there is a 6-month waiting period for this type of inquiry.”

Alice wondered why a Web site should tell a customer to go to a physical office to obtain a form that could be downloaded easily. Neither of the Web site’s references to the lost ticket application provided a way to download the form. It wasn’t that Burgess hadn’t heard of Internet downloads. The “About Burgess” section of the Web site provided free downloads of an animated Burgess greeting card and 15 different Burgess screen savers in four sizes, 691, 1398, 1443, and 1630 kilobytes, respectively.

Another part of the “About Burgess” section contained a list of press releases including a 2002 release saying that Burgess was the first airline to win certification from a quality assurance consulting group for the quality of its passenger services. The press release concluded with a quote from Burgess’s CEO, who mentioned the competitive importance of associating quality with Burgess’s brand image.

CALLING BURGESS TO OBTAIN A REFUND FORM

After attending to other matters for several weeks, Alice called Burgess on Jan. 27, 2003. She was kept on hold for 25 minutes, and finally spoke to an agent who told her she would have to fill out the “Lost Ticket Application” form mentioned in the Web site. When she requested that the agent send her the form, the agent said that would not be possible. She would have to go to a Burgess ticket office to pick it up. She could go to San Francisco International Airport or to a Burgess office in San Francisco, which was open during business hours, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday and closed on Saturday and Sunday.

Alice was furious. This felt like some kind of bizarre conspiracy. She didn’t work in San Francisco. Going into downtown and parking her car in a parking garage near the Burgess office would require that she leave work early and would absorb at least one and a half hours of her time. Going to the airport would take an hour each way. How could a winner of a quality award provide a Web site that can download 1630-kilobyte screensavers and provide an interactive multimedia presentation but be unwilling to download simple forms that customers really needed? Why would it take six months to get a refund? If this company won a service award, imagine what service must be like in companies that didn’t win.

SIX MONTHS LATER

On Aug. 11, 2003 Alice received a letter from Burgess dated Aug. 4, 2003. The letter said:

"We have carefully reviewed your request for a refund, but must advise you that no refund is possible because:

The replacement ticket was not purchased through Burgess with the same itinerary and flights.

We are sorry we cannot comply with your request."

Alice was not surprised, but she wondered whether the decision would have been different if she had bought the \$675 ticket on Burgess instead of the \$475 ticket on the other carrier. On the other hand, if the Burgess had a policy of reissuing lost tickets and charging a service charge for doing so, why hadn't they done that back in December?

Note: Alice and Fred are pseudonyms. The dates are accurate. The quotations from email messages came directly from email messages received by Alice and Fred. The web site quotations were downloaded from web pages accessed through links within the TicMart and Burgess web sites on Jan. 30, 2003.

Editor's Note: This article was received on May 12, 2003. It was with the author for three weeks for one revision. The article was published on August 25, 2003

QUESTIONS

1. The case mentions a number of instances of lack of information, lack of knowledge, and confusion. For each of the three problems mentioned in the case please explain how better information systems, better web sites, better employee training, better paper documentation for customers, better knowledge sharing, or other approaches might help avoid or minimize the problem. If no plausible approach could avoid or minimized each problem, explain why.
 - a. Answer the question for the problem involving the non-existent flight on Christmas morning.
 - b. Answer the question for the problem involving the car rental.
 - c. Answer the question for the problem involving the lost ticket.
2. Other than any responsibility for losing her ticket, to what extent is Alice responsible for the situation?
 - a. As a typical TicMart customer, to what extent should she have been able to use web resources more effectively to solve her own problem?
 - b. To what extent would it have made a difference if she had checked the terms and conditions used by TicMart and Burgess before purchasing the Burgess ticket on TicMart?
 - c. To what extent is it reasonable to say that she consciously took a risk by buying the ticket on TicMart rather than directly from Burgess and simply happened to lose what was in effect a bet?
3. Assume that major airlines and travel sites want to provide their customers the most useful information in the most readily usable form. Identify several airline sites and travel sites (if possible, those that you used personally), and try to find the types of information that Alice needed. Explain whether it is easy to find this information. Either identify changes in these sites that might make communication with customers clearer or explain why no changes are needed.
4. Assume that airline policies and actions related to the lost tickets are the decision of individual airlines or travel providers and are not governed by governmental laws or regulations. Identify and discuss ethical issues revealed in this case in policies, actions, and communications by TicMart and Burgess. (Ethics encompasses a broad range of issues that may or may not be

covered by laws or regulations.) Consider the quotations from the Web sites, the interactions with human agents, and responsibility for reissuing the ticket. Explain changes in business policies or practices that might be appropriate on ethical grounds.

5. The topic of trust in e-commerce receives a lot of attention. What factors determine whether a possible user or buyer views a web site as trustworthy? How are those factors related to the events in this case?

6. Assume the CEOs of TicMart and Burgess are totally familiar with the situation described in this case. From the viewpoint of the CEO of TicMart, explain why it is or is not ethical to sell Burgess tickets on the TicMart site. From the viewpoint of the CEO of Burgess, explain why it is or is not ethical to sell Burgess tickets on the TicMart site.

7. A wide range of views have been stated regarding whether e-commerce and international commerce do or do not have unique characteristics and challenges.

a. Which aspects of your answers to the previous questions are related to the nature of e-commerce and which are related to business practices in general? What, if anything, does your response imply about the uniqueness or non-uniqueness of e-commerce?

b. Which aspects of your answers to the previous questions are related to the nature of international commerce and which are related to the nature of large, geographically dispersed organizations? What, if anything, does your response imply about the uniqueness or non-uniqueness of international commerce?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Alter is Professor of Information Systems at the University of San Francisco. He holds a B.S. in mathematics and Ph.D. in management science from MIT. He extended his 1975 Ph.D. thesis into one of the first books on decision support systems. After teaching at the University of Southern California he served for eight years as co-founder and Vice President of Consilium, a manufacturing software firm that went public in 1989 and was acquired by Applied Materials in 1998. His many roles at Consilium included starting departments for customer service, training, documentation, technical support, and product management. Upon returning to academia, he wrote an information systems textbook that is currently in its fourth edition with a new title, *Information Systems: Foundation of E-business*. His articles appear in *Harvard Business Review*, *Sloan Management Review*, *MIS Quarterly*, *Interfaces*, *Communications of the ACM*, *Communications of the AIS*, *CIO Insight*, *Futures*, *The Futurist*, and many conference transactions.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter from Paul Teeuwen and Response from the Author

AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION OF THE AIRLINE TICKET CASE

Paul Teeuwen
The Netherlands
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Dear Editor,

I am surprised about Steven Alter's story in the Communications of the AIS. While I feel sorry for the mishaps during the trip, the suggested implications seem to go far beyond the actual happenings.

Most obvious is the problem with the car rental: they were late for their pick-up of their car, and no computers will ever be able to prevent this kind of thing.

If you use the internet for bookings like this (instead of a travel agency), the implied assumption is that you know what you are doing. It is low price therefore low cost and therefore low service. The flight coupon is the 'payment' between Ticmart and Burgess, and therefore it is not easily replaced. It is obvious that there were operational difficulties in handling these, but they were no different from a normal ticket from whatever source. I do believe Ticmart is the main source of problems in the story, but it seems to be a matter of operational difficulties more than anything else.

International Travel always is a notch more difficult than staying at home and dealing with familiar institutions. As an example: on my father's first trip to the USA, he parked his rental car at a fire pole. Of course he was towed; and I feel sorry for him. However asking broad questions about the US legal and administrative systems ethics seem far-fetched, and I feel the same about Mr. Alter's article.

AUTHOR'S RESPONSE TO TEEUWEN

Steven Alter
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Paul Teeuwen is surprised that this case appeared in the *Communications of the AIS* and that "the suggested implications seem to go far beyond the actual happenings."

In itself the case has no implications. It is simply a slightly disguised account of events that actually happened, whether or not they should have happened, whether or not other people in the role of Alice and Fred would have made different decisions, and whether or not better information systems could have led to happier results. The questions at the end of case cover a range of issues that instructors might want to explore with their classes. Different instructors can select among these questions or can develop other questions that better suit their interests and instructional goals.

The purpose of teaching cases is to present situations that can be discussed in classroom settings. This case is relatively simple, but it provides a usable backdrop for discussing many issues related to ecommerce, customer service, responsibility, knowledge management, and the capabilities and limitations of information systems. For example, the six lead faculty members of

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the University of San Francisco's EP MBA program used it on Sept. 5, 2003 at the beginning of a two and a half day opening exercise for a new cohort of students. We split them into five teams, one each for data and systems, marketing, finance, organizational behavior, and ethics and law. We asked the teams to go to separate rooms, read the case, prepare answers to several questions related to their particular topic, and then return to present their answers to everyone else. Everyone in the room saw that this relatively simple situation elicited different responses from different students. Mr. Teeuwen might be surprised by the range of different views and concerns expressed by managers and business professionals averaging at least 8 years of business experience. Assertions that some students presented as obviously correct encountered strong disagreement from other students or faculty members. After receiving Mr. Teeuwen's letter, I confirmed with the other lead faculty members that they did find the case effective for our purpose of raising a series of issues that would be explored in much greater depth throughout a 15-month program. I hope other faculty members find their own uses for the case.

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