

# navigator



## bargains

### Done Deals

Will the senior discount soon become extinct?

**S**ure, spoiling the grandkids is fun, but let's face it: The best part about aging is the discounts. Ever since the 1950s, when senior discounts were introduced, getting old has meant getting a break. But that may be changing. As older Americans become one of the largest segments of society—every eight seconds someone in America turns 50—some companies are wondering if giving discounts to such a massive demographic is bad business.

The result: disappearing discounts. Several airlines and resorts have axed popular senior discount clubs. Cable TV provider AT&T

Broadband has killed its 10 percent discount for Florida residents, and even public utilities are rethinking policies. Philadelphia Gas Works in Pennsylvania estimates it could save up to \$18 million a year by eliminating its 20 percent senior discount.

Companies are in a tough spot. People over 50 have the highest levels of wealth in the country (though not everyone is wearing a Rolex: a recent federal study found that the median income for women over 65 is just \$10,943). Giving such an affluent group a discount is like giving Bill Gates a deal on software. Marketers, however, know that the wealthy are just as likely to reserve their Gold Cards for companies that give discounts as low-income consumers who truly need the break.

"There's a saying that

today's seniors clip coupons and drive Cadillacs—they'll spend money, but only if they get a good deal," says Sharon Brooks, an expert on seniors marketing. "Discounts are still a very attractive marketing tool."

Which is why discounts almost certainly will survive—though with less generous savings. "Companies will probably offer less and increase the age of eligibility," says Douglas Brown, founder of SeniorDiscounts.com, a Web site of special offers for older persons. Pat Veretto, editor of About.com's Guide to Frugal Living, says that some businesses are reserving the savings for those of us with aggressive tendencies: "The companies want your business," she says, "but a lot of them won't give a discount unless you ask for it." —*Judith Dancoff*

## Savings Scorecard

### Airlines

No Deal American and Delta have cancelled senior discount clubs. Big Deal United offers Silver Wings Plus Club for flyers over 55; one-way Southwest flights in U.S. are never more than \$129 if you're 65 or older.

### Baseball

No Deal New York Mets have eliminated senior dollar days (\$1 tickets). Big Deal Go to minor league games. The Binghamton (New York) Mets shave \$1.50 off \$6 tickets for fans over 60; Kingsport Mets in Tennessee give \$3 discount on \$5 seats.

### Retailers

No Deal Lowe's Co. hardware chain has killed discounts in some areas. Big Deal Discounts are offered daily at Bally's Total Fitness, Banana Republic, International House of Pancakes, LensCrafters, Pearle Vision.

### Ski Resorts

No Deal Vail Resorts, Inc., and Aspen Skiing Co. of Colorado no longer give free lift tickets to skiers over 70. Big Deal Big Bear Mountain Ski Resort in California offers free skiing for people over 70 on weekdays.