

'No Vacancy' signs vanishing from U.S. highways

By Paul Lukas, Bloomberg

You've been driving for a good chunk of the day, you're pulling into an unfamiliar town, and you need a place to stay for the night. Happily, there's a comforting sight just ahead—a motel with an illuminated "Vacancy" sign, the "No" thankfully darkened.

The "(No) Vacancy" sign, a beacon of hospitality and/or disappointment, has greeted road-weary American travelers for generations. But just as paper maps and toll booth clerks increasingly seem quaint relics of the analog age, the classic "(No) Vacancy" sign may soon become another victim of shifting travel habits and market forces.

"We don't really have any customers who want that type of sign anymore," said Alex Lauretano of the Lauretano Sign Group, a leading sign manufacturer for the hospitality industry. "At one point they were useful—but not anymore, with online booking." Julie Hall, a spokesperson for AAA, which inspects and rates motels, confirmed that vacancy indicators are on the wane and also cited online booking as a key factor.

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