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BUSINESS TRAVEL

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Plan ahead for rewards

IdeaWorks contributed information to this article - - see italics.

The Problem: Making the most of your frequent-flier miles.

The Solution: Act early. Airlines generally schedule their flights 330 or more days in advance, meaning rewards seats are up for grabs almost a year before the departure date.

With each air mile worth the equivalent of about 1.6 cents, according to brand-consulting firm IdeaWorks, travelers who have racked up 25,000 miles for a free trip should seek a free domestic plane ticket worth at least \$400.

To use your miles for shorter trips, wait for a promotion offer, which usually is available at least once a year with loyalty programs.

You can also sign up for free e-mail updates from your program or from a third-party service like the "Mile Alert" e-mail from SmarterTravel.com to stay on top of deals and promotions.