

Duff on Hospitality Law

## **OTA & Travel Distribution Update: Simpleview develops destination-focused application for Amazon Alexa and Google Home; Sonder seeks to shake up traditional hoteliers; vacation rentals gain prominence on Google Search**

By Greg Duff on 10.18.19 | Posted in OTA Update

This week's OTA & Travel Distribution Update features a number of stories on recent changes at Google with regard to the way in which it displays vacation rentals and the market's response to those changes. Enjoy.

### **“Alexa, find me tickets to...” Destinations Go Vocal**

*(“How destinations might soon have a voice via Amazon and Google,” Phocus Wire on Oct 11, 2019)*

Meet [Simpleview](#). The UK-based digital agency that specializes in the tourism industry is building (beta version is expected by year end) one of the first destination-focused applications for Amazon Alexa and Google Home. When finished, the application will allow users to search third-party destination information (e.g., activities, dates and times) via their voice-activated devices.

### **Sonder Seeks to Shake up Traditional Hoteliers**

*(“Billion-Dollar Travel Startup Tries to Upend Hotel Industry,” Fox Business on Oct 10, 2019)*

With apartment-style accommodations now available in 26 cities in six countries, Sonder is readying itself for a possible IPO. The venture capital backed start-up leases traditional multi-family units, combines them with services similar to traditional hotels and then leases the units on a short-term, transient basis. According to Sonder CEO, Francis Davidson, Sonder doesn't see itself as a competitor of Airbnb, but as a competitor to traditional hotels. How this model evolves in the face of growing state and local regulation of similar short-term rentals will be interesting to watch. So long as state and local regulators find themselves short of the resources necessary to implement and enforce these regulations, however, Sonder may do just fine.

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#### **Vacation Rentals Gain Prominence on Google**

*("Google Elevates Vacation Rentals With Hotel-Like Treatment in Search," Skift Travel News on Oct 5, 2019)*

Nearly all of the sources of distribution-related news that we regularly follow to produce these weekly Updates featured stories on Google's recent decision to begin featuring more prominently (in the same manner as its hotel listings) its vacation rental inventory. Searches on Google Search for vacation rentals now result in Google-selected (non-monetized for now) listings enjoying a prominent top (above-the-fold) position. Suppliers of these featured rentals include the usual suspects – VRBO, Vacasa and Red Awning – with Airbnb and Booking Holdings among those most notably missing.

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Other news:

#### **MakeMyTrip announces tie-up with TripAdvisor for outbound travel space**

*Business Standard Companies & Industries on Oct 9, 2019*

MakeMyTrip, an online travel company, announced a sourcing tie-up with travel website TripAdvisor, offering its customers tours and activities in over 100 places abroad. "Our data shows consistent increase in the number of outbound Indian travellers who are willing to spend more on new and differentiated local experiences.

#### **Booking Holdings Is Withdrawing From Google Vacation Rentals**

*Skift Travel News on Oct 8, 2019*

Behind the scenes, there may be abundant reasons that Booking Holdings and Airbnb, for that matter, won't be dabbling in Google's vacation rentals business for the time being. Perhaps they are seeking to boost direct traffic, or are unhappy with the economics, and user experience.