

Duff on Hospitality Law

OTA & Travel Distribution Update: Booking.com adds direct flight search for U.S. travelers and anticipates what's next for future of travel; the online travel industry reacts to the Department of Justice's antitrust claims against Google

By Greg Duff on 10.30.20 | Posted in OTA Update

What started out as a relatively quiet week in the distribution world ended with a flurry of activity and announcements (some were expected and some were not). I hope you enjoy.

Booking.com Expands Its Product Offerings for U.S. Travelers

("Booking.com launches flight search and booking in the U.S.," October 22, 2020 via Phocus Wire)

As of October 15, U.S. travelers can now search and book airline tickets on Booking.com. This latest news comes on the heels of several recent announcements by Booking.com and its parent company, Booking Holdings, including last week's public [announcement](#) about Booking.com abandoning its core BookingSuite products. Many users in the United Kingdom and other countries in the EU have had access to the airline offerings for close to a year, though much of the transaction to purchase tickets was handled by a third party. In contrast, U.S. users will complete the transaction entirely on the Booking.com site. Facilitated payments, corporate and managed travel and now airline tickets...What's next for Booking.com?

Booking.com Answers the Question: What's Next

("Smarter, Kinder, Safer: Booking.com Reveals Nine Predictions For The Future Of Travel," October 20, 2020 via Booking.com)

For those of you asking what's next for Booking.com and the broader travel industry, last week, Booking.com issued its nine predictions for the future of travel as well as introduced a few terms that we've not seen before along the way – wandermust, familiarists and spontechnaity. Whether these nine predictions will result in any real change to the products and services offered by Booking.com (or the other Booking Holdings' companies) remains to be seen.

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DOJ Pursues Antitrust Claims Against Google

("U.S. Antitrust Lawsuit Faults Google for Abusing Monopoly Power — What It Could Mean in Travel," October 20, 2020 via Skift Travel News) (subscription may be required)

We couldn't not include at least one story (or in this case, three) on the recent filing of antitrust claims by the U.S. Department of Justice against Google and the online travel industry's initial response to these claims. Also included in this week's Update is [Expedia's response](#) to the filing as told only to our own Seattle-based Geekwire.

Details Emerging Regarding Google/Sabre Partnership

("Sabre, Google to launch tech platform driving personalization in travel," October 23, 2020 via Phocus Wire)

In January of this year, Google and Sabre [announced](#) a 10-year partnership that, among other things, would lead to the creation of a new marketplace for customers in the hotel and airline industries. Last week, we learned a little more about the partnership and what it might mean for hoteliers with Sabre's introduction of Sabre Travel AI, a Google AI-powered platform designed to further enhance hoteliers' personalized retail travel efforts. Sabre intends to use the new technology to both improve existing products and develop new products, all of which are expected to be available in early 2021. It will be interesting to follow this partnership and to watch whether it is able to truly produce "third-generation" products and services whereas IBM (and its AI platform, IBM Watson) and its travel partners were not.

Other news:

Keep It Flexible, Transparent and Diversify Offers, Booking.com Advises Partners as It Unveils "The Future of Travel"

October 21, 2020 via WIT

Booking.com advises its partners to keep flexibility and transparency as top of mind when creating deals. Additionally, they should diversify the type of offers they put out in order to manage their cash flow.

Expedia Group Goes Deeper on Job Cuts

October 20, 2020 via Skift Travel News (subscription may be required)

Expedia Group laid off about 12 percent of its global workforce in February. Last week, Expedia Group announced internally that "further redundancies" would be taking place within its Travel Partners Group, Skift has learned.

Hotelbeds and Magnuson Hotels' Reach Distribution Agreement

October 20, 2020 via Hotel Business

Hotelbeds has reached a new strategic agreement with Magnuson Hotels that provides

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Magnuson with access to Hotelbeds' distribution network of more than 60,000 travel trade buyers, including tour operators, retail travel agents, airlines and loyalty programs across more than 140 source markets worldwide.

TripAdvisor CEO Says Google Uses its 'Dominance in Internet Gatekeeping' Against Travel Sites

October 23, 2020 via CNBC - Business News

Many in Silicon Valley may be fuming about the Justice Department's antitrust lawsuit against Alphabet's Google, but one slice of the tech industry is cheering the move: online travel booking operators.

Globalization and OTA power, the Two Sacred Cows Killed by COVID

October 22, 2020 via WIT

Speaking at last week's HICAP conference during a panel on "Where are we heading?", Wilson said, "We were all presuming that globalization would lead to the end of nationalism, and I don't think anyone expected borders to close as they have." Choe Peng Sum, CEO of Pan Pacific Hotels Group said the breakout of other platforms and channels during the past few months means hoteliers no longer have to live in a world dominated by OTAs.