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Duff on Hospitality Law

A Busy Week for Travel Tech: Google, Booking, Hilton and Hopper in Focus

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Good Sunday afternoon from Seattle . . . Our weekly Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, March 20, 2026, is below. This week's Update features a wide variety of stories, includes updates from OpenAI, Google and Hopper (sort of). Enjoy.

Google Doubles Down on Agentic Commerce. As OpenAI re-thinks (perhaps only temporarily) its approach to AI driven online commerce, Google appears to be heading in the opposite direction, at least with regard to traditional retailing. This past week, Google announced new capabilities for its Universal Commerce Protocol (UCP), including cart management (allowing purchases of multiple items from the same retailer), real time catalogue access and loyalty program integration. While travel remains on UCP's official list of excluded products and services, many expect that to change soon once the platform learns traditional retail.

European Law Makers Urge Stricter Enforcement of DMA. Two key European Parliament members have authored a paper encouraging "rigorous enforcement" of the DMA's provisions against gatekeepers, including Booking.com. The paper is set for a vote by the Parliament's Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection this next week, and if adopted, the paper will become part of the European Commission's larger review of the DMA. The DMA has come under increasing attack by members of the Trump administration, which according to some, has caused EU lawmakers to hold back on imposing fines for fear of retaliatory tariffs. According to the paper, European lawmakers "must not compromise the EU's sovereignty and its autonomy to define and enforce its own rules." With regard to Booking, the authors allege that some of Booking's practices, like performance-based programs for hotels, might be equivalent to parity provisions that the DMA expressly prohibits.

Capital One Acquires Hopper Technology Behind Capital One Platform. When rumors of this transaction were first announced last November it created considerable confusion among many industry suppliers, particularly those with direct distribution relationships with Hopper. Now that the rumored deal has been officially confirmed and closing is imminent, I'm still not sure anyone really knows what is happening.

Hilton Launches New "Select by Hilton" with Yotel Franchise. You might ask why this story is relevant to our weekly Online Travel Update. This "unique" model allows Yotel to maintain independent operational control across its portfolio , while at the same time leveraging Hilton's sophisticated loyalty and distribution systems (and presumably, preferential distribution terms and conditions). Size matters in the loyalty and distribution worlds and those without size must continue to look for creative solutions and structures to

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drive direct bookings while lowering the cost (and challenges) of third party bookings. For those with size, structures like the newly announced "Select by Hilton" brand allows Hilton to realize a return on its large loyalty and distribution investments, but at the same time, may create administrative challenges as it assumes some level of responsibility for the new portfolio's compliance with existing practices and contractual requirements.

Have a great week everyone.

Google Adds Cart, Loyalty Features to UCP
March 20, 2026 via PhocusWire
Google has updated its Universal Commerce Protocol (UCP) with new capabilities to simplify shopping for users. The company has added a new "Cart" option enabling agents to save or add multiple items to a shopping basket from a single store.

EU Lawmakers Want Tougher Stance on Google, TikTok, Booking Under Gatekeeper Law
March 20, 2026 via MLex
Companies including Google, TikTok and Booking need closer attention under the EU's tech gatekeeper law according to a draft paper which is due to be voted on by a European Parliament committee. The document, which is due to feed into a European Commission review of the Digital Markets Act, also says that enforcers should hold the course in the face of US criticism.

Hilton Cuts Yotel Deal, Launches Select by Hilton
March 19, 2026 via Skift
Hilton's newest brand is aimed at bringing outside brands into its system without buying them outright. Yotel is the first test of that model.

OpenAI Pulled Back on Checkout. Google Is Pushing Ahead - Travel May Be Next
March 19, 2026 via Skift
Google just shipped new commerce tools for retail. The travel industry is watching - and some developers aren’t waiting for an invitation. OpenAI pulled back earlier this month from enabling direct AI transactions inside ChatGPT. Google is moving in the opposite direction.

Capital One to Make 'Payout' to Acquire the Hopper Tech and Employees that Built Its Travel Portal
March 17, 2026 via Skift
It will soon be independence day for Capital One Travel, and Hopper adds to its own challenges. Capital One is making a “payout” to Hopper to acquire the technology infrastructure, supplier relationships, and 150 employees that built Capital One Travel, a Capital One spokesperson said Tuesday.

OpenAI Continues To Expand Ads in ChatGPT and Tests Ads Manager

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March 16, 2026 via Search Engine Roundtable

This weekend AdWeek reported that OpenAI is currently testing an Ads Manager for ChatGPT advertisers. As AdWeek explained, “The Ads Manager is a dashboard that lets marketers run, monitor, and optimize campaigns in real time.” And what ending up being somewhat …

Hopper Tech Solutions Adds Cancellation Options for Hotels, Sellers

March 16, 2026 via Business Travel News

Hopper Technology Solutions has launched a new “Cancel for Any Reason” offering for hotels, which the company said gives hotels and travel sellers the ability to offer premium refundability options. With the CFAR offering, hotels can offer in the booking flow additional cancellation flexibility at an extra cost to the …

Posted in Online Travel Update

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