

Agentic AI or Amplified Influence: The New Battle for Guest Acquisition

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Good Sunday morning from Seattle . . . Our weekly Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, October 3, 2025, is below. Artificial intelligence again generated most of this past week's headlines (many of which coming out of the recent Destination AI Forum in Washington, D.C.), but social media also made a strong showing. Finally, Seattle's own AI conference (which wasn't focused on travel) also featured an interesting announcement. Enjoy.

- **ChatGPT Announces Agentic Commerce.** This past week, Seattle (and [Madrona Venture Group](#), where Steve Singh serves as a Managing Director) hosted the IA Summit 2025, an "exclusive gathering of AI founders, researchers and leaders." OpenAI's chief strategy officer, Jason Kwon, spoke on a variety of topics, including the AI platform's plans for e-commerce and its recent integration with payment platform Stripe. Below are a few highlights from the recent [announcement](#). It's not a stretch to think that this new tool will soon be made available for travel, **underscoring the need for hoteliers to formulate their AI strategy NOW**. While recent studies have underscored travelers' frustration with AI platforms' inability to support bookings on their platforms without the need to switch applications, last week's announcement shows that at least one prominent AI platform may be a lot closer to solving that problem.

"More than 700 million people turn to ChatGPT each week for help with everyday tasks, including finding products they love. Starting today, we're taking the first steps toward ChatGPT helping people buy them too—beginning with Instant Checkout, powered by the Agentic Commerce Protocol, built with Stripe."

"U.S. ChatGPT Plus, Pro, and Free users can now buy directly from U.S. Etsy sellers right in chat, with over a million Shopify merchants, like Glossier, SKIMS, Spanx and Vuori, coming soon. Today, Instant Checkout supports single-item purchases. Next, we'll add multi-item carts and expand merchants and regions."

- **Agoda Launches New Social Media Program - Agoda Ambassadors.** Think that we've seen the height of influencers' influence over the industry? Think again. Agoda announced this past week a new program (Agoda Ambassadors) that pays an influencer a commission whenever a traveler books on the Agoda website using a unique promotion code given the influencer. Other features of the new program include new sponsored stays and activities for influencers and marketing campaigns featuring the influencers. Time to re-examine those Agoda contracts?
- **How Are Hoteliers Using AI Today?** Two recent studies and speakers at last week's Destination AI Forum seek to provide some preliminary answers. See the stories below.

- **Airbnb's Loyalty Play.** All signs point to the short term rental (and soon hotel) booking platform's introduction of a new loyalty program. What this program will ultimately look like is unknown, but industry analysts believe it will look much more like a membership or subscription program (e.g., Amazon's Prime program) versus a traditional ("transactional") program (e.g., Marriott's Bonvoy program).
- **Capital One Travel Hires Industry Veteran.** Early last month, Capital One Travel brought on Sarah Kaplan Moore to lead the credit card company's travel program as the Head of Capital One Travel. Moore joins Capital One after roles with Agoda's Rocket Travel, Expedia and Vivid Seats. What Moore's addition might mean for the company's existing travel partnerships, including its long-standing supplier (and investor) relationship with Hopper is unclear (Moore has indicated that she's open to all forms of partnerships). Add to this uncertainty the effect of Capital One's recent acquisition of Discover Financial Services and its 300 million global cardholders.
- **Tik Tok Announces Additional Travel Ad Products.** Only weeks after its newly announced partnership with Booking.com, Tik Tok has introduced a new advertising solution targeting the travel industry - Travel Ads by Smart+. The Travel Ads program connects users of the social media platform to hotel, destination, flight and cruise promotions while exploring travel related content on the platform. Travel industry members, including Accor, Melia and Expedia, have already participated in program tests. Advertisers seeking to use the program can choose among three options - single videos, catalog videos or catalog carousels.

Have a great week.

Duff on Hospitality Law Named Among FeedSpot's 10 Best Hotel Law Blogs and Websites in 2025

October 3, 2025 via Foster Garvey

Duff on Hospitality Law stands among the most trusted publications serving the hospitality community.

How to Avoid Getting Squashed by OpenAI, and Other Startup Insights From the Company's Strategy Chief

October 3, 2025 via GeekWire

Apple's Sherlock killed the third-party Watson search utility for the Mac. Microsoft's bundling of Internet Explorer into Windows steamrolled Netscape Navigator. And whatever OpenAI does next could upend today's startup ideas just as quickly. How startups can avoid that reality was one of the questions at the Madrona IA Summit ...

Agoda Launches New Program to Partner with Travel Creators and Drive Bookings

October 3, 2025 via PR Newswire

Digital travel platform Agoda has launched the Agoda Ambassador program, a new initiative designed to strengthen commercial ties with travel creators on social media. The initiative will see Agoda working directly with travel creators to inspire their audiences to book travel through the platform. ...

Hotel Chains Struggle with AI Strategy, Independents See Fast ROI

October 3, 2025 via PhocusWire

Artificial intelligence (AI) is advancing in hospitality, making it easier for staff to offer guests the human touch while the technology takes over other operational processes. New research on both global hotel chains and independent properties reveals that AI adoption is expanding across the hospitality sector, but barriers remain, including ...

AI in Hotels: New Search Tools, Call Centers - and Why Robots Aren't in the U.S.

October 2, 2025 via Skift

Nobody will say how much money any of this is making or saving. "Experiments," they call it. "Early days." But many of the AI examples remain quite promising. Major hotel chains are testing artificial intelligence tools across their operations, but executives are still sorting through fundamental questions about ...

An Airbnb Loyalty Program Is In the Works and It Won't Be Like Marriott Bonvoy

October 1, 2025 via Skift

Airbnb will launch some type of membership program to give guests a reason to book a hotel on Airbnb rather than earn points elsewhere. It certainly won't be a clone of hotel group loyalty programs - that's not Airbnb's style. It's highly likely that Airbnb will launch a ...

Capital One Travel Taps Agoda B2B Veteran as New Head: Scoop

September 30, 2025 via Skift

Capital One Travel landed an experienced travel B2B exec in Sarah Kaplan Moore, who hails from the online travel agency side of the ledger. Capital One's Discover acquisition potentially provides it with ammunition to better compete against leaders Chase Travel and American Express Travel. Sarah Kaplan Moore, who ...

TikTok Launches Travel Advertising Solution

September 29, 2025 via PhocusWire

Social media giant TikTok is launching an advertising solution tailored to the travel industry called Travel Ads, driven by Smart+. The solution, which incorporates artificial intelligence (AI) elements, is TikTok's first ad format built with travel in mind. TikTok's Travel Ads connect users with hotel, destination, flight and cruise offers ...

Lufthansa Group Says AI Will Help it Cut 4,000 Jobs by 2030

September 29, 2025 via PhocusWire

Lufthansa Group is planning to reduce its workforce by around 4,000 people in the next five years as artificial intelligence (AI) increases efficiency. During an event for analysts and investors in Munich Monday, the company said it is aiming to cut thousands of administrative roles by 2030 as the result ...

TikTok Launches Updated Travel Ads

September 29, 2025 via Social Media Today

TikTok is launching new Travel Ads, powered by its advancing AI ad targeting models, which are designed to help travel marketers tap into its highly engaged, aspirational audience, by showcasing relevant offers and options in-stream. TikTok's new Travel Ads will give travel marketers another consideration for their promotions, with advanced ...

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