Foster Garvey

Duff on Hospitality Law

Analyzing Divergent Views on the Booking-eTraveli Merger and Developments in Corporate Travel Platforms – Online Travel Update

09.19.23

This week's update includes a variety of stories, including an explanation by the UK's CMA as to why it viewed the proposed Booking Holdings and eTraveli merger differently than its European competition counterparts. Highlights:

- **CMA Explains Differences with European Counterparts Over eTraveli Merger**. As our readers will likely recall, the UK's competition authority (the Competition and Markets Authority) previously approved the planned merger of Booking Holdings and eTraveli, while its European counterparts at the EU Commission are rumored to be vetoing the merger. According to a chief economic advisor at the CMA, the divergent outcomes are the result of different authorities faced with different facts and different consumers. Speaking more broadly, the advisor added that the Booking / eTraveli merger generated "ecosystem" concerns (i.e., largely undefined concerns that a technology platform and its many interconnected businesses become entrenched and ultimately harm innovation and competition). In short (my two cents), the CMA's differing view of these so-called "ecosystem" concerns led to it reaching a different outcome.

- **Credit Card Travel Platforms: A Quick Overview**. For those of you seeking a summary of the credit card travel platforms (and their attributes) currently available (platforms we've covered in several posts the past year or two), the attached story from *Forbes* provides a helpful overview.

- **Kayak's Shift to Corporate Travel**. Since Kayak's release of "Kayak for Business" in the summer of 2021, over 30,000 small and medium businesses have used Kayak's booking tool. But Kayak's aspirations don't end there. Kayak is now targeting large corporate clients. With its partner Blockskye (a blockchain-based startup), Kayak has been developing and testing an enterprise solution with PwC. Since last fall (2022), the Kayak enterprise solution has processed more than 400,000 bookings for PwC's 65,000+ employees in the United States. According to Kayak CEO, Steve Hafner, the goal of the new solution is multifold - disintermediate traditional GDSs (via NDC), "stick it to the credit card companies" (via direct payment solutions) and take on existing (disfavored) market legacies - American

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Express GBT and Concur (through a better overall solution). It will be interesting to watch how these legacy corporate platforms - including Amex GBT and Concur - respond to this newest corporate offering. More to come.

- **Booking.com Partners with Affirm**. Wait. What? Among the many potential benefits or detriments (depending on your perspective) of Booking.com's much lauded payments platform is the ability to offer guests a variety of consumer friendly fintech products, products offered through Booking Holdings' fintech business. With its recently announced partnership with Booking.com, Affirm can now boast that it powers the consumer financing options (BNPL) for the two largest online travel platforms – Expedia and Booking.com. Affirm also powers consumer financing options for other Booking Holdings' companies - Agoda, Priceline and Kayak. I have to admit, I'm a little confused. If Booking Holdings is making huge commitments to create its own fintech unit, why partner with Affirm? Change of direction? Temporary solution? Learning opportunity for Booking? Perhaps a realization that creating your own platform (build) is far more difficult (and costly) than partnering (buy)?

UK Booking-Etraveli merger divergence with EU was due to different facts, CMA economist says

September 15, 2023 via foster.com

The UK approved the Booking-Etraveli merger, in contrast to the EU, because it faced a different set of facts, according to an economist at Britain's antitrust watchdog. Booking's 1.6 billion-euro plan to buy flights travel agency Etraveli will be blocked by the EU after remedies failed to appease concerns that

Credit Card Travel Portals: A Quick Guide

September 13, 2023 via Forbes

The number of travel booking websites you can choose from is astonishing: Priceline, Expedia, Kayak.com plus a hundred others. With so many choices, adding a credit card travel portal to the mix might feel unnecessary. But don't be so quick to dismiss them. Credit card booking engines can be convenient ...

IHG launches new digital booking experience

September 12, 2023 via hotelbusiness.com

IHG Hotels & Resorts has launched of a reimagined digital booking experience for its guests that leverages the power of cloud-based platforms. The enhanced booking experience empowers guests to select individual room attributes such as a higher floor or a room with a view, the company reports. Guests can also ...

Steve Hafner on why Kayak is going deeper into business travel

September 12, 2023 via Phocus Wire

Kayak has more than 30,000 companies using it's free corporate travel tool for small- and medium-sized businesses and is now going after larger enterprises with a new product developed for PwC.

Affirm Signs Booking.com as Latest Buy Now, Pay Later Partner

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September 7, 2023 via Skift Travel News

You probably can't blame travel companies for giving travelers more options for financing their vacations. But which will be the first to run a YouTube ad on how to responsibly budget for your next trip? -Dennis Schaal

Posted in Online Travel Update

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