

Booking Holdings' Bet on Vayo Raises the Stakes for Travel AI

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Good Sunday morning from Seattle . . . Our Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, October 16, 2026, is below. This past week was all about Vayo, the newly announced AI agent built exclusively for travel. While travel start ups may come and go (sometimes with little or no fanfare), Booking Holdings announced \$100 million investment (or, should we say, potential investment) in Vayo make this newly announced travel start up a little different. We have a lot of questions.

Airline Check-In: Agentic AI. If you are regular reader of our Update, you know that we like to periodically check in with our friends in the airline industry to see how they are adapting/evolving in the face of the same changes, pressures or _____ (name your favorite organizational threat) faced by lodging industry members. This past week, *PhocusWire* offered an update on agentic AI adoption in the airline industry and posited four possible outcomes, including complete OTA domination. The four noted outcomes make abundantly clear the important role that traveler trust and confidence will ultimately play.

Vayo is Here. This week's Update features a couple of stories detailing the recent Vayo announcement, including a detailed story (and group photo) produced by our local Seattle technology newsletter, *Geekwire*. There is a lot to unpack here. First, here's what we know:

- Vayo's founders have a strong Seattle and Madrona connection (the same Seattle-based venture capital firm closely associated with Spotnana and its CEO, Steve Singh).
- Booking Holdings' actual investment/ownership is a little unclear. According to announcements, Booking Holdings may invest up to \$100 million depending on progress and market conditions.
- In its current iteration, the agent is largely an itinerary management tool - leveraging a user's email inbox to identify opportunities to improve travelers' existing itineraries with better fares, available rooms and/or available restaurant tables - that targets leisure travelers. For now, Vayo can only make actual bookings on Booking Holdings' OpenTable. Other itinerary improvements are only identified and then handed off to the traveler to complete via the chosen intermediary or supplier. Additional booking opportunities are expected within weeks.
- Vayo claims to provide website neutrality. Vayo works with Booking Holdings' product and service offerings (and SeatGeek), but also those of its competitors (Expedia) and suppliers. What that might look like remains unknown (see questions below).
- For now, Vayo is exploring monetization options. Vayo's East Coast cousin (the recently announced Booking Holdings' Lola) is exploring a subscription model.

- Those interested in the AI agent tool can join a private beta waitlist (I'm on the list). General availability is expected in 2027. Future developments reportedly include loyalty integration.

Any questions? I have a few.

- Fundamentally, should suppliers welcome these agents or fear them? How might the answer change if these agents seek to leverage travelers' loyalty program membership or benefits? Might we soon see an Amazon vs. Perplexity type case in the travel industry where a supplier seeks to limit agents' access or use of the supplier's website? Should suppliers re-visit existing booking terms and conditions and/or website terms of use in anticipation of this new tool?
- Now more than ever, who owns the guest? Voya represents yet another layer between traveler and supplier, a layer that over time could know more about the traveler than just about anyone. Do existing privacy policies need to be updated to account for these new agents?
- Travel law still struggles at times to identify a travel agent's legal principal. Is it the guest? Sometimes. Is it the supplier? Sometimes. What role (and related responsibilities) is Voya seeking to fill? Do the eventual financial incentives line up with whatever role Voya expects to fill?
- What exactly is Booking Holdings' investment or ownership? For purposes of evaluating Voya's roll within established distribution ecosystems (Booking.com, Agoda or Priceline), should Voya be considered an "Affiliate" or "Related Party"? How might existing contractual restrictions around fintech, AI, onward distribution, IP usage, etc. apply?
- Voya claims to be channel agnostic. Does that mean that Voya might identify (and someday soon, book) cheaper alternatives found on brand.com versus an existing booking made through a Booking Holding channel? Should suppliers welcome these opportunities or discourage (or even prevent) them?
- What does loyalty program integration look like?
- How does the itinerary improvement aspects of this new tool affect existing revenue management (pricing strategies). Knowing that a nominal rate change could affect hundreds or thousands of bookings, how might a revenue manager behave differently? Time for changes to booking terms and conditions? Changes to cancellation policies? For those hoteliers still hanging on to best rate guarantees, are policy changes needed?
- How much of a strategic advantage does this ultimately prove to be for Booking Holdings' channels? As Voya learns more about its user (including existing bookings and loyalty program memberships with competitors), how will Booking Holdings leverage those learnings to benefit its own channels?

Have a great week everyone.

4 Scenarios for Flight Booking in the Age of Agentic AI

October 15, 2026 via PhocusWire

Airlines are still at the early stages of agentic artificial intelligence (AI). At the Elevate conference in Atlanta, ATPCO revealed that 37% of carriers have active AI programs but only 11% of airlines have deployed agentic AI.

[Booking Holdings Unveils AI Travel Startup Vayo, Based in Seattle, With a Planned \\$100M Investment](#)

October 14, 2026 via GeekWire

Booking Holdings is launching a new Seattle-based travel startup called Vayo, led by serial entrepreneur Mike Fridgen, betting that AI agents built for travel can do a better job of planning and managing trips than general-purpose assistants from the likes of OpenAI and Meta.

[Booking Holdings Launches Vayo AI Travel Agent, Plans \\$100M Investment](#)

October 14, 2026 via PhocusWire

Booking Holdings has launched Vayo, an artificial intelligence (AI) travel startup, with plans to invest \$100 million, subject to continued product advancement and market conditions.

[I Asked Muse to Help Me Book My Holiday Travel. It Didn't Fly Far](#)

October 12, 2026 via Gizmodo

Like it or not, AI agents are cropping up everywhere. Big tech companies are betting that in the not-so-distant future, we'll all habitually rely on these systems as automated personal assistants, letting them handle our drudgework while we do something more worthwhile (sleep, maybe).

[How Amex GBT Reviews AI Risk](#)

October 7, 2026 via Skift

Amex GBT may be a software, payments and meetings company for business travel, but it's also selling trust - and its chief privacy officer said that's what it built its AI governance around.

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