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Duff on Hospitality Law

Online Travel Update: Expedia joins other platforms in offering COVID-19 advisory; online distributors pursue public offerings; Booking.com fined over recent data breach reporting

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While the debate around health care passports continues, our latest Update offers Booking Holdings' CEO's perspective on the growing controversy. We also take a look at two major distributors' plans for public offerings - one via a SPAC (Traveloka) and the other through a new secondary listing (Trip.com). What each distributor does with the proceeds from the offerings will be interesting to watch. Enjoy.

Expedia Joins Other Platforms in Offering COVID-19 Advisory

("Expedia Group Launches COVID-19 Advisor Tool to Track Global Travel Restrictions, April 8, 2021 via Hotel News Resource)

Recently, Expedia announced plans to launch the COVID-19 Travel Advisor, offering information that other platforms have made available to travelers for some time. The Travel Advisor will offer users of several of Expedia Holdings' consumer sites real-time information on COVID-related travel restrictions in various destinations. According to Expedia, an initial pilot of the Travel Advisor resulted in 1.6 million travelers using the tool on Expedia Holdings' sites since November 2020. Whether this new advisory will be enough to draw prospective travelers to Expedia Groups' sites earlier in their search (before identifying or booking a flight or accommodation) - which is clearly the intent behind the new Travel Advisor - remains to be seen.

Online Distributors Pursue Public Offerings

("Trip.com Group hopes to raise $1.4B from second public listing in Hong Kong, April 8, 2021 via Phocus

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Wire)

Trip.com (operator of Ctrip, Qunar, Trip.com and Skyscanner) has announced plans to offer up to 31.6 million shares on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. This second offering (the initial offering was on the New York Stock Exchange in 2003) is expected to raise as much as $1.4 billion. According to offering documents, proceeds from the listing are expected to fund further expansion, improve the companies' technology and address other corporate needs. Traveloka, the largest Southeast Asian online distributor (and growing e-commerce platform), has also announced plans for a public offering via a merger with Bridgetown Holdings Ltd., a blank check firm founded by billionaires Richard Li and Peter Thiel. The proposed deal values Traveloka at approximately $5 billion, which in 2020 was valued only at $2.75 billion. Backers of Traveloka include Expedia Group.

Booking.com Fined Over Recent Data Breach Reporting

("Dutch DPA fines Booking.com for delay in reporting data breach, April 8, 2021 via European Data Protection Board (Europa.eu) - News)

Recently, the Dutch Data Protection Authority (DPA) imposed a €475,000 fine on Booking.com for its failure to timely notify the DPA of a data breach. According to the DPA's investigation, the breach originated via a telephone scam targeting hotels in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in December 2018. Hotel staff were convinced by callers to provide login details to the hotels' Booking.com accounts. With details in hand, scammers were able to access the personal information of approximately 4,100 guests and credit card details of approximately 280 guests who had booked rooms at UAE hotels.

Other news:

Booking CEO Says Vaccine Passport Would Help Travel Rebound

April 8, 2021 via Bloomberg - News (subscription may be required)

The world's biggest online travel agency is in favor of vaccine passports that would make it safer and easier for people to travel. “We need a way that tourists can go to a country but prove that they are safe to travel so that governments are willing to let people come," said Booking Holdings Inc. Chief Executive Officer Glenn Fogel in an interview on Bloomberg Television Thursday.

Emirates Wants to Shake Up Ticket Sales Through Closer Ties to Travel Agencies

April 7, 2021 via Skift Travel News (subscription may be required)

Emirates is hoping to return to profitability next year by trimming costs while recapturing demand ahead of its rivals. The Dubai-based carrier has been revealing details about one of its newest strategies. It aims to make its distribution more cost-effective.

Is Google’s Zero-Click Search a Threat or Opportunity for Hoteliers?

April 9, 2021 via Phocus Wire

Last year, 64.82 percent of searches on Google ended up with zero "click-throughs" to websites, blogs, articles, etc., because Google provided all the answers a user would need on the search results page itself, making a click to the underlying content unnecessary (SimilarWeb/SparkToro). This was a significant

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increase from the 50 percent "zero-click searches" back in 2019...

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