Duff on Hospitality Law

Online Travel Update: Spanish hotels made claims against Booking.com over its pricing practices; recently passed house bill may impact Google's travel products; and Google delays rollout of its controversial third-party cookies

07.02.21

This week's Update features a variety of stories, including details on the recent change in leadership at Booking.com in the Asia-Pacific region. Enjoy.

Spanish Hoteliers Cry Foul

("Hotels in Spain sue Booking.com for 'abusive practices' - '40% more than real price'," June 22, 2021 via Daily Express)

The Madrid Hotel Business Association recently announced that it had made claims against Booking.com to the Spanish competition authority, asking the authority to investigate the online travel agency's practices. The claims center around Booking.com's rate parity requirements (which the Association alleges result in booking prices 40 percent higher than its members' own prices), and the degree of control that Booking.com's website wields over the hotels' guests - booking management and (now) payments. The Association's complaints came on the heels of similar claims made by the Spanish Association of Hotel Directors.

Recently Passed House Bill Could Significantly Affect Google's Travel Products

(There Is A Good Chance Google Travel's Ambitions Are About To Be Reined In, Legislatively," June 24, 2021 via Skift Travel News) (subscription may be required)

Last week's passage of the American Choice and Innovation Online Act by a House committee could ultimately force some major changes at Google, Facebook and other online platforms. Under the Act, the

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platforms would be prohibited from providing preferential treatment to their products, services and businesses over those of their competitors. Presumably (though the Act does not specifically state), the Act would apply to Google Flights, Google Hotels and Google Things To Do. If passed, the Act would represent a victory for many of Google's biggest critics (and customers), TripAdvisor and Expedia. The Act still requires consideration and approval by the full House and Senate before becoming effective.

Google Delays Rollout of Controversial Third-Party Cookie Policy
("Google delays plan to bar tracking cookies," June 24, 2021 via Washington Post)
Congratulations to all the digital marketers out there, you now have a little longer to prepare for Google's planned policy of blocking third-party tracking cookies. The recently announced decision by Google extends commencement of the policy until late 2023. Note that no similar postponement has been announced by Apple.

Other News:

Expedia Group Looks to Close the Lopsided Profit Margin Gap With Booking Holdings
June 23, 2021 via Skift Travel News (subscription may be required)
It's been a perennial handicap in the competition between Expedia Group and Booking Holdings - Booking Holdings is a much more profitable company. But now Expedia boss Peter Kern is holding out hope that his company can at least narrow the gap.

Delta-Sabre Deal Will See Global Distribution System Paid on Booking's Value, Not Flat Fee
June 22, 2021 via Phocus Wire
A revamped distribution agreement between Delta and Sabre has the potential to disrupt the standard commercial payment model between airlines, Global Distribution System and travel advisors.

Booking.com Names Laura Houldsworth as New Asia-Pacific Chief
June 24, 2021 via WIT
Booking.com has appointed Laura Houldsworth as Managing Director & Vice President for the Asia-Pacific region, effective June 2021. She succeeds Angel Llull Mancas, who served as Managing Director for Asia Pacific since August 2018.

Posted in Online Travel Update

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