Duff on Hospitality Law

OpenAI May Have Bigger Plans for Travel

11.15.26

Good Sunday afternoon from Seattle . . . Our weekly Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, November 13, 2026, is below. This week's Update features stories on the two topics that garnered much of the online travel industry's headlines this past week: the industry's rapidly evolving response to AI agents and OpenAI's newly announced acquisition of AI travel agent, Odessia. This week's Update also includes an invitation from our friends at HTNG for its upcoming AI webinar led by members of Booking.com's AI team. I sat through a similar presentation a few weeks ago and found it tremendously helpful. Curious as to how one of the major OTAs views the many threats and opportunities presented by AI? I encourage you to tune in.

Expedia Confirms Cyberattack. Time to review those privacy and data security provisions again. Expedia confirmed this past Thursday that it had been the subject of a cyberattack, which, according to Expedia, had originated through a compromised third-party data platform provider. News of the attack had been featured in several cybersecurity sites earlier in the week when a known extortion group claimed that it had stolen Expedia data. Important details of this recent attack, including the type of amount of data stolen, have not been forthcoming.

Airlines Respond to AI Agents. This past week was filled with news of announcements by airlines and other travel industry members regarding AI agents and their access to members' digital channels. United Airlines' announcement that it was blocking unauthorized agents (both personal and third party) from booking on its website and app garnered most of the attention. According to United, allowing agents to book on its sites could lead to many undesirable outcomes, including unintended purchases, account changes and use of loyalty program points. United further claimed that the automated actions of AI agents could violate applicable DOT or FAA regulations. While the ban prohibits unauthorized AI bookings (and United won't honor agent bookings made prior to November 11), United will allow AI agents to access its sites for search purposes. Jet Blue expressed a slightly less confrontational approach. In remarks last week, Jet Blue's CEO, Marty St. George, said that airlines must adapt to customers' wants, cautioning, however, that agentic bookings could present Jet Blue (and other airlines) with another costly distribution channel (similar to OTAs).

Who's Responsible When an AI Agent Gets Things Wrong? Citi has an answer for that. One of the major questions arising out of the increasing use of personalized AI agents is who bears responsibility for the agent's inevitable mistakes. In a conversation with *Skift* this past week, Citi's Head of Value Cards, Lending and Commerce for U.S. Consumer Cards, Abhinav Anand, offered Citi's perspective. According to Anand, liability should fall to the agent and the company offering the agent (not the merchant or payment card issuer). And how might Citi impose and enforce this perspective? Citi might require agents wishing to

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transact using Mastercard or Visa to accept liability contractually when registering with its networks. Citi was one of the first issuers to become enabled for agentic commerce with Mastercard and more recently, Visa.

OpenAI Pushes Further into Travel. OpenAI announced last week its purchase of Odessia, the recently launched AI agent travel startup founded by Sonder co-founder, Francis Davidson. As part of the purchase, Davidson announced that he was joining OpenAI "to focus on the future of travel." Launched only 5 months ago, Odessia offered a free concierge service through which users could plan and book flights, hotels and itineraries through text conversation. Odessia runs on Nuitee, a travel technology company, that provides hotel inventory as well as hotel search, pricing, booking and guest services capabilities. Nuitee's role following the OpenAI purchase is unclear, though it could offer OpenAI an interesting partnership opportunity to add core booking functionality. What does this latest acquisition by OpenAI mean for the travel industry? OpenAI hasn't said. If ChatGPT becomes better at planning and booking travel itself, without relying on its many existing travel partners - OTAs and hotels alike – it could soon compete with OTAs and become the next intermediary to insert itself between travel suppliers and their guests.

Have a great week everyone.

Travel Destinations, Creators Launch Alliance Against AI Generated Content
November 13, 2026 via PhocusWire
Steller, a platform linking creator content with travel planning, has unveiled the Human Verified Content Alliance (HVCA), supported by a number of destinations.

Expedia Confirms Cyberattack Through Third-Party Vendor
November 12, 2026 via Skift
Expedia says attackers reached its systems through a compromised technology provider. The company has not disclosed the extent of any data exposure.

JetBlue President Says Airlines Should Follow Customers' Lead on AI Booking Agents
November 12, 2026 via Channel News Asia
JetBlue Airways' President Marty St. George said on Wednesday that he understands why airlines may be wary of artificial intelligence-powered booking intermediaries, after United Airlines said it would restrict AI bots' access to its digital platforms.

Duffel-Katanox Partnership Targets AI Agents, Hotel Booking Breakdowns
November 11, 2026 via Skift
For travel sellers building AI agents, booking the room is only part of the job. Duffel and Katanox want to bring payments, commissions, and financing into the same system.

United Blocks Unauthorized AI Bookings
November 11, 2026 via Travel Weekly

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United Airlines is blocking personal agentic AI assistants from booking its flights. The prohibition applies to United's direct and indirect channels.

United Blocks Third-Party AI Agents From App, Website
November 11, 2026 via PhocusWire
United Airlines is blocking third-party personal artificial intelligence (AI) agents from booking on its app and website.

Citi Says AI Companies Should Pay When Their Agents Book the Wrong Travel
November 11, 2026 via Skift
AI agents are already booking travel, and they get things wrong. The industry hasn't settled who absorbs the cost when they do. Citi wants the agent companies on the hook, which would spare hotels and airlines, but could slow how fast agents transact.

Brand Loyalty Retains Influence as Personal AI Agents Take on Travel Booking
November 10, 2026 via PhocusWire
Personal artificial intelligence (AI) agents like Meta's Muse are new to the travel landscape. But established shopping behaviors and brand relationships are influencing how travelers use them-and which companies are positioned to capture the bookings.

Airbnb Opens Its API to Business Travel, Starting With Perk
November 10, 2026 via Skift
Airbnb has courted business travelers for a decade, but corporate bookings mostly happened off to the side, through referral deals and workarounds. Letting Perk tap its API puts live Airbnb listings inside a corporate booking tool for what Perk says is the first time.

OpenAI Acquires Odessia, the AI Travel Agent From Sonder's Co-Founder
November 10, 2026 via Skift
OpenAI didn't acquire Odessia for its revenue. It bought a team that built a working AI travel agent in months, plus a founder who ran a lodging company, which included hotels and short-term rentals, for a decade. It's a sign ChatGPT wants to do more in travel than send users to Booking.com and Expedia.

Presenting the Hot 25 Travel Startups for 2027
November 9, 2026 via PhocusWire
Throughout the travel industry, there is constant talk of the pace of change and the "early days" of agentic artificial intelligence (AI).

A New Agenda for Tech Regulation Beyond AI
November 9, 2026 via Tech Policy Press
The massive Democratic sweep of congressional and state races across the United States was a referendum on many things: the increased cost of living, President Donald Trump's unpopularity and corruption in his administration, the rollback of ...

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Posted in Online Travel Update

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