Duff on Hospitality Law

OTA & Travel Distribution Update: Tripadvisor unloads eight of its media companies; Expedia finalizes union negotiations; Airbnb captures headlines with bookings hitting pre-pandemic levels for first time

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It was a relatively quiet week on the distribution front. This past week, Airbnb garnered a lot of attention from the usual suspects and the not so usual...Enjoy.

Tripadvisor Continues Its Rapid Evolution

("Tripadvisor Is a Media Business So Why Did It Unload These 8 Brands? Jul 17, 2020 via Skift Travel News) (subscription may be required)

Over the past weeks, we've featured stories on Tripadvisor's many staff reductions, financial re-structuring, focus on quality over quantity and now, the disposition of eight of its media companies.With little fanfare, Tripadvisor announced this past week that it had disposed of Smarter Travel, Airfarewatchdog, BookingBuddy, OneTime, Oyster.com, Family Vacation Critic, What to Pack and Holiday Watchdog. All eight companies were acquired by travel marketing company, Hopjump.The sale is seen as part of Tripadvisor's broader media shift that includes, among other things, a focus on B2B advertising and the advertising of products and services outside of travel.

Expedia Finalizes Union Negotiations

("Precedent-Setting or a Footnote? Expedia and Union Reach Pact on Short-Term Rentals," Jul 13, 2020 via Skift Travel News) (subscription may be required)

No, Expedia's thousands of employees shouldn't expect to receive their union cards anytime soon...Instead, Expedia announced this past week that it had entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Unite Here Local 30, the union that represents many of San Diego's hospitality employees, on the regulation of

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short-term rentals in San Diego. The groundbreaking deal brings much needed clarity to a city that has long debated short-term rentals (going so far as to prohibit rentals entirely) by clarifying the legality of short-term rentals in exchange for limiting the number of rentals. The deal remains subject to (and is meaningless without) San Diego City Council approval, but even without such approval, the agreement represents an unprecedented level of cooperation and compromise between two historically adverse perspectives - the platforms that facilitate the rentals (Vrbo) and the union that represents the workers arguably most impacted by those rentals. Notably, Airbnb did not participate in the negotiations, though it has reportedly been asked to endorse the agreement.

Airbnb in the News

("Airbnb Claims 1 Million Nights Booked in One Day for First Time Since March 3rd," Jul 15, 2020 via Phocus Wire; "The Pandemic Is Straining Airbnb," Jul 17, 2020 via The New York Times – Most Recent; "Airbnb Was Like a Family. Then the Layoffs Started." Jul 17, 2020 via The New York Times – Most Recent) (subscription may be required for The New York Times articles)

This past week, Airbnb garnered a lot of media attention.First, Airbnb announced that on July 8, it had again exceeded the one million daily bookings threshold (a post-COVID 19 first). According to Airbnb's announcement, approximately half of the million plus bookings were for properties located within 300 miles of the traveler's location, two-thirds of the bookings were for properties outside cities, and 60 percent of the bookings were for one to two travelers, and a "significant" number of the bookings were for travel after August 7. Airbnb was also the subject of two separate *New York Times* articles published this past week detailing the challenges brought on by the pandemic and the toll that Airbnb's response to the pandemic has had on a company built on inclusiveness and empathy. I encourage you to read both articles.

Other news:

Travelport Seeks Sharper Distribution Edge Despite Pandemic's Hit to Revenue

Jul 13, 2020 via Skift Travel News (subscription may be required)

The pandemic has been a seismic moment for the travel technology sector, and Travelport has been looking to regain its footing since. Travelport announced in June it had gotten access to a half-billion dollars in fresh financing from its private equity owners, Siris Capital Group and the Elliott Management-affiliated Evergreen Coast Capital.

Skyscanner to Cut Jobs, Offices, as Revenues Collapse

Jul 15, 2020 via The Straits Times – Business

Skyscanner, the travel booking service owned by China's Trip.com Group, is preparing to cut as much as a fifth of its workforce and close several offices after revenues collapsed following COVID-19 lockdowns. The company intends to consolidate its operations in Britain, close its Sofia and Budapest offices and reduce its presence in Singapore and Miami, according to an internal e-mail from chief executive Moshe Rafiah seen by Bloomberg News.

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