

Platform Players Stake Out New Ground in Online Travel Distribution

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Good Sunday afternoon from Seattle . . . Our weekly Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, May 15, 2026, is below. With quarterly earnings releases behind us, it was a much quieter week in the online travel world. TikTok garnered most of the industry's attention this past week with its announced expansion of TikTok GO. Enjoy.

TikTok Announces In-App Booking with TikTok GO. For some time now, I've included references to social media platforms in my client presentations on the future of distribution and advised clients to keep an eye on popular social media platforms and their travel aspirations. While AI has garnered most of the distribution headlines over the past 18+ months, social media cannot be overlooked particularly for younger travelers. This past week, TikTok, announced partnerships with the many of the usual suspects - Expedia, Booking.com, Trip.com, Viator and GetYourGuide and Tqets (now part of Expedia) – that will allow users (U.S. initially) of the popular social media platform to "look and book" accommodations and experiences. Creators who feature accommodations and activities in their posts will be able to earn commissions when their content is connected to a booking. According to Tik Tok, each of the announced partners underwent rolling testing over the past year with positive results (no details were provided). As the bright lines that once separated the phases of the traditional sales funnel are further eroded (first with AI and now these social media booking solutions), it will be interesting to watch whether these new tools actually produce additional bookings. For suppliers concerned about this latest booking tool and intermediaries' seemingly headstart in leveraging its possible opportunities, it is time to review again the marketing and IP provisions in your favorite intermediary agreement. For years, suppliers have granted intermediaries broad discretion for social media platforms. Something to think about in your next renewal or extension.

Ever Wonder the Real Value of Booking.com's Merchant Model (aka Facilitated Payment)? *Skift's Rafat Ali* (one of my favorite industry observers) provides a deep dive into Booking Holdings' financials and uncovers the real value of Booking.com's growing merchant model (one of three interdependent "machines" identified by Ali within Booking). Yes, the merchant model may present additional operating costs and challenges (fraud, chargebacks, etc.), but don't be fooled. The merchant model provides Booking.com greater control over its traveler relationships (e.g., rate discounting would be nearly impossible without the merchant model) and without the merchant model, Booking Holdings' recent run of aggressive returns of shareholder capital would be impossible.

How Important is B2B to Expedia's Future? Just look at this past week's announced promotion of Alfonso Paredes, who formerly led Expedia's B2B business, to President of B2B and Chief Commercial Officer. In

his new role, Alfonso will have responsibility for both Expedia's EPS platform and global supply (without which, the EPS platform could not function). Expedia's former Chief Commercial Officer, Greg Schulze, a 20+ year veteran of Expedia, will be leaving the company.

OpenAI Seeks to Grow Enterprise Deployments and the Travel Industry May Have Shown Them How.

Leveraging the experience gained by [Tomoro](#) and its team of AI experts and engineers deploying AI across Virgin Atlantic, OpenAI (which recently acquired Tomoro) plans to launch a new AI deployment company (OpenAI Deployment Company). According to OpenAI, the plan is to embed personnel from the new company directly inside client companies to identify the best AI use cases, facilitate AI (likely only OpenAI's version) adoption and then grow it. With Tomoro's assistance, Virgin Atlantic built an AI concierge (chatbot) that can handle bookings, loyalty accounts and customer support - all through natural language searches on Virgin Atlantic's website and mobile application. Clients of the new OpenAI company are expected to have front row seats to OpenAI's ongoing research and product pipeline.

Have a great week everyone.

TikTok Formalizes In-App Travel Bookings with Booking.com, Expedia, Trip.com Among Partners

May 12, 2026 via *PhocusWire*

Off the back of a travel booking test last summer, TikTok has formally announced in-app booking with TikTok GO.

Booking Holdings Is Running Ahead of Its Own Strategy

May 12, 2026 via *Skift*

The merchant model is the most important thing happening at Booking Holdings. It is also the thing that lets it avoid proving whether Connected Trip actually works.

Expedia Promotes B2B Chief to Lead Global Supply as Partner Business Takeover Accelerates

May 11, 2026 via *Skift*

In her seven years heading Expedia B2B before becoming CEO in 2024, you can imagine Ariane Gorin feeling that the unit had so much unrealized potential. While Booking Holdings might be the much larger business, Gorin is trying to show that Expedia B2B is the secret sauce.

OpenAI Builds AI Deployment Biz Around Team Behind Virgin Atlantic Concierge

May 11, 2026 via *Skift*

OpenAI's new \$4 billion deployment company gives travel brands a clearer path to adopting AI at scale - and starts with the team behind Virgin Atlantic's AI concierge.

Colo. Legislators Pass Bill Limiting Surveillance Pricing

May 9, 2026 via *Law360*

The Colorado General Assembly has passed a bill that limits companies and others from using consumers'

and workers' personal data for setting individualized consumer prices and worker wages.

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Authored by

[Greg Duff](#)

[Principal|Seattle](#)

[206.816.1470](tel:206.816.1470) greg.duff@foster.com