

The Growing Role of AI Agents in Online Travel and ChatGPT's Ad Plans

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Good evening from the ALIS Conference in Los Angeles . . . Our travel-shortened Online Travel Update for the week ending January 23, 2026, is below. This week's Update features a wide variety of stories, including updates on two stories we featured last week - Airbnb's evolving hotel aspirations and investigations into Trip.com's allegedly anti-competitive practices. I hope you enjoy.

To Allow AI Agents or Not to Allow AI Agents - That Is the Question. I've been a part of these discussions with several clients over the past few weeks. We definitely know Amazon's perspective on this question, though as Perplexity has argued in recent court filings, Amazon appears to be engaged in the very same behavior that it is now seeking to stop by Perplexity. This week's first story from *PhocusWire* provides a number of arguments in favor of allowing AI agents.

ChatGPT to Test Advertising. This past week, OpenAI announced that it would soon test sponsored ads in responses delivered to logged-in users of ChatGPT's free and new Go tiers (users of ChatGPT's higher subscription tiers will continue to enjoy ad free responses). No one should be surprised. At some point, these platforms, which require huge financial investments to sustain and grow, had to commercialize their platforms and extensive user bases. Significant questions remain about the newly announced advertising product (including, most importantly for hoteliers, how ads may be purchased, prioritized, etc.), but OpenAI did share some initial guiding principles about the product:

- "Organic" AI responses will not be influenced by the advertisements
- OpenAI will not sell users' personal information to advertisers
- Advertisements will only appear for logged-in users and will not appear alongside sensitive topics like personal health or politics

While travel was not specifically identified in the announcement, a sample screen shot included in the announcement featured a sample travel response and related advertising. For anyone still debating whether AI platforms (and related advertising) need to be addressed in your internal and external distribution discussions, this latest OpenAI announcement should be a call to action.

Have a great week everyone.

[Making the Case for Hotels to Enable AI 'Crawlability'](#)

January 22, 2026 via *PhocusWire*

Leading technology advisors are urging hoteliers to open up to artificial intelligence (AI) search platforms

by giving greater access to their crawlers and bots. Hoteliers should be adding new types of unique content too, as large language models (LLMs) accelerate as a source of direct bookings. Hospitality companies are in ...

[Apple Plans Siri Chatbot Overhaul - Developer Access Will Decide Its Impact on Travel](#)

January 21, 2026 via Skift

Apple is reportedly turning a Gemini-powered Siri into a new full-time chatbot. How Apple structures developer access may determine whether it becomes relevant for travel booking. Apple is preparing to replace Siri with a generative AI chatbot across iPhones, iPads, and Macs later this year, according to a ...

[China Trip.com Antitrust Probe Targets Hotel Booking Competition Issues, Adviser Says](#)

January 19, 2026 via MLex

China's Trip.com Group probe will "precisely target" competition problems in the online hotel booking platform services market, arguing it could ...

[Airbnb Builds Hotel Team to Take On the OTAs](#)

January 16, 2026 via Skift

For years people have wondered whether Airbnb's business is doomed as it faces increased regulation around the world. Airbnb has an answer to getting shut out in that manner - hotels, hotels, hotels.

[Our Approach to Advertising and Expanding Access to ChatGPT](#)

January 16, 2026 via OpenAI

AI is reaching a point where everyone can have a personal super-assistant that helps them learn and do almost anything. Who gets access to that level of intelligence will shape whether AI expands opportunity or reinforces the same divides. We've been working to make powerful AI accessible to everyone through ...

[OpenAI is Testing ChatGPT Ads - Travel Brands Should Pay Attention](#)

January 16, 2026 via Skift

OpenAI is finally turning on the revenue taps by piloting ads in its free and low-cost tiers. For travel brands, it means ChatGPT is moving from a pure utility to a massive, intent-driven marketing platform. OpenAI has crossed the advertising rubicon. The company announced Friday it will begin ...

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