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Duff on Hospitality Law

This Week in Travel: Booking.com Phishing Scam, California's AI Pricing Crackdown & More

03.17.25

Happy Saturday from Seattle . . . Our Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, March 14, 2025, is below. What started as a relatively quiet week in the travel industry (other than the concerning reports from several major airline carriers that captured much of the travel industry's attention and reporting), finished with a bang as multiple outlets began warning on Friday of a widespread phishing campaign targeting the hospitality industry via fake Booking.com emails. I hope you enjoy.

- **Microsoft and Others Warn of Widespread Phishing Campaign Via Booking.com**. The campaign, which, according to Microsoft, began in December 2024, uses an increasingly popular social engineering technique called ClickFix to deliver malware designed to steal users' credentials. According to Microsoft, "[T]his phishing attack specifically targets individuals in hospitality organizations in North America, Oceania, South and Southeast Asia, and Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western Europe, that are most likely to work with Booking.com, sending fake emails purporting to be coming from the agency." The fake emails encourage recipients to respond to negative reviews left on the platform by purported guests. Recipients of the emails are then re-directed to a fake page that ultimately allows the hackers to collect payment and personal information. So why are these campaigns targeting Booking.com and not other travel platforms? The answer isn't clear, though earlier last week, the UK consumer watchdog Which? reported that the lack of effective checks left Booking.com wide open to fraudulent campaigns (and listings) and urged the platform to do more to prevent fraud on its side. Even if Booking.com chooses to ignore these requests, the UK's Online Safety Act (which takes effect this year) may force its hand - at least in the UK.

- **California Legislature Is Focused on Allegedly Abusive Predictive Pricing**. California legislators have introduced five (yes, five) bills aimed at limiting or preventing predictive pricing. Predictive pricing involves the use of various technologies (including AI) to set different prices for the same products and services (including travel) based on users' personal information (e.g., browsing history, residence).

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- **Another Week and Another Booking Platform Announces Its AI Partnerships**. South Korean online travel agent, Yanolja, announced this past week new partnerships with Google and OpenAI (including OpenAI's new agentic AI tool, Operator) to offer new products and services to hoteliers and to enhance users' trip planning experience.

- **Massachusetts AG Releases New Junk Fees Rule**. Massachusetts' Attorney General, Andrea Joy Campbell, announced the new regulations this past week as part of National Consumer Week. Like the FTC's recently issued final junk fee rule (which takes effect this May), the new Massachusetts' regulation requires hoteliers to present most prominently the total price (rate and mandatory fees) of products and services whenever pricing is presented. Taxes and other government charges are excluded from total price, though of note, taxes and charges on a hotel that the hotel chooses to pass on to the guest are not excluded. The regulations also expressly require hoteliers to provide the nature and purpose of the mandatory fees. The new regulations take effect on September 2, 2025. This newest regulation underscores the need for uniform regulation of junk fees across the United States, which is a critical component missing from the FTC's rule.

Have a great week.

Phishing campaign impersonating Booking.com targeting UK hospitality
March 13, 2025 via The Independent
Your support helps us to tell the story Support Now From reproductive rights to climate change to Big Tech, The Independent is on the ground when the story is developing. Whether it's investigating the financials of Elon Musk's pro-Trump PAC or producing our latest documentary, 'The A Word', which shines ...

Microsoft Warns of ClickFix Phishing Campaign Targeting Hospitality Sector via Fake Booking[.]com Emails
March 13, 2025 via IT Security News
Microsoft has shed light on an ongoing phishing campaign that targeted the hospitality sector by impersonating online travel agency Booking.com using an increasingly popular social engineering technique called ClickFix to deliver credential-stealing malware. The activity, the tech giant said, started... Read more → The post Microsoft Warns of ClickFix Phishing ...

AI can rip you off. Here's how California lawmakers want to stop price discrimination
March 13, 2025 via California Courts
AI can rip you off. Here's how California lawmakers want to stop price discriminationKaren. NewsLink Amazon, ride-sharing apps, travel companies, and retail giants such as Staples and Target have engaged in the practice, which can set different prices for customers based on factors including internet browsing ...

Yanolja Teams With ChatGPT and Google. More AI Partnerships to Come, CEO Says

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March 12, 2025 via Skift Travel News

Industry leaders envision a future where consumers can plan, book, and manage all aspects of travel from a single interface. These early partnerships between AI and travel companies bring that vision a step closer. Share Yanolja, the online travel agency based in Seoul, is teaming up with Google …

Consumer Watchdog Calls Out Booking.com for Major Security Lapses

March 11, 2025 via Hotel News Resource

UK consumer watchdog Which? identifies significant security gaps in Booking.com's system, including weak identity verification and abundant scam listings. Booking.com is urged to improve its fraud prevention mechanisms before the Online Safety Act's illegal harm codes take effect. The global online travel agency, Booking.com, has been exposed for security shortcomings …

Autonomous AI agent Manus joins the fray

March 10, 2025 via Phocus Wire

China-based AI agent Manus is in early preview and attracting mixed reaction from the technology industry.

4 Reasons AI Chatbots Won't Become Online Travel Agencies: Booking Holdings CFO

March 10, 2025 via Skift Travel News

Will the big AI chatbots - those that survive - ever become online travel agencies in their own right? Booking Holdings' CFO doesn't think so, but the company is trying to prepare for all scenarios. Booking Holdings is "preparing for all scenarios" when it comes to emerging travel …

Generative AI: What's on the horizon for airlines?

March 10, 2025 via Hospitality Net

Airlines are ramping up their exploration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance both customer-facing services and operational decision-making. Many carriers are adopting Large Language Models (LLMs) to create AI-powered booking assistants and recommendation tools in …

EU denies picking on US tech giants, says US also tackling monopolisation

March 7, 2025 via Reuters

European Union flags flutter outside the EU Commission headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, April 20, 2016. REUTERS/Francois Lenoir/File Photo Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tab Companies Alphabet Inc Amazon.com Inc Apple Inc BRUSSELS, March 7 (Reuters) – Europe's new tech rule aims to keep digital markets open and is not targeted …

AG Campbell Releases "Junk Fee" Regulations To Help Consumers Avoid Unnecessary Costs

March 3, 2025 via Attorney General of Massachusetts

During National Consumer Protection Week, Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell has announced the adoption of nation-leading consumer protection regulations to prohibit "junk fees" and help consumers

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understand the total cost of a product or service upfront, avoid unnecessary charges, …

Posted in Online Travel Update

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