

Duff on Hospitality Law

OTA & Travel Distribution Update: New platforms brought to regulators' attention; Google Assistant Interpreter Mode gets a test drive; Expedia's Ad-On Advantage lives another day

By Greg Duff on 1.18.19 | Posted in OTA Update

Voice-assisted devices (a/k/a smart speakers) feature prominently in this week's Update. Enjoy.

New Platforms Brought to Regulators' Attention

("Smart speakers, publishing platforms and connected cars prompt antitrust concerns," MLex, January 8, 2019) (subscription required)

Given the lessons learned years ago when Microsoft's operating system (allegedly) ruled the desktop world, it wasn't surprising to see reports this past week that European competition experts have alerted the European Commission of the potential gatekeeping power of voice-assisted devices (e.g., Alexa, Siri, etc.). According to these experts, as adoption of these popular devices grows, so does the potential for abusive (i.e. exclusionary) behavior. Hoteliers at times have raised similar concerns with the growing use of these popular devices. Unlike desktop or mobile search applications, which return multiple responses to users' queries, these devices typically return only one response. If, for example, an online travel agent or particular hotel company was able to strike an exclusive relationship with these platforms (and therefore become the sole supplier of travel products and services), it could effectively shut out other distributors or hoteliers from this increasingly important point of sale.

Google Assistant Interpreter Gets a Test Drive

("Three Hotels Pilot New Google Assistant Interpreter Mode," Lodging Magazine, January 9, 2019)

Speaking of voice-assisted devices and the control they may one day wield...On the heels of Google's introduction of its new Google Assistant Interpreter Mode at this week's Consumer Electronics Show (CES), two hotels (Hyatt Regency San Francisco and Dream Downtown (NYC)) announced plans to introduce the new product at their concierge desks (Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas demoed the new technology during CES). The technology, which allows users of Google Home devices and Smart Displays to conduct real-time spoken conversations and (for users of Smart Displays) to receive written translations in dozens of languages. As global travel increases and hotels' workforces become increasingly diverse, the potential benefits of such

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technology for hotels - for either front of house or back of house applications - is obvious.

Expedia's Ad-On Advantage Lives Another Day

("American Airlines and Expedia Quietly Settle Trademark Lawsuit," Skift Travel News, January 8, 2019)

Last month American Airlines and Expedia quietly settled trademark infringement and breach of contract claims brought by American Airlines over Expedia's Add-On Advantage logo. According to the airline, Expedia's use of the logo infringed on American's long used AAdvantage loyalty program logo and violated contracts (Governing Travel Agency Agreements) between the parties, which permitted Expedia's limited use of the American marks. Although details of the settlement are unknown, by all appearances, Expedia's use of its Ad-On Advantage logo continues unabated without any noticeable change.

For those of you attending HSMAI's upcoming Digital Marketing Conference in NYC or HEDNA's North American Global Distribution Conference in Los Angeles, please let me know. I would love to see you while there.

Other news:

Airline Group's Blockchain Could Bring Distribution System Bypass a Step Closer

Skift Travel News, January 11, 2019

These are very early days, but the airline-owned Airlines Reporting Corp.'s new experimental blockchain, and others like it, could lead to efficiencies for corporate travelers, but also — importantly — distribution alternatives to bypassing the global distribution systems. Let's be very clear: A potential bypass of the distribution incumbents is not going to happen anytime soon. The death of global distribution systems such as Sabre, Amadeus, and Travelport have been prematurely forecast for the last 20 years. They are an integral part of travel commerce on a global basis, online and offline, and they aren't going anywhere anytime soon despite intermittent disruptions. The U.S.-based Airlines Reporting Corp., or ARC as it's most commonly known, announced this week that it fielded a private blockchain proof of concept with United Airlines and blockchain solutions provider Blocksky.

SiteMinder Partners with RoomIt by CWT on Modern Alternative to Traditional Corporate Travel Distribution

PRWeb, January 10, 2019

SiteMinder and RoomIt by CWT, the hotel distribution division of Carlson Wagonlit Travel, have partnered to provide a modern alternative to the traditional corporate travel distribution chain by offering eligible SiteMinder hotel customers direct access to a travel management company's clients for the first time. The hotel industry is witnessing an unprecedented rise of direct connections, be that to guests or, now, a travel management company. This partnership

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is about rewriting the rules to provide hotels choice as they look to tap into the booming corporate travel market. SiteMinder, the global hotel industry's leading guest acquisition platform, today announces a pioneering partnership with RoomIt by CWT, the hotel distribution division of Carlson Wagonlit Travel, a long-standing leader in business travel.