

Duff on Hospitality Law

## **OTA & Travel Distribution Update: Google's popular vertical search features; third-party distribution sites dominate keyword purchases; AHLA selects Matt Carrier as Vice President of Innovation Policy and Research**

By Greg Duff on 2.28.20 | Posted in OTA Update

This week's Update again features number of stories on Google, including an update on last week's story detailing Google's recent addition of direct links to competitors' travel sites.

Last but not least, as most of you know, this past Monday, Expedia announced a massive layoff cutting 3,000 jobs, including 500 at the new Seattle headquarters. Geekwire (our local Seattle technology news outlet) has had some of the best coverage of Expedia over the past few years and broke [the story](#). I will share my analysis later, but what this might mean for the OTA giant and its many supplier relationships remains to be seen...Stay tuned.

### **Google's New Vertical Search Features a Big Hit With Travelers**

*("Google's Customized Travel Search Features Receive Massive Traffic in the U.S.: New Skift Research," Skift Travel News on Feb 18, 2020)*

In case anyone is in need of further evidence of Google's growing prominence in online travel, Skift's recently released report, "A Deep Dive Into Google's Impact on Travel 2020," provides ample details. In particular, the report details the growing prominence of Google's vertical search features for flights, hotels and short-term rentals. In 2019, the search offerings for just two of these segments (flight and hotels) enjoyed traffic (as measured by number of U.S. user visits) almost equal to Expedia and Booking.com combined. The 674 million visits in 2019 represent a 28 percent increase over 2018. Although total annual visits are far fewer in key international markets (e.g., UK, Germany, France and Japan), the annual growth rates in these markets are nearly double the U.S. rate.

### **Surprised? Third-Party Distribution Sites Dominate Keyword Purchases**

*("OTAs and Metasearch Dominate Google's Hotel-Related Keywords," AdWeek on Feb 20, 2020)*

I have heard it said on more than one occasion that distributors no longer purchase keywords

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(and therefore I shouldn't worry about requested keyword protections.) Recent research by media research company Kantar suggests otherwise. In the six-week period between January 1 and February 11, 2020 more than 75 percent of the lodging-related keywords analyzed by Kantar (e.g., "NYC hotels") produced ad clicks belonging to OTAs and metasearch sites. Across Google, seven of the top 10 most-clicked desktop advertisers are OTAs, with Hotels.com enjoying the top OTA spot (19.3 percent of clicks). On mobile, Booking.com enjoys the top OTA (19.8 percent of clicks). The battle for desktop and mobile search supremacy rages on.

### **Welcome Matt Carrier**

*("AHLA Names Matt Carrier Vice President of Innovation Policy and Research," Lodging Magazine on Feb 14, 2020)*

In a much needed nod to the growing influence of technology in today's hotel industry, this past week, the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) announced the addition of industry veteran Matt Carrier as Vice President of Industry Innovation Policy and Research. Matt joins AHLA from Marriott, where he most recently oversaw Marriott's price guarantee and rate parity efforts. Welcome Matt.

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Other news:

### **Google's Critics Dismiss Move Posting Competitors' Travel Links as Window Dressing**

*Skift Travel News on Feb 14, 2020*

Google competitors in Europe and the United States aren't putting much stock in the search engine's test in Europe where it is [placing rivals links in a "carousel"](#) above its own far-more-elaborate boxed collection of vacation rental offerings.