

Duff on Hospitality Law

Online Travel Update: Agoda debuts additional new offerings; Booking.com reins in suppliers' promotions; Amex GBT continues its transformation

By Greg Duff on 12.17.21 | Posted in Online Travel Update

Despite what the calendar might say, winter has definitely arrived in the Pacific Northwest. This week's Update features a variety of stories, including a story or two on online travel agencies (OTAs), and stories on Vacasa's public debut and Amex GBT's planned public debut. Tis' the SPAC season. I hope you enjoy.

Agoda Debuts Additional New Offerings

("Agoda launches Beds Network to help hotels distribute wholesale rates," December 9, 2021 via Phocus Wire)

Last week, we included a [story](#) detailing the launch of several new Agoda products. Last week, Agoda launched yet another new product, Beds Network, which represents Agoda's formal entry into wholesale distribution. The Network will leverage Booking Holdings' existing affiliate network to allow participating suppliers to distribute rates and inventory on a wholesale or B2B basis. According to the announcement, suppliers who participate in the program will have complete control (fully yieldable) over the rate and inventory offered through the solution (which if true, would be quite a departure from competitors' similar wholesale distribution offerings). Existing Agoda suppliers won't need to enter into new, or amend existing, contracts to participate. Agoda's plans call for the Network to be rolled out initially in Asia, the Middle East and Europe, with other markets added throughout 2022.

Booking.com Reins in Suppliers' Promotions

("Booking.com Warns Car Partners About Using Over-the-Top Promo Lingo," December 7, 2021 via Yahoo Finance - Top Stories)

Talk about a role reversal...It wasn't that many years ago that complaints by suppliers and consumer groups over the promotional practices of the large online travel agencies (and other online retailers) have led to a string of investigations by European competition authorities and ultimately the issuance of online promotional regulations. Now, the tables have turned, as Booking.com steps up efforts to rein in the promotional practices of its supplier partners.

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Amex GBT Continues Its Transformation

("American Express GBT and Sabre partner on tech development," December 3, 2021 via Travel Weekly)

Recently, Amex GBT announced plans to go public through, you guessed it, a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) transaction with Apollo Strategic Growth Capital. Gross proceeds from the transaction are expected to total \$1.2 billion, \$335 million of which is being contributed by new investors, including global distribution system (GDS) provider, Sabre. Following the close of the transaction, GBT's shareholders will include Expedia Group, Sabre, American Express and Certares. According to GBT's investor presentation, the new company's primary focus (at least for now) will continue to be managed corporate travel (including SME travel). Also recently, GBT announced that it was partnering with Sabre to develop technological solutions for the future of corporate travel. What the public debut and Sabre partnership might mean practically for GBT's suppliers, is unknown.

Other news:

Rentals and SPACs Spotlited as Vacasa Goes Public at \$4.4 Billion Valuation

December 7, 2021 via Phocus Wire

Vacasa CFO Jamie Cohen says the company has two priorities that will drive how it uses the new capital: adding supply and developing its technology and product.

What Is Booking Holdings Up to With Its Big 2021 Spending Spree?

December 6, 2021 via Phocus Wire

Booking Holdings has splashed out almost \$3.5 billion on acquisitions and investments in the space of less than a month. The first came in mid November, when it acquired Getaroom for \$1.2 billion and grabbed a slice of the B2B hotel room distributor market.

American Express GBT Will Go Public Via SPAC at \$5.3 Billion Valuation

December 3, 2021 via Phocus Wire

American Express Global Business Travel (GBT) will become a public company through a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) deal with Apollo Strategic Growth Capital (APSG). With plans to trade under the ticker GBTG, the company is expected to have a market capitalization of \$5.3 billion.