

Duff on Hospitality Law

## **OTA & Travel Distribution Update - Expedia expands its voice-activation résumé; UK's Competition and Markets Authority issues study on the use of pricing algorithms; Domio seeks to become the "Airbnb" of group travel**

By Greg Duff on 10.19.18 | Posted in OTA Update

### **Expedia Expands Its Voice-Activation Résumé**

*("Expedia Brings Voice Bookings, Cancellations and Rewards to Google Assistant," Skift Travel News, October 9, 2018)*

It was less than two years ago that we featured Expedia's introduction of limited functionality (or "skill") for Amazon's Alexa devices. Now, Expedia is bringing far more robust functionality to devices powered by Google Assistant. According to Expedia, this new functionality will allow travelers to search hotels and book (or cancel) reservations and access and use their Expedia loyalty program accounts. Although this new functionality will debut for U.S. travelers in English only, additional languages are planned. If you have not already done so, it may be time to update those keyword and negative keyword contract provisions.

### **No Signs of Personalized Pricing, But...**

*("Personalized pricing isn't the only regulatory concern around algorithms," MLex, October 12, 2018) (subscription required)*

The UK's Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) issued this past week the results of its recent study into the use of pricing algorithms by some of the largest online retailers and platforms, including Expedia. Although the CMA concluded that the retailers and platforms were not (yet) using algorithms to personalize user pricing, it did note that the potential for abuse was increasing rapidly. According to the CMA, the combination of real-time data collection allowing retailers and platforms to collect growing amounts of personal data and rapid advances in technology and machine learning reducing the need for human involvement increases the likelihood that powerful online retailers or platforms can and will engage in abusive and/or collusive behavior (and the need for increasing scrutiny of these retailers' and platforms' practices).

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#### **Domio Seeks to Become the “Airbnb” of Group Travel**

*("Why This "Apart-Hotel" Startup Is Betting \$50 Million On Group Travel," Forbes - Most Popular, September 30, 2018)*

Vacation rental company, Domio, announced last week a \$50 million joint venture with private equity firm Upper90. While Domio got its start hosting bookings at its single-use apartments, Domio intends to use this newest funding to provide apart-hotels (purpose built, owned and operated by Domio) to group travelers. Domio's first apart-hotel is scheduled to open in November in New Orleans with units ranging from 2 to 4 bedrooms.

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Other news:

#### **Expedia virtual reality project offers ‘try before you buy’ tour of cenote pools in Mexico**

*GeekWire, October 8, 2018*

Expedia unveiled a new virtual reality experience today that takes viewers to Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula to see and swim in the cenote pools that were important pieces of Mayan culture. The virtual reality experience comes from ExpediaLabs, the company's testing ground for new travel tech, and is the second one the organization has produced. Last year, ExpediaLabs worked with the Space Needle on a VR experience that included the ability to bungee off the iconic Seattle structure.

#### **Chinese online travel agency Ctrip to expand business in S. Korea: CEO**

*Yonhap News, October 10, 2018*

Chinese online travel giant Ctrip.com International will expand the services provided by its brand Trip.com in South Korea as the company moves to increase its presence in the global market, its CEO said Wednesday. The company is planning to launch a Trip.com round-the-clock customer center in Seoul this month to cope with rising demand in the local market.