

Duff on Hospitality Law

Google's DMA Compliance Controversy and the End of TripAdvisor Plus: This Week in Online Travel

By Greg Duff on 3.12.24 | Posted in Online Travel Update

This week's Update offers two differing industry perspectives on Google's DMA compliance efforts. We also update the status (demise) of TripAdvisor's much criticized subscription program, TripAdvisor Plus. Enjoy.

- **Perspectives on Google's Gatekeeper Efforts.** This past week (March 7) saw D-Day arrive for those platforms designated as "gatekeepers" under the Digital Markets Act (DMA). On the day before, [EU Travel Tech](#), whose members include most major leisure and managed travel platforms, issued a letter to the European Commission criticizing Google's changes and complaining that the changes continued to feature Google's own products and services over those of its members. According to the industry group, Google's efforts "fall significant short of compliance, potentially rendering the new rules ineffective." At the same time, organizations representing hotels, airlines and restaurants issued their own statements, warning that the changes could drive users away from their members and to large online intermediaries (i.e., OTAs). According to one statement, several of the industry's groups could lose as much as 50% of their online traffic to intermediaries. As it begins its review of the many changes proposed by Google and other gatekeepers (and considers possible enforcement efforts), the EU Commission will have some difficult decisions to make.
 - **TripAdvisor's Latest.** A few weeks ago we included a story detailing the steps taken by TripAdvisor to evaluate possible future transactions. This past week, we learned that TripAdvisor's first possible suitor is John Malone's Apollo Global Management, a private equity firm with a long history in the travel world (Expedia, AmexGBT, Oceania, Norwegian Cruise Lines and Diamond Resorts). Last week also marked the official demise of TripAdvisor's subscription program, TripAdvisor Plus. Readers of our Update will recall the many stories featured over the past few years (the subscription service was made widely available in June 2021) detailing the program and suppliers' (and my) general poor view of the program.
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Google's changes on vertical search fail to comply with EU's DMA, travel association says

March 8, 2024 via foster.com

Google has failed to comply with the ban on self-preferencing of the Digital Markets Act by displaying its comparison products for hotels, flights or trains more prominently than those of rivals, the association EU Travel Tech has said. According to the association, organic search results are moving "further away from view," which leads to a poorer experience and less choice for users.

Airlines, hotels warn Google changes may benefit large intermediaries

March 8, 2024 via Reuters

Lobbying groups representing airlines, hotels and restaurants on Wednesday warned that changes proposed by Alphabet's (GOOGL.O), opens new tab Google to comply with EU landmark rules may drive users to large online search services at their expense.

Hotel executives say 'junk fee' rules should apply to all

March 8, 2024 via Travel Weekly

Amid mounting U.S. legislative pressure on "junk fees," hospitality industry leaders say they welcome regulation as long as it is evenly applied across the lodging sector as a whole.

Apollo Has Expressed Interest in Exploring a Bid for TripAdvisor

March 6, 2024 via Bloomberg.com

Apollo Global Management Inc. has expressed interest in exploring a bid for travel information service TripAdvisor Inc., according to people familiar with the matter. TripAdvisor, part of John Malone's Liberty Media empire, has been working with advisers after receiving takeover interest, said the people, who asked not to be identified

Kayak launches image recognition tool to compare flight prices from a screenshot

March 5, 2024 via Phocus Wire

Extensive training of ChatGPT's AI model on Kayak's database of billions of consumer travel queries helped produce the metasearch site's new features.

Tripadvisor Plus is shutting down after three years

March 1, 2024 via Phocus Wire

In remarks at the Phocuswright Conference in November, Tripadvisor CEO Matt Goldberg said the company would focus on the benefits of free membership versus trying to build the paid subscription program.