

Duff on Hospitality Law

## AI's Impact on Travel: OpenAI's "Operator" Tool and Its Disruptive Potential

By Greg Duff on 1.27.25

Good Saturday morning from Seattle . . . Nice to be back in balmy (25°) Seattle after a week working in frigid New York.

This week's Update presents yet another announcement by yet another generative AI platform about yet another AI tool that has direct application to (and is likely to have a major disruptive effect on) online travel. I'll admit that I've been a little slow to grasp AI's potential, particularly for online travel. Maybe each of you were already aware of (and planning appropriate responses to) the many collaborations between legacy travel platforms (Kayak and TripAdvisor) and generative AI platforms (Gemini, Perplexity) featured in our Updates over the past few weeks. But, even with that knowledge, I'm guessing that this week's demonstration by OpenAI of its new "Operator" agent tool was a wake-up call for at least a few of you. It was for me.

We feature only two stories in this week's Update – stories that offer two leading industry perspectives on last week's OpenAI demonstration. Enjoy.

- **OpenAI's Agent "Operator" Can Book Travel.** I'll let our readers review this week's two stories themselves. Some of my immediate reactions include (i) interesting to note that the demonstrations feature only well-known travel intermediaries (Booking.com, Priceline and TripAdvisor) and not suppliers, and (ii) do traditional online marketing concepts of SEO, SEM, keywords and negative keywords apply in this context (in other words, how does one affect the Operator agent's preferred travel resources)? Application of this new tool could cement intermediaries' position in the travel distribution landscape (if always the preferred choice of such agents) or erode the position (if such agents ultimately prefer booking direct through the relevant suppliers). So much to think about here.

I hope to see many of you this next week in San Diego at the annual HEDNA distribution event. If you do plan to attend, please email or text (206-321-8386) so that we can connect while there. Have a great week everyone.

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### **OpenAI debuts "Operator" agent that can book travel**

*January 24, 2025 via Phocus Wire*

While still very early days, the development of agents is moving fast and raises questions about the evolution of marketing strategies and search optimization, such as whether site design should change.

### **ChatGPT Can Now Search for and Book Travel on Its Own**

*January 23, 2025 via Skift Travel News*

OpenAI's new autonomous digital assistant is an early glimpse of what travel leaders have been waiting for — and warning against — since ChatGPT was first released. Share Summarize this story Select a question above or ask something else OpenAI on Thursday said that it is releasing a .