

Duff on Hospitality Law

## **This Week in Online Travel: Sabre Bets on AI, Social Media Drives Inspiration and Skift Questions Market Power**

By Greg Duff on 9.28.25 | Posted in Online Travel Update

Good Sunday morning from Seattle . . . With a full week of wind and rain in the forecast, fall has definitely arrived in the Pacific Northwest.

Our Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, September 26, 2025, is below. With Skift's annual Skift Global Forum now behind us, things definitely slowed this past week in the online travel world. This week's Update features another heavy dose of AI updates, including Sabre's attempt to garner its own AI headline. Enjoy.

- **Stratechery Features Wide Ranging Interview with Glenn Fogel.** The online newsletter [Stratechery](#) featured this past week a wide-ranging interview with Booking Holdings' CEO, Glenn Fogel. Topics include Glenn's personal medical challenges back in high school, the origination of Booking.com (who ever heard of Active Hotels), Booking's rapidly evolving relationship with Google and of course, the Connected Trip and AI's role in making the Connected Trip a reality. I must admit that I knew very little about Glenn or his background until reading this informative interview.
- **Sabre Announces Agentic AI Ready APIs.** Sabre announced this past week its upcoming launch of agentic AI ready APIs, powered in part by a new proprietary Model Context Protocol (MCP) server. Powering all of this of course is Sabre's extensive data set of travel transaction data, hotel content, etc., which Sabre claims is the "richest base of travel knowledge anywhere." Are hoteliers ready to pay GDS transaction fees on AI generated bookings? How soon will the leading connectivity service providers introduce their own (cost-effective) connectivity options? Are hoteliers better served by connecting directly with AI platforms? We will all have to wait and see.
- **Measuring the Effect of Social Media and Generative AI.** Another week and another study documenting the increasingly disruptive effect of generative AI and social media in travel. For those of you who have been part of my recent AI and distribution

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presentations, the study underscores several of my previous points – social media and generative AI affect travelers much higher in the traditional sales funnel (social media is now the primary source of inspiration for American travelers), generative AI's role in travel inspiration is growing quickly (particularly among baby boomers) and trust remains a tangible concern.

- **Skift's Take – “The End of Travel's Big Four Stranglehold.”** Coming out of last week's Skift Global Forum, Skift Founder, Rafat Ali, shared his thoughts on emerging cracks in the largest players' (Booking Holdings, Expedia, Trip.com and Airbnb) control and influence over the online travel landscape. According to Ali, “the potential for disruption is more tangible than it's been in years.” If Ali's assessment is correct, the optimist in me sees both challenges (the shift to platform loyalty) and opportunities (the increasing importance of direct traffic and direct customer relationships) for suppliers in this new online reality. What an incredible time to be part of online travel.

Have a great week everyone.

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### **An Interview with Booking CEO Glenn Fogel About Travel and Aggregation**

*September 25, 2025 via Stratechery*

An interview with Booking CEO Glenn Fogel about being an aggregator, the power — or not — of network effects, and how AI can finally create the perfect travel agent.

### **Sabre Seizes First-Mover Position with Comprehensive Agentic APIs for Travel**

*September 24, 2025 via Webwire*

Sabre seizes first-mover position with comprehensive agentic APIs for travel New APIs accessible via a proprietary MCP “universal translator” unlock endless possibilities for AI-powered shopping, booking, and servicing at scale Sabre Corporation (NASDAQ: SABR), a leading global travel technology company, today announced its first agentic solutions for travel – building ...

### **The End of Travel's Big Four Stranglehold: Rafat's Notes from Skift Global Forum**

*September 22, 2025 via Skift*

The growth-at-all-costs playbook that built online travel platforms is dead. The disruption opportunity with new players isn't theoretical anymore, it's structural, and it rewards depth over scale. For the first time in years, there is an opening in the online travel giants' grip on travel booking. Just as ...

### **Gen AI and Social Media Transform How U.S. Travelers Plan Travel Reveals New Amadeus Research**

*September 22, 2025 via Business Wire*

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U.S. travelers are increasingly turning to Generative AI and social media to plan travel according to a major new Amadeus global study, including 2,000 U.S. travelers. Social media is now the primary source of travel inspiration having replaced 'recommendations from family and friends' to become the most influential ...

### **Cruising Goes Digital: Complexity, Connectivity and the Human Touch**

*September 18, 2025 via WIT*

Did you know that in 2009, online travel penetration in APAC was just 17.4%? By 2025, it has surged to 65.4%. The growth is huge. Cruise, however, has always been the laggard. Flights, hotels, tours and activities all went online earlier. Cruise, with its complexity, was the last holdout.