

Duff on Hospitality Law

## Travel's Next Competitive Fault Lines

By Greg Duff on 12.7.25 | Posted in Online Travel Update

Good Sunday evening from Seattle . . . Our weekly Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, December 5, 2025, is below. With last week's Thanksgiving holiday break, our list of stories this week is longer than usual. Enjoy.

- **Otto Introduces AI Assistant for Business Travel.** Seattle-based Otto's release this past week of its new AI-enabled business travel assistant, [Otto the Agent](#), garnered many of the industry's headlines, including headlines by Seattle's own *Geekwire*. If you are a regular reader of our Updates, you know that *Geekwire* is Seattle's Pacific Northwest Focused technology news service. Those behind the new startup include a who's who of travel industry veterans, including Spotnana's Steve Singh, Orbitz's Barney Harford and Expedia's Michael Gulmann. The platform, which has been in beta tests since August 2024, is designed to learn travelers' travel habits and then apply those learnings to planning and booking (without leaving the platform) travel – for now, flights and hotels. For the next 12 months, the platform will be free to individual users and small businesses.
- **Personalized Pricing in Legislative and Regulatory Crosshairs.** Given the number of questions we've fielded over the past few weeks regarding personalized pricing and now New York's recently enacted legislation, I think it time to put personalized pricing on our distribution radar and list of "distribution" related topics that we monitor daily. This week, we feature two stories on the growing calls to regulate so-called "surveillance" pricing, including New York's October passage of surveillance legislation that requires New York businesses to notify consumers whenever personal information is used when setting pricing. New York is not alone is considering steps to combat this allegedly abusive practice as several states considered similar (often bipartisan) legislation this past year. Much of this legislation activity is built on earlier efforts by the FTC that were abandoned with the change in administrations. How these state-level efforts might fair in light of the Trump Administration's threatened Executive Order limiting state-level regulation of artificial intelligence remains to be seen. How these rules might affect the travel industry, including the use of personalized offers and promotions (think targeted loyalty program promotions) also remains to be seen. We plan to cover all of these topics and more in future Updates.

- **Confusing Headline Calls into Question Hopper's Long Term Travel Plans.** On November 24, *Skift* ran a story stating that Capital One (one of the largest known users of Hopper's B2B booking platform and Hopper investor) was "buying" (not licensing, as it already likely does) Hopper's software that powers Capital One's cardholder travel platform and hiring several members of Hopper's hotel and engineering teams. What this change might mean for Hopper's declining B2C and remaining B2B distribution business is unclear.
- **Power of Event Based Travel Leads Trip.com to Add Tickets to Its Online Inventory.** Trip.com recently announced a new partnership with Ireland-based ticketing company, [Coras](#), that will provide the traditional OTA and its users with access to tickets for major concerts, sports and theater events. Users of Trip.com will now be able to see real time availability and pricing for events "in path" without being re-directed to another booking website. According to Coras CEO, Mark McLaughlin, events (thank Taylor Swift and her recent Eras tour) have become a huge motivator for travel and event tickets are often the first product that a user purchases. Combining event tickets with other travel products provides travel suppliers an opportunity to upsell flights, hotels and transfers (and not vice versa). From what we've learned recently, event ticket sales and distribution can be very different than the distribution of traditional travel products.
- **ARC Shuts Down Program Selling Traveler Data to Department of Homeland Security.** This hopefully brings an end to the controversial practice by the Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC) that several of you brought to my attention over the past few weeks.

Have a great week.

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### **[Otto, Led by Former Expedia Exec, Rolls Out AI Agent for Business Travelers that Mimics an Executive Assistant](#)**

*December 5, 2025 via GeekWire*

Seattle-based startup Otto announced the wide release Thursday of its AI-powered travel assistant — Otto the Agent — in a bid to bring a concierge-level experience and personalization to business travelers. The platform has been in closed beta for nine months.

### **[Generative AI Adoption Grows as Traditional Search Declines in Travel Research](#)**

*December 4, 2025 via Hotel News Resource*

Nearly 40% of U.S. travelers have utilized generative AI for trip planning in the past year, indicating a significant shift from traditional search methods, according to a new report by Phocuswright. A recent report by Phocuswright reveals that nearly four in ten U.S. travelers

have used generative artificial intelligence (AI) ...

### **Agoda's Omri Morgenshtern on OTAs Moving up the Funnel**

*December 1, 2025 via PhocusWire*

Agoda CEO Omri Morgenshtern discussed AI's impact on trip planning as well as behind the scenes.

### **Expedia Hires Former Google VP as First Chief AI Officer**

*December 1, 2025 via Skift*

Expedia Group's move to bring in Xavier Amatriain, a heavyweight from Google, as its inaugural Chief AI and Data Officer underscores its intent to lead on travel technology in the AI age. Expedia Group said Monday that it had hired its first chief AI officer — an effort ...

### **New York State Law Takes Aim at Personalized Pricing**

*November 29, 2025 via Tech Crunch*

New York's latest state budget includes new disclosure requirements for businesses that use personal data to set different prices for different shoppers — for example, charging you more if you have a history of splurging. Businesses that use personalized pricing are now required to tell customers, "This price was set ...

### **U.S. Launch Offensive Against Algorithm-Based Pricing as Costs Squeeze Consumers**

*November 24, 2025 via Technology.org*

These state initiatives build upon groundwork laid by former FTC Chair Lina Khan and her allies, who championed regulatory action and litigation against practices they deemed exploitative toward shoppers, employees and tenants. "Even as the federal government backslides, ...

### **Capital One Set to Acquire Hopper Travel Software and Hire Key Hotel and Engineering Staff**

*November 24, 2025 via Skift*

A new deal may serve to loosen the Capital One-Hopper partnership. Meanwhile, Hopper CEO Fred Lalonde co-founded and chairs a climate company: Doesn't a struggling Hopper require his full-time attention? Capital One plans to buy the installed software from Hopper that powers Capital One Travel and to hire ...

### **Cendyn, DirectBooker to Add Hotel Rates to AI Platforms**

*November 24, 2025 via Hotel Management News*

Hotel technology and services company Cendyn has partnered with DirectBooker to make hotel direct-booking rates visible in AI search results. The launch of Cendyn AI Connect, a new distribution channel within the Cendyn DMP, pushes hotel Availability, Rates and Inventory (ARI) directly into AI search platforms such as ChatGPT, Claude ...

**Trip.com to Sell Event Tickets on Its Platform: Here's Why That Matters**

*November 24, 2025 via Skift*

Events are increasingly becoming the starting point for a trip rather than an add-on. That shift is reshaping how online travel agencies pull event tickets into the main booking flow instead of keeping them on the sidelines.

**Airlines Will Shut Down Program That Sold Your Flights Records to Government**

*November 18, 2025 via 404 Media*

Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC), a data broker owned by the U.S.'s major airlines, will shut down a program in which it sold access to hundreds of millions of flight records to the government and let agencies track peoples' movements without a warrant, according to a letter from ARC shared with ...