

Duff on Hospitality Law

Wyndham and IHG Join the AI Conversation While Booking Holds Its Ground

By Greg Duff on 2.22.26 | Posted in Online Travel Update

Good Sunday evening from Seattle . . . Our weekly Online Travel Update for the week ending Friday, February 20, 2026, is below. Last week we featured stories on the reported AI activities of [Marriott and Hyatt](#), and this week we feature updates on both Wyndham and IHG. This week's Update also offers a few perspectives on Booking Holdings' recent quarterly earnings release (a copy of the Booking Holdings' earnings call transcript is also linked below). Enjoy.

- **Wyndham Partners with Google, Claude and OpenAI.** What are major hotel suppliers doing to counter the seemingly endless AI announcements by the major OTA platforms? Wyndham CEO, Geoff Ballotti shared information on Wyndham's plans in Wyndham's recent earnings release call. According to Ballotti, Wyndham has partnered with Google (serving as one of Google initial integration AI mode partners), Claude (providing Claude direct access to Wyndham's rates and inventory) and OpenAI (working to also provide ChatGPT direct access to Wyndham's rates and inventory). So far, the costs associated with these efforts are minimal as both Claude and ChatGPT (which refer users back to the Wyndham website to complete the booking) are foregoing transaction costs – at least for now.
- **IHG Updates Its Hotel Content.** According to IHG CEO, Elie Maalouf, IHG may not be as externally focused as its competitors (at least not yet) when it comes to transitioning for AI. In an earnings call last week, Maalouf, detailed the company's plans to adopt an entirely new AI-compatible hotel content platform to better attract and respond to AI systems. IHG is also working with Google to develop AI trip planning capabilities that will allow for natural language searches on the IHG websites and apps. These AI specific updates are part of a larger technology overhaul by IHG that is currently underway and features the rollout of a new customer relationship management platform, guest reservation system and property management system – all of which are cloud based.
- **Booking Holdings Reports Strong 4Q and Full Year Results.** A few takeaways from last week's Booking Holdings' earnings release and call:
 - Demand. Demand growth (9% YOY growth in 4Q) was driven by growth in the U.S. (10-12% YOY growth in 4Q).

- Artificial Intelligence. Management was far more focused on the savings achieved via AI integration in its customer support processes (roughly 10% per booking) versus new customer acquisition. Management remains bullish on the important role that OTAs like Booking.com will serve in the post AI world as, according to Booking, AI platforms will ultimately serve largely search and advertising functions (and not as an actual merchant).
- The Importance of Independent Hoteliers. Booking Holdings CEO, Glenn Fogel, spoke at length about the importance of Booking's relationships with independent hotels and the value that Booking represents to this hotel segment. According to Fogel, the 10 largest hotel chains account for only a "low double digit percentage" of Booking.com's total room bookings. Interesting timing for Booking to raise this point as AI and now Airbnb appear to present viable threats to Booking's dominance of this hotel segment.
- The Increasing Role of Connected Transactions. Connected transactions grew in the high 20% range in 2025. Connected transactions now represent a low double digit percentage of all Booking.com transactions. Note that Booking's view of "connected transactions" is slightly different than the traditional "packages" definition in that Booking.com defines a connected transaction as one where one traveler books multiple travel verticals over a 1-3 day period (and not necessarily a simultaneous purchase of multiple verticals like most traditional packages).
- Marketing. Booking invested heavily in marketing during 4Q (total marketing increased 22% YOY in 4Q) and throughout 2025 (total marketing increased 12%). During 2025, Booking Holdings invested a total of \$8.1 billion dollars in marketing (let that number sink in), which represents 4.4% of Booking Holdings' total gross booking value during the same period. Note that social media investments increased 13% during 4Q.
- **Booking.com Defends Contracting Practices**. Ever wonder how Booking.com views the many investigations and class action claims brought against it over its allegedly anti-competitive contracting practices? Booking.com recently posted a response on its website.
- **Google Testing Ad Formats for AI Mode**. Anyone surprised by this one? Last week, we included a [story](#) about ChatGPT's announced commencement of ad testing on the lowest tiers of its AI subscriptions. Not to be outdone, Google has announced plans to begin testing new ad formats for retailers that offer products and services most responsive to a user's natural language query. According to Google, similar tests are also being run in the travel industry. What these AI ads ultimately look like and just how personalized they may become – think loyalty – remains to be seen.

Have a great week everyone.

Wyndham Works With Google and Anthropic on AI Bookings

February 19, 2026 via Skift

AI booking platforms could become the new gatekeepers of travel demand. Wyndham is among the hotel groups plugging in their inventory and hoping to capture bookings at a lower cost than through OTAs.

New Phishing Campaign Exploits Booking.com Partners, Targets Customers in Multi-Stage Fraud Scheme

February 18, 2026 via GBHackers Security

New phishing activity is again abusing the Booking.com ecosystem to defraud both hotel partners and their guests, using a coordinated multi-stage campaign that blends email, infrastructure abuse, and social engineering across email and WhatsApp. The primary objective is financial gain, using tailored phishing kits to first capture partner credentials and ...

Airbnb Tests Loyalty Benefits. Chesky Says Program 'Could Be a Massive Accelerant'

February 18, 2026 via Skift

In 2018, Airbnb had a "superguest" loyalty plan in the works to reward frequent guests with premium benefits, but it never came to be. Might the loyalty benefits being tested resurrect some of those plans?

Booking CEO Touts Ties With Independent Hotels as Agentic AI and Airbnb Seek Gains

February 18, 2026 via Skift

We sometimes think of independent hotels as relatively powerless given the strength of the OTAs and the big hotel chains. Will agentic AI turn the tables?

Booking Holdings Sees 20% Rise in Travelers Booking Multiple Trip Components

February 18, 2026 via PhocusWire

Booking Holdings is seeing more customers choosing to book more than one vertical for the same trip. The company defines this category as its "connected trip" vision. In 2025, these transactions grew in the "high 20% range," Booking Holdings CEO Glenn Fogel ...

Sabre Shuffles Leadership Team for 'AI-Native' Future

February 18, 2026 via PhocusWire

Sabre has restructured its senior team as it looks to take full advantage of artificial intelligence (AI). Reporting fourth quarter and full-year results, the company said is in the process of transitioning from a global distribution system-focused company to an AI-native company. During the company's earnings call, president and CEO ...

Booking Holdings, Inc. Q4 2025 Earnings Call

February 18, 2026 via Booking Holdings

2025 was another year of strong execution for us. Despite volatility in the broader global markets, the underlying fundamentals of our business are solid. Travel demand remains resilient and we continue to benefit from our existing global platform, which has positioned us well to ...

Booking Holdings' CEO on Building the World's Largest Travel Platform

February 17, 2026 via McKinsey

Glenn Fogel explains how AI, personalization, and the “connected trip” could redefine value for travelers.

Airbnb's Hotel Strategy Is Now 'Much Bigger'

February 17, 2026 via Skift

There is absolutely no doubt that eventually Airbnb will take on Booking.com head-on in homes and hotels. But then what will set the two rivals apart? Airbnb is expanding its hotel ambitions beyond its initial pilots in highly regulated cities, signaling a broader approach to expanding its lodging ...

IHG Overhauls Its Hotel Data for AI Agents

February 17, 2026 via Skift

IHG's AI strategy isn't about chatbots. It's about making sure its hotels are structured, searchable, and integrated enough to survive the shift from links to answers.

Will AI Kill Travel Metasearch?

February 16, 2026 via Skift

Agentic AI will likely access APIs to compare pricing. But those queries would have severe limitations and will ultimately require more rigorous solutions to ensure a deal is really a deal.

The Facts About Legal Claims, Booking.com and Parity

February 16, 2026 via Booking.com

You may have heard about legal claims concerning Booking.com's past use of 'price parity clauses' in Europe, as well as certain formal claims made by hotel and consumer associations. In short, we believe the claims about Booking.com's past use of parity clauses are incorrect and ...

Google Testing Ad Formats for Travel in AI Mode

February 13, 2026 via PhocusWire

Google is testing ad formats in retail and said similar tests were happening in other industries such as travel.