

Duff on Hospitality Law

OTA & Travel Distribution Update - Keyword restrictions: What exactly is the problem?; Tripadvisor acquires tours and activities technology platform; Booking Holdings acquires activities distribution startup

By Greg Duff on 4.27.18 | Posted in OTA Update

Our weekly client OTA & Travel Distribution Update for the week ending April 20, 2018 is below. This week's Update features a number of stories on the emerging tours and activities space. I also included the first installment of our own detailed look at recent complaints (and now litigation) raised against hoteliers regarding their keyword contracting practices. A huge thanks to my colleague, [Don Scaramastra](#), for digging into this much-publicized anti-trust issue.

Keyword Restrictions: What Exactly Is the Problem?

("Keyword Restrictions Part I: Restrictions on Keyword Advertising by OTAs: What Exactly Is the Problem?", GSB Client Update, April 20, 2018)

In the first installment of our six-part series critiquing recent [articles](#) (and litigation) questioning hoteliers' keyword practices, my colleague, [Don Scaramastra](#), attempts to define the "problem." We hope you enjoy.

TripAdvisor Acquires Tours and Activities Technology Platform

("TripAdvisor Buys Tours and Activities Tech Provider Bokun as Connectivity Race Heats Up," Skift Travel News, April 20, 2018)

In what is becoming a tours and activities distribution arms race, TripAdvisor has made the latest move. Within days following Booking Holdings' announcement of its acquisition of Fareharbor (see story below), TripAdvisor announced its purchase of Iceland-based Bokun. With this purchase, TripAdvisor will no longer need to rely on third-party integrators (including Fareharbor) to provide connectivity between TripAdvisor and the wide variety of tours and activities suppliers. According to TripAdvisor's Dermot Halpin, president of TripAdvisor's Experiences and Rentals division, TripAdvisor's purchase should cement its market leader position (at least for now).

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Booking Holdings Acquires Activities Distribution Startup

("Booking Holdings Buys Activities Distribution Startup FareHarbor," Skift Travel News, April 19, 2018)

Just days before TripAdvisor's announcement, Booking Holdings announced its own purchase of tours and activities distributor, Fareharbor. With its purchase of Fareharbor, Booking.com will now be better positioned to source the content needed to upsell hotel reservation holders on in-destination tours and activities (thus moving Booking steps closer to its desired full-service consumer travel services provider status). Even before this latest purchase, Booking.com was able to provide guests with tours and activities booking opportunities in 40 global cities. Booking's purchase not only provides strong evidence of a simmering tours and activities market, but also signals a possible renewed interest by Booking in the B2B space.

Other news:

Trip Advisor Attractions Unit Will Rebrand as Experiences

Skift Travel News, April 18, 2018

TripAdvisor Attractions is hopping onboard the Experiences bandwagon. The company will rebrand its business unit as TripAdvisor Experiences, according to a confidential internal communication obtained by Skift. The memo from Dermot Halpin, president of TripAdvisor Attractions and Vacation Rentals, and sent to employees, said the switchover of the Attractions business unit name to Experiences will take place April 23, and there will be more details to come.

Technology Finally Convinced Mandarin Oriental to Launch a Loyalty Program

Skift Travel News, April 10, 2018

Can luxury brands like Mandarin Oriental, Four Seasons, and others convince consumers that you don't need the lure of points or free nights to be loyal? Even though it seems like today's consumers are inundated with an overwhelming number of travel loyalty programs, some brands have resisted offering their own programs. For 55 years, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group was one of those brands — until very recently.