

# HYB26

Technology Edition

AI Everywhere



**The Hotel Yearbook**

Foresight and innovation in the global hotel industry

HY8



# Do You Think You're Ready for A2A Commerce?

Pre-Stay

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***Ira Vouk challenges the industry's comfortable assumption that agentic AI is still a distant, chatbot-adjacent phenomenon. The real disruption, she argues, is not travelers talking to AI assistants, it is machines negotiating directly with machines, and a hospitality infrastructure built entirely around human browsing behavior that is nowhere near ready for it.***

You wake up on a Tuesday morning and casually say to your AI assistant:

“

*Find me a beachfront hotel in San Diego for three nights in July. Quiet at night, strong Wi Fi, healthy breakfast, walkable area.*

A few seconds later, you receive a notification: “I booked this for you.”

Most people picture Agentic AI bookings as instant, casual, hands-off transactions. However, this vision is far from reality. Today, travelers rarely book hotels simply by issuing a quick voice command to Alexa.

In reality, most (true) A2A flows will start scaling in the corporate segment before they infect leisure. And many flows will not involve any user input, not even voice. Full automation.

So while corporations may develop their own agent systems for managed travel, it is very likely that most leisure bookings will continue happening through major AI platforms (OpenAI, Gemini, etc.) in an “AI-assisted” manner, not in a fully “AI-executed” A2A way.

It does NOT eliminate the fact that A2A is a thing and is becoming more of a “thing” as the days go by. There will absolutely be a day, sooner than you think, when a traveler’s AI communicates directly with a hotel’s AI to check availability, confirm loyalty benefits, and book a room.

No manual input, not even saying a word to Alexa. No browser tabs opened. No scrolling through reviews. No comparing rates across six different websites while questioning whether the pool photos were taken recently or sometime during the Obama administration. No retargeting ads follow the traveler around the internet for the next two weeks after they abandoned the booking halfway through.

Just machine-to-machine collaboration. And not just collaboration, but negotiation as well. That’s the key part. They’ll actually talk back and forth, not just take orders. Argue a bit, maybe. And then come to a consensus on how good a deal you’ll be getting.

This sounds futuristic, but it is already happening. Don’t sleep through it. Read further.

## **THIS IS BIGGER THAN CHATBOTS**

Most hospitality conversations about AI still focus on visible use cases: chatbots, trip planners, recommendation engines, concierge assistants, and conversational search. Those are AI assistants.

Those applications matter, but they are only the surface layer of what is happening.

As these systems become more capable and trusted, travelers will naturally delegate more decisions to them and turn them into AI agents.

There’s a subtle difference between the two: ACTION. An assistant answers your question about which hotel is best to choose. An agent goes and books it for you.

The real transformation is not about how travelers interact with AI, but about AI systems increasingly connecting and negotiating directly with other AI systems and supplier infrastructure: removing humans from the process.

That changes the mechanics of commerce itself.

For the last 30 years, hospitality distribution and the entire commerce layer have been built around one core assumption: somewhere, a human being is sitting at a screen trying to decide where to stay. Everything evolved around influencing that human during the decision-making process. Hotel websites became digital storefronts. Booking engines became conversion funnels. Revenue strategies, SEO, metasearch, loyalty programs, review management, and digital marketing all evolved around understanding how humans browse, compare, hesitate, change their minds 20 times, and eventually book.

The industry became exceptionally good at optimizing for human behavior.

But what happens when the browsing itself starts disappearing?

And THAT creates a shift most people in our industry are still underestimating.

AI is fundamentally altering the customer’s identity. The crucial shift is from the traveler to the AI agent, which acts on the traveler’s behalf.

That is the philosophical shift.

## **EXPLAINING A2A: MACHINES TALKING TO MACHINES**

Emerging frameworks such as the Model Context Protocol (MCP), Agent-to-Agent communication (A2A), and related orchestration standards are beginning to build the infrastructure layer for autonomous commerce.

The terminology can sound intimidating, so don’t worry about all the abbreviations. Worry about the underlying idea, which is relatively straightforward.

MCP helps AI systems securely access data sources, such as hotel rates and special offers. A2A enables AI systems to communicate and coordinate with one another. Together, they create environments where autonomous agents can discover information, compare options, negotiate conditions, verify details, and complete transactions with minimal or zero human involvement.

But the important part is not the technology itself. The important part is what the technology enables.

AI shifts from being conversational to operational.

And once AI becomes operational, the distribution structure begins to change.

This brings us to a crucial implication. Hotels Optimized for Humans. AI Doesn't Care.

At first glance, the idea of "machines booking travel" may sound like simply another interface evolution. In reality, it changes the meaning of optimization entirely.

Humans browse emotionally. Humans get distracted. Humans are influenced by photography, storytelling, brainwashing, urgency messaging (OTAs are really good at that), branding, and polished user experiences. Sometimes they abandon a booking because they got interrupted by their cat or suddenly decided they should "think about it."

Machines do not behave that way.

Hotels, and OTAs for that matter, optimized their online presence for humans. AI does NOT care whether your homepage has cinematic drone footage, elegant typography, or a beautifully animated "Book Now" button.

AI systems evaluate something entirely different. They care about structured data, machine-readable policies, trusted inventory access, contextual relevance, interoperability, fulfillment confidence, and real-time accuracy.

A human traveler may fall in love with a hotel because the website made the property feel aspirational or romantic. An AI agent may prioritize a completely different hotel because its cancellation policies are easier to interpret programmatically and its room attributes are consistently structured across systems. Because AI agents are nerds with OCD.

This distinction (machines evaluating by logic instead of emotion) redefines competition and requires a new approach.

For decades, hotels competed for human attention inside search engines, OTA listings, metasearch rankings, and social feeds. But in an AI-driven environment, visibility increasingly depends on whether machines can properly access, interpret, and trust your information.

So... we are approaching the end of the browsing era.

Not overnight, of course, let's admit it, nothing in our industry happens overnight... except for the hotel stay itself. Leisure travel, in particular, will remain highly emotional and aspirational for a long time. Humans will still browse, dream, compare, and spend entirely too much time convincing themselves they need the oceanfront suite they technically cannot afford.

But consumer behavior rarely changes all at once. It evolves gradually until old habits quietly become inefficient.

Nobody announced the official death of travel agents. Nobody held a ceremony for the end of paper boarding passes. Consumer behavior simply evolved alongside technology until older behaviors slowly became uncool.

The same thing may, and probably will, happen with browsing.

## THE POWER SHIFT: A ONCE-IN-30-YEAR RESET

This moment represents something much larger than another technology cycle.

AI-driven distribution creates a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for hotel companies to regain control over direct distribution before intermediaries fully reposition themselves.

The last major restructuring of travel distribution (remember the early days of the internet?) fundamentally shifted power toward intermediaries because they became better at organizing and centralizing fragmented inventory and simplifying discovery. Hotels slowly adapted after the fact, often realizing too late that much of the influence had already moved beyond their control.

Now the orchestration layer is being rebuilt again. DO NOT SNOOZE THROUGH THIS ONE!

Whoever controls orchestration controls demand flow.

This strategic moment is urgent. Only swift action will enable hotel brands to control the future of distribution.

If hotel brands fail to build agent accessible infrastructure, intermediaries will once again become the orchestration layer between demand and supply. Only this time, the interface itself may begin disappearing. The traveler may never even reach a hotel website before options are already filtered, prioritized, negotiated, and influenced by the size of the OTA commission, somewhere outside of your control.

The future of travel may never reach your website.

That possibility sounds dramatic, but parts of it are already becoming visible. AI assistants are increasingly becoming the first point of interaction between consumers and digital commerce. As those systems improve, travelers will naturally delegate more transactional decisions to them because convenience almost always wins eventually. And that naturally will turn them into AI agents. And that will slowly lead to the real dawn of A2A.

The companies that control machine orchestration may ultimately control visibility itself.

## THE HARD TRUTH: HOSPITALITY IS NOT READY

Unfortunately, the industry's underlying infrastructure remains deeply fragmented and poorly prepared for autonomous commerce.

Property management systems, CRSs, booking engines, loyalty platforms, customer data systems, and revenue tools often operate like neighboring countries reluctantly exchanging information through aging diplomatic channels, fax machines, or pigeons. APIs remain inconsistent. Data structures vary wildly. Loyalty systems were not designed for machine negotiation. Room attributes are often incomplete, inconsistent, or impossible for autonomous systems to interpret reliably.

Even basic interoperability remains a challenge across large parts of the industry.

That becomes a serious problem when machines increasingly communicate directly with other machines.

The challenge is not that AI capabilities are advancing too quickly. The challenge is that hospitality infrastructure is advancing too slowly.

### **THE PHILOSOPHICAL SHIFT**

For decades, travel commerce was built around influencing human choice.

Now we are entering an era in which decisions may increasingly be made by machines before humans ever enter the process.

That changes the role of discovery. It changes the role of marketing. It changes the role of distribution itself.

The question is no longer simply: “How do hotels market to travelers?”

The more important question may become: “How do hotels become understandable, trusted, and accessible to machines acting on behalf of travelers?”

The new customer may no longer be the traveler. It may be the system representing them. Right now, the hospitality industry remains unprepared.

But that can change. If we don't snooze through it again...

