

COMM5950 New Media Content Development

Website Usability Analysis of Booking.com & Agoda.com



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Individual Assignment #2

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Introduction

With the development of tourism and communication technology, the online travelling agency(OTA) is growing rapidly. According to Anserbridge(2016), three giants dominate the OTA industry: Expedia inc., the Priceline Group, and Ctrip.

Booking.com (<https://www.booking.com/>) and Agoda.com (<https://www.agoda.com/>) are two of the mainstream online travelling agencies owned by the Priceline Group. They mainly offer reservation services of hospitality & flight with nice price, and other tourism information. According to Rossini (2016), both brands are growing popular among European and Asian independent travelers because of their lodging reservations.

Founded in 1996 in Dutch, Booking.com is experienced in this industry, with over 1,500,000 properties in 229 countries and territories. It is one of the revenue promises of the Priceline Group since the acquisition in 2005. Agoda.com was established in Thailand in 2005 and bought by the Priceline in 2007. Now it owns more than 1,500,000 properties in the world. Agoda.com adopts “Smarter hotel booking” as the brand claim.

Booking .com and Agoda.com differs mainly in two aspects. Firstly, they expanded the business in different routines. Booking started from Europe market, then gradually expanded to Asia, while Agoda is just in contrary to Booking. Secondly, their business models are different. Booking adopts agency (commission-based) model, which means it provides matching choices for consumers and the consumers pay the property owners directly, then Booking will gain commissions from the property owners. While the business model of Agoda is called merchant model, namely Agoda merchandises the rooms from property owners and the consumers pay Agoda.

Design

I. Booking.com

The Layout. As is shown in Figure 1, the Booking.com homepage is designed based on typical modular grids. In terms of the layout, the main body of the homepage is basically symmetrical. Rounded rectangles are applied to create blocks of different contents, which makes the webpage visually consistent. Obeying the basic visual flow, the searching box is placed in the upper left corner for the convenience of searching, which is applaudable.

The Colors and Typography. As is shown in the color scheme below, blue is the dominant color to create the feeling of reliability and its hue, saturation and lightness change in the different functional areas. Meanwhile, orange is introduced to add dynamics and express the concept of warmth. Moreover, orange makes contrast so that the searching area stands out from the contents. Green also acts as a supporting color, but only appearing in some detailed information. The san-serif fonts enable the users to read through the webpage more easily.

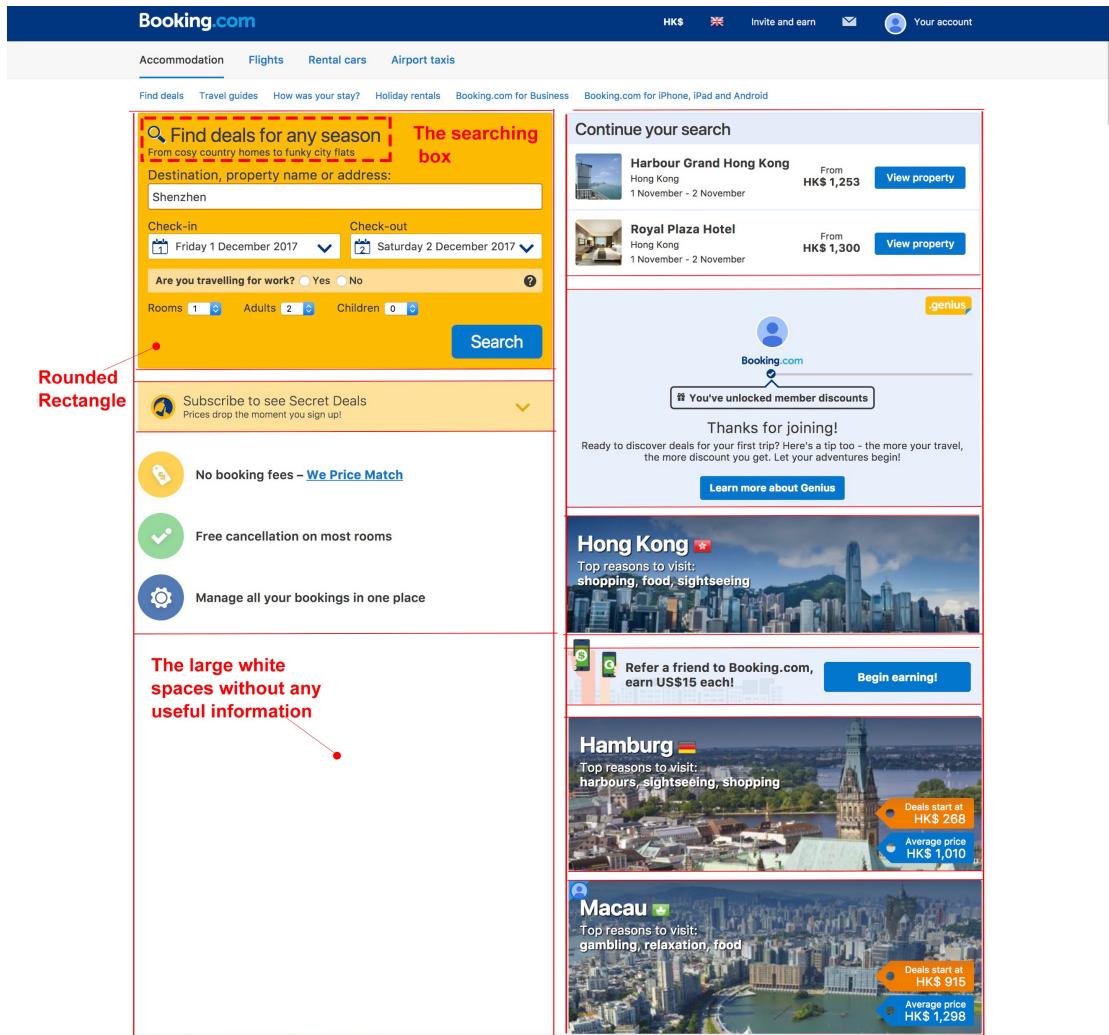


Figure 1-a. Booking's Homepage-the layout, color and Typography



Figure 1-b. Booking's color scheme

Drawbacks. However, there are two drawbacks to the web design. Firstly, the space is not fully used, after login, there is large white space on the homepage. Secondly, there are too many texts (especially in the hotel introduction page showed below) and there is no highlight of headlines, making the page occupied with a large amount of information, which to some extent violates the principle that customers respond to the imagery better than texts.

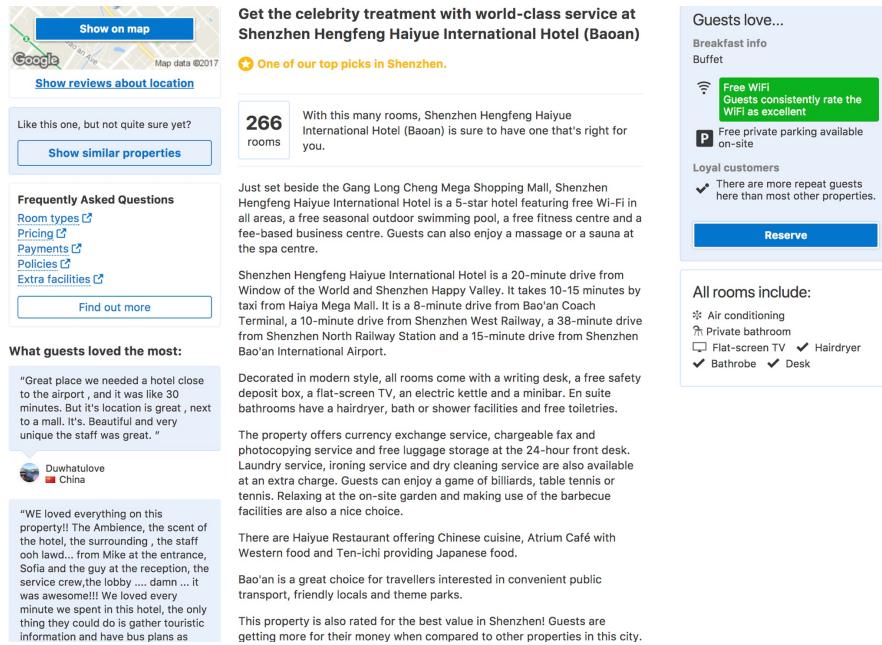


Figure 2. Hotel Introduction Page-the text

II. Agoda.com

The Layout. Similar with Booking, Agoda also designed the homepage based on modular grids and rectangle is the most important shape that separate different contents.

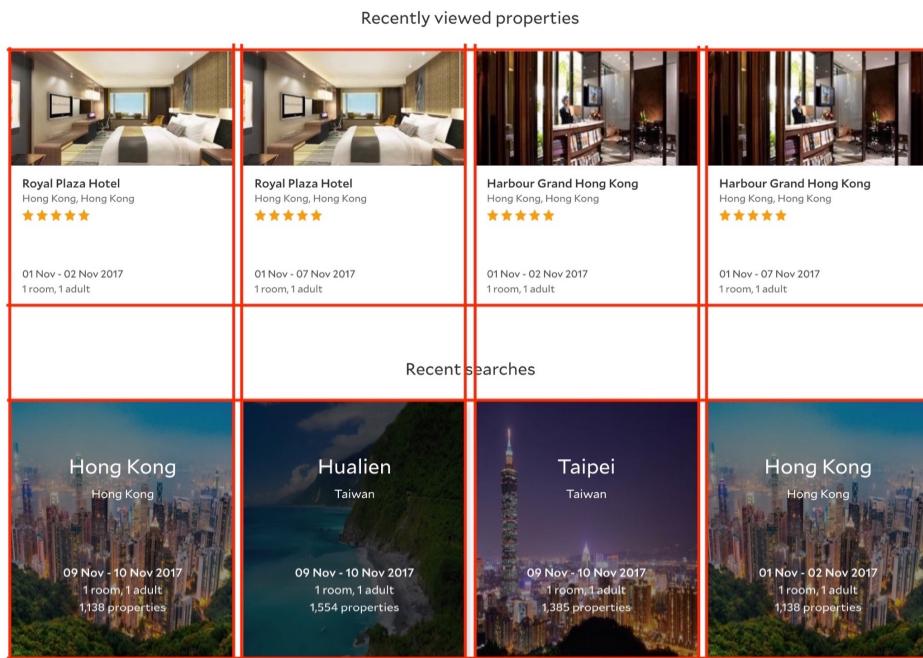


Figure 3. Agoda Homepage-the grid

The layout is symmetrical horizontally, while the differences lie in the way in which the rectangles are organized. For example, at the very beginning of the page, a rectangular picture is placed above a grey rectangle and the latter is not divided evenly, which helps to avoid dullness.

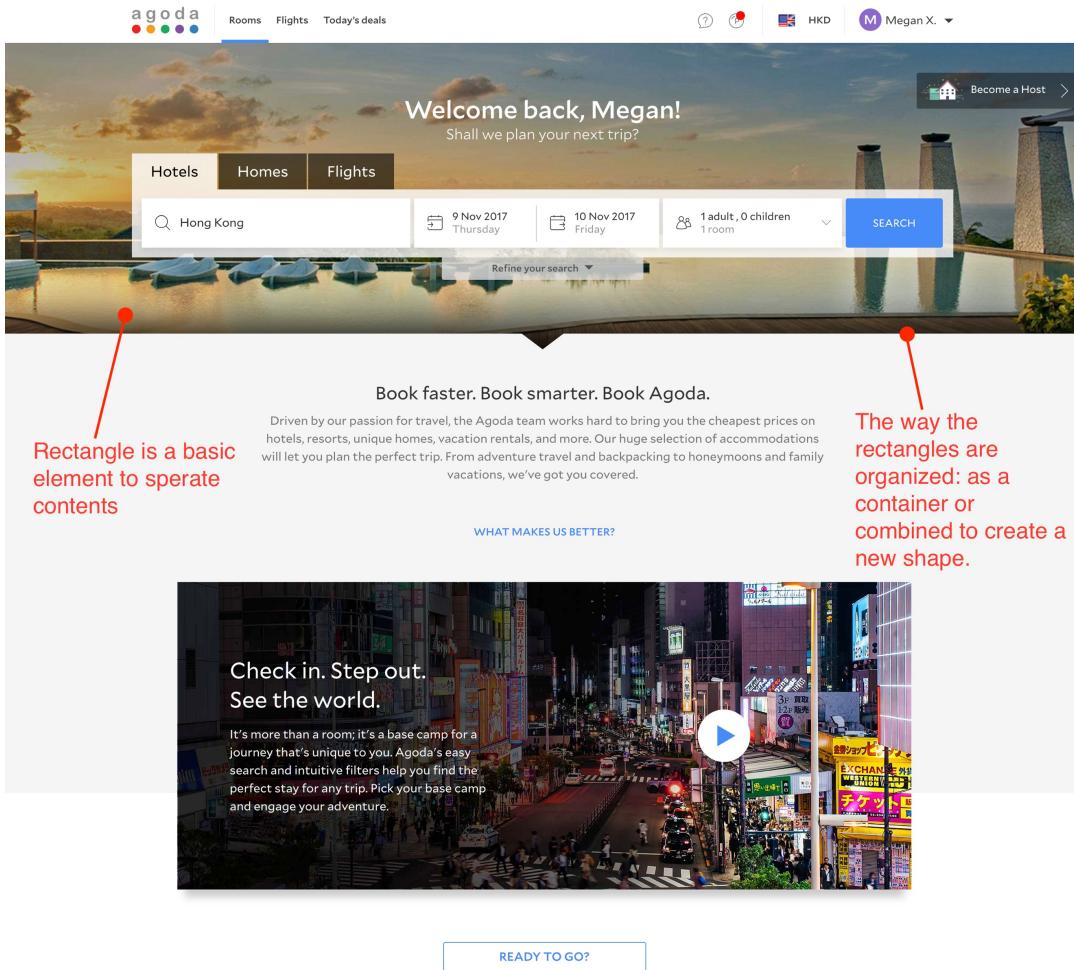


Figure 4. Agoda Homepage-the layout

The Colors. Agoda adopts various colors in its logo to express its stylish, young and open-minded attitudes. Images are adopted to present the richness and colorfulness of Agoda corresponding to the logo. In terms of graphic design, light blue and achromatic colors like white and grey are adopted. Although there is no obvious color scheme, the colors and pictures are harmonious with each other. The pictures and icons to apply other colors to the webpage, which makes it stylish,

concise, dynamic and modernized. The achromatic colors and large white space between different parts balance the rich colors and provide visual pauses for users.

Although the pictures are in different tones, they still look consistent because of the semi-transparent black layers on top of them, especially when the mouse hovers on the picture, the transparency will change, so that the users will be reminded.

Multimedia like the video is also introduced to add enjoyments of reading.

The Typography. The typography is also san-serif style and the stroke is thinner than that of Booking, making the information easier to read because it is spacy. Basically, all the texts are placed in the middle of the page and the headlines are in larger font sizes, enabling users to seize important information more easily and quickly. The information is short and concise. Moreover, the texts are well combined with pictures so that the page looks more compacted without losing white space.

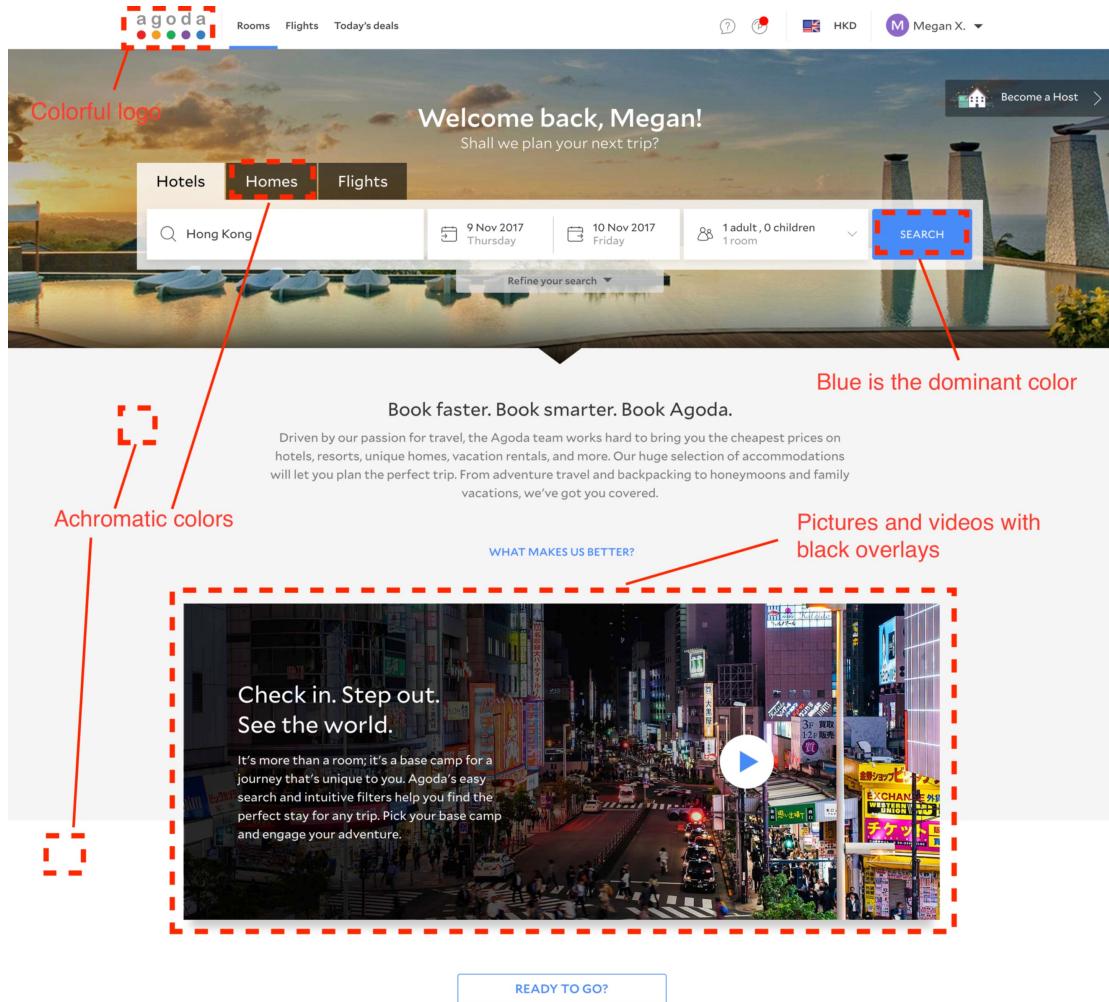


Figure 5. Agoda Homepage—the colors and other elements

Usability

I. Content and Scope

As content and scope are about the functionalities that can satisfy the needs of users, it is necessary to figure out the users' expectations/needs before starting the analysis. According to J.D. Power (2014), the primary reason is price (66%), followed by previous experience with the brand (44%) and brand reputation (22%), and positive reviews (19%) also count for the purchasing on OTAs. Another research by Gaggioli (2015) pointed out that the consumers are attracted because there are so many choices and they can make comparisons before purchasing on the OTAs. They can also gain

various information like the tourist attractions recommendation to refine their travel plans. From some other reports, reasons like customized information, sharing opinions and experiences are also important for some consumers.

1. Booking.com

Booking provides reservations services for accommodation, flight, rental cars, and airport taxis, and offers recommendations for travelling plans, basically satisfying the needs that mentioned above.

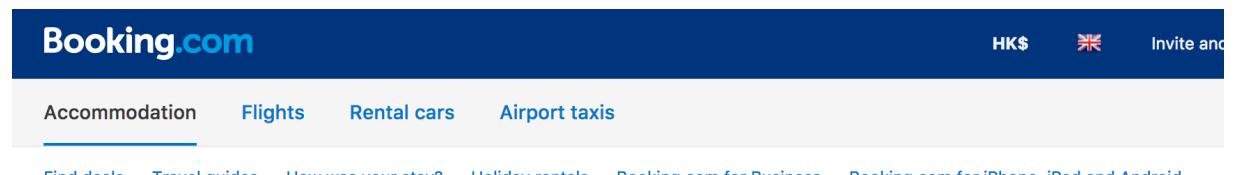


Figure 6. Functions of Booking

In terms of the needs for lower prices, Booking.com not only has regular discounts, but also claims to refund if the consumers happen to find cheaper reservations somewhere else. The reward programme called Booking Genius offers extra 10% off on popular properties and other services like free airport transfers for those who have memberships. It also encourages the users to invite their friends by a rewarding of \$15 each successful invitation (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Booking-ways of getting lower prices

Booking owns more than 1,500,000 properties all over the world, thus it is convenient for users to make comparisons before they make decisions. It also integrated information of flights, rental cars and airport taxis run by different companies. After searching, the users can see comprehensive information about the hotels. For example, it can be seen from the page that Royal Plaza Hotel was the most booked hotel in Hong Kong in 2016 with 5 stars and its general comments are fabulous. After entering the page of the hotel, more details like others' comments, different prices, the hotel facilities and picture can be found. The filters that help to set conditions for choices are very detailed so the recommendations are customized. For example, users can set their budget and neighbourhood of the accommodations (see Figure 8 & Figure 9).

The screenshot shows the search results for Hong Kong hotels. On the left, there is a sidebar with filtering options like 'Your budget' (average price per night for Hong Kong is HK\$ 782), 'Most popular filters' (e.g., Tsim Sha Tsui, Hotels, Breakfast included), 'Location score' (e.g., Superb location: 9+), and 'Star rating' (e.g., 1 star, 2 stars, 3 stars). The main area displays two hotel listings:

- JJ Hotel ★★★** (Very good 8.0, 2,775 reviews) - A photo of the hotel building is shown. It is a smoke-free hotel located in Wan Chai, Hong Kong, 2 km from the center. A note says "Sorry, this property is sold out from Mon 4 Dec - Tue 5 Dec".
- Harbour Grand Hong Kong ★★★★☆** (Very good 8.3, 3,446 reviews) - A photo of the hotel building is shown, featuring a prominent glass facade overlooking the water. It is located in North Point, Hong Kong, 3.5 km from the center. A note says "Popular now! 11 people are looking at this moment In high demand! Booked 48 times in the last 24 hours".

Both listings include room details (e.g., Double Room, Sleeps 2 – 20 m², HK\$ 2,100), cancellation policies (FREE cancellation, No prepayment needed), and a 'View property >' button.

Figure 8. Booking-the searching results

This screenshot shows the detailed page for the Royal Plaza Hotel in Hong Kong. The left sidebar includes a 'Search' section with fields for destination (Hong Kong), check-in (Friday 1 December 2017), check-out (Saturday 2 December 2017), and guest count (1-night stay). It also has a 'Discount' section showing a 37% discount today. Below this is a map with a 'Show on map' button.

The main content area features the hotel's information: 'The most booked hotel in 2016' (Royal Plaza Hotel, 5 stars, Luxury Deal, Airport shuttle), its address (193 Prince Edward Road West, Hong Kong, Hong Kong), and its star rating (The star rating). To the right, there is a large image of a hotel room, a 'Show Location in the map' button, and a box containing 'Overall rating and comments'. The overall rating is 'Fabulous 8.7' (6,734 reviews). A testimonial from Mohammed, United Arab Emirates, is displayed: 'Location, connected to a beautiful mall Breakfast was very good. Housekeeping staff was very good Halal menu in the dining was an absolute surprise and a ...'. Other amenities listed include Free WiFi and 8.7.

Figure 9. Booking-the hotel page

As for the brand reputation, Booking is one of the 10-top OTAs in the world and in Europe, it owns more than 60% market share, therefore, it is very trustworthy for consumers.

2. Agoda.com

Agoda focuses on services of room reservations, flights booking and divides the consumers into travelers and hosts. It has different contents catering to the needs of different groups.

For hosts, they can click the link displayed above the searching engine to enter the subsidiary page to start hosting by setting the required information (see Figure 10).

The travelers can figure out discount information from “today’s deal”, which consist of “explorer deals” and “everyday deals” of accommodations all over the world, enabling consumers to find lower prices. The instant coupon is also available for consumers to get extra off in price. When compared the hotels’ prices, hotels on Agoda are cheaper in most cases, not to mention the houses (see Figure 11).

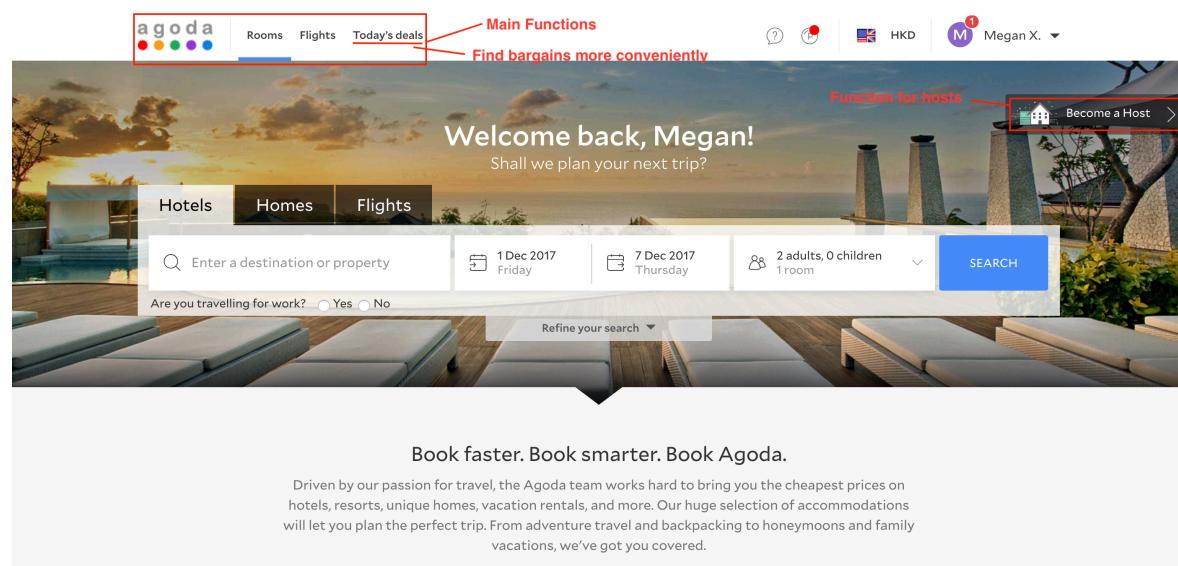


Figure 10. Agoda-the basic functions

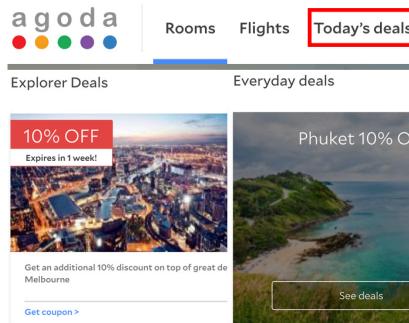
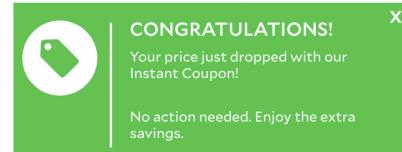
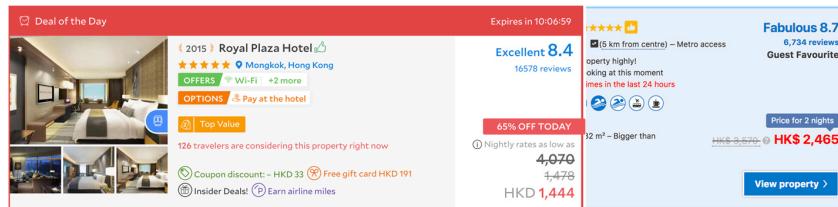
1 Today's deals**2 The instant coupon****3 Cheaper than Booking**

Figure 11. Agoda-ways of getting lower prices

Similarly, after searching rooms in Agoda, the users will be brought to the page that shows detailed information like facilities and comments of the hotel or house. It owns more than 1,500,000 properties in the world, providing sufficient alternatives for them to choose from. And the properties are classified into hotels and houses to satisfy different preferences for accommodations as well as prices. Usually, houses are non-standard accommodation which will be cheaper than hotels and provide different styles of furnishing. Users can also set filter criteria to make the information better fit their needs. The filters of Agoda is different from that of Booking, mainly in that it adds the filter of property type.

After users signing in, there will be a welcome message displayed on top of the homepage, which makes the users feel warm.

Figure 12. Agoda-the prices

Figure 13. Agoda-the hotel page

II. Navigation

1. Booking.com

In terms of navigation, Booking.com has both advantages and disadvantages. Basically, the users of the website are the different types of travelers. The main navigation bar is clearly divided into four parts according to travelers' needs and Booking's business scope.

The sub-navigation bar under "Accommodation" provides quick links for link-oriented users with different needs. For example, "find deals" provides the discount information, "Booking.com for business" is designed for those who often have business stay. However, the information hierarchy in this part is a little bit confusing. For instance, "how was your stay" is placed after "travel guides" but before "holiday rental". In my perception, the review stage often happens after checking out, therefore, it will be better to place it after "Booking.com for business".

For search-oriented users, the searching box is immediately noticeable at the upper left corner of the homepage with a vivid orange color. There are clear instructions to guide the users to search for the hotels they want correctly. It is very convenient that various keywords like destination, property name and address can be used in the searching box. When users scroll down the page, the searching box will turn into a floating bar on top of the page, enabling users to search freely whenever and wherever. Users can also choose whether they are travelling for work, so that the searching results will be more precise. But drawbacks still exist. First and foremost, the users cannot set filter criteria like the prices, star rating and guest rating at this stage, which brings about the inconvenience for those who are very clear about what they need. What is more, the users need to move up to the main navigation bar if they want to check other functions like flights and rental cars after finishing hotels searching.

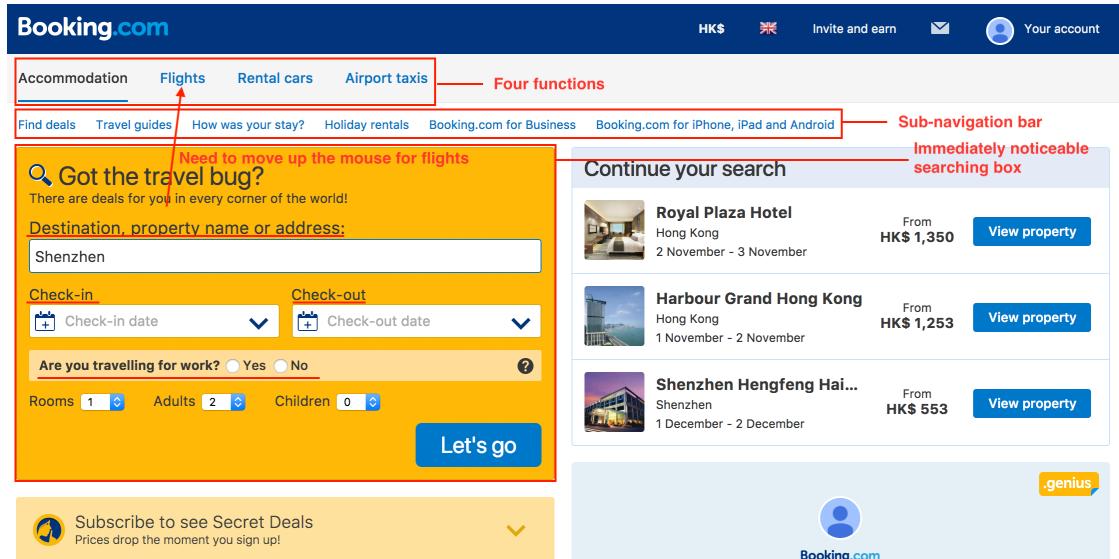


Figure 14. Booking-navigation

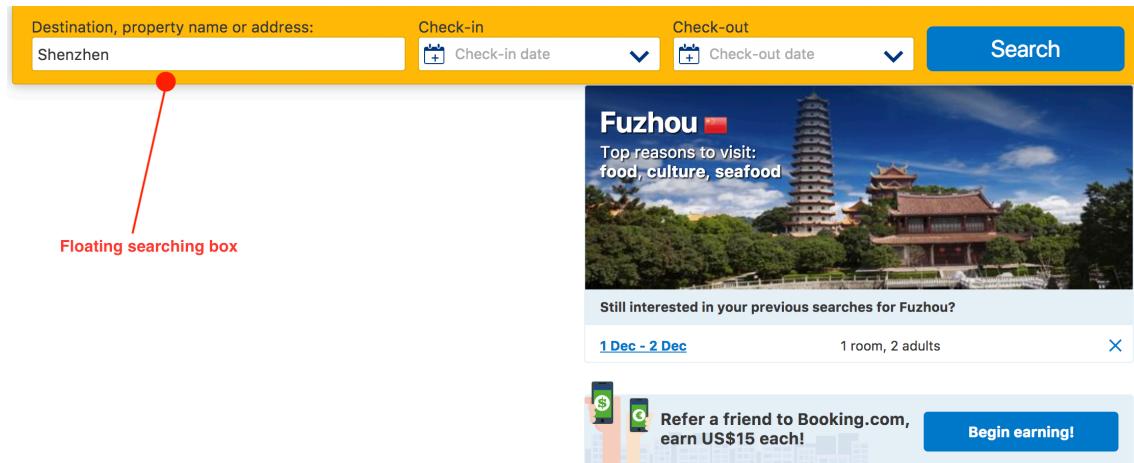


Figure 15. Booking-floating searching box

2. Agoda.com

Agoda's business scope is slightly different from that of Booking: it mainly offers reservations for rooms and flights. The majority users are not merely travelers but also the hosts.

Similarly, Agoda.com divides its main navigation bar according to the main functions and the users' needs. But the detailed information and the information hierarchy are different. It includes "rooms", "flights" like what is shown on Booking's website, but "today's deals" is moved into the main navigation bar,

becoming the third function. It is a suitable way to design because the price is one of the most important requirements of most travelers. By gathering the deals in one page and put the link in the main navigation bar, Agoda saves time for travelers because they don't need to compare the prices among a bunch of hotels. For the hosts, it provides a link in the right-hand side upper the searching area and an elaborated icon of a house is used so that those who want to rent their houses can find it easily and gain access to within one click.

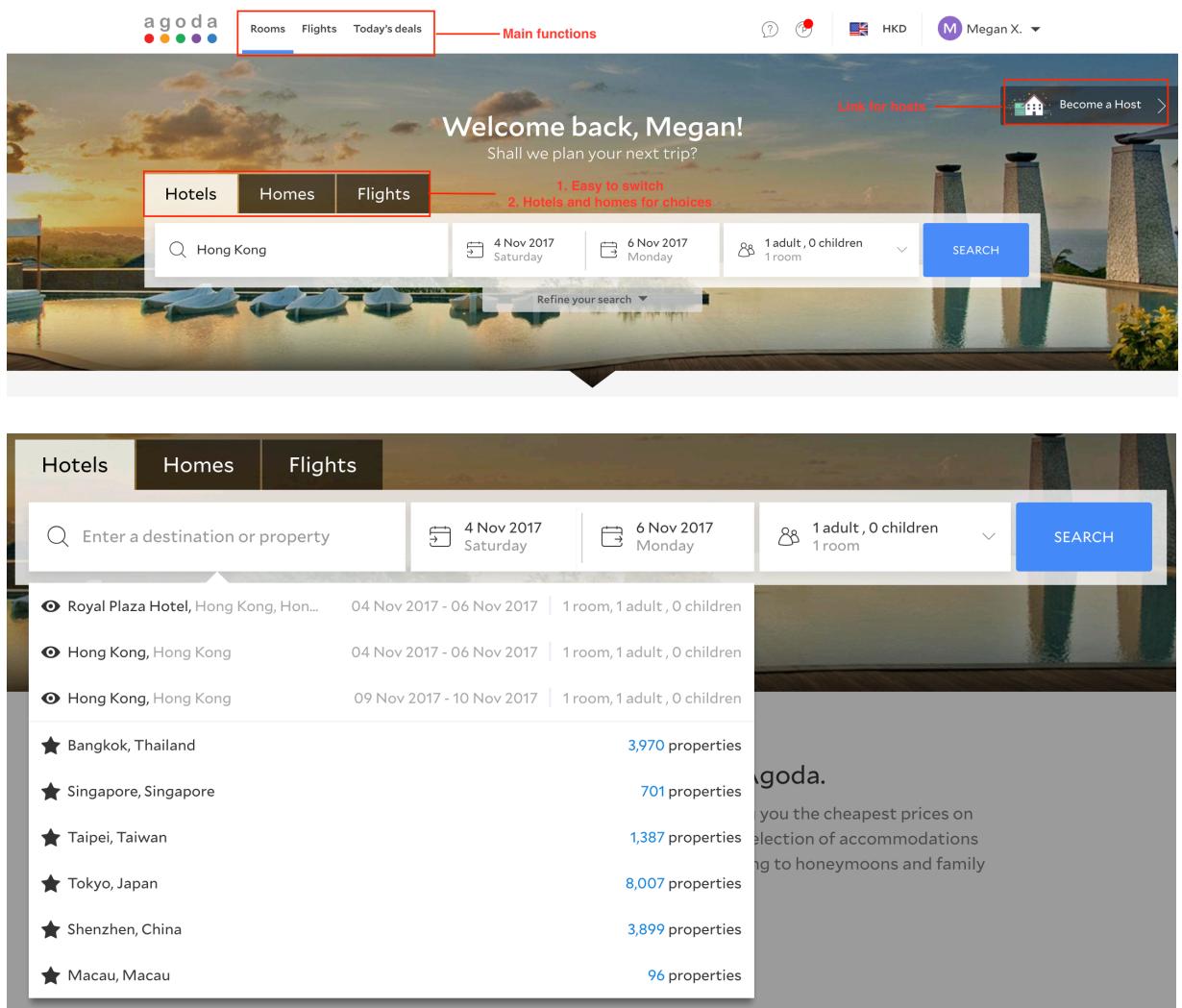


Figure 16. Agoda-navigation and key word association

For search-oriented users, the searching box is large and noticeable at the first sight. And the same with Booking, the searching box will become a floating bar when the users scroll down the page. The accommodations are divided into “hotels” and

“homes”, catering for preferences of different users. Concise and proper icons are used to guide the users what to fill in or choose in each box. For example, a magnifier stands for input the destination they are searching for and a calendar means choosing the check-in and check-out date. In addition, the keywords association will pop up when the users click the searching box, providing destination and accommodations according to their GPS information and searching history. Although Booking has this function as well, it won’t pop up until the users type the first letter and the associations are only based on the first letters of keywords. Agoda’s association is more precise and thoughtful. Another advantage of Agoda’s searching box is that there is a drop-down menu where users can set the acceptable price, guest rating and star rating to filter the results. This is quite nice and time-saving. Furthermore, for those who want to book flights first, they can also switch to the page of flight reservations as within one click at the tag on top of the searching box instead of moving up to the navigation bar and then switch back to the hotel’s page.

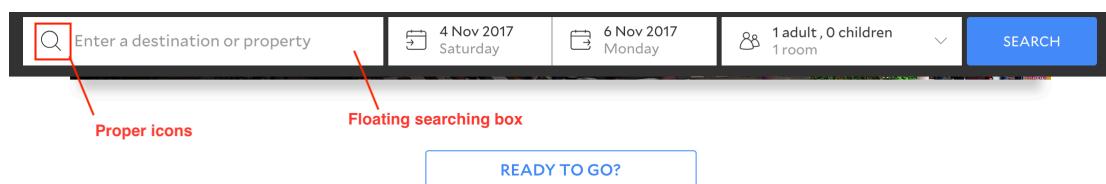


Figure 17. Agoda-the floating searching box

Usability Test

I. Goals, Task, and Scenario

The most representative function of both websites is accommodation and flights reservation. Therefore, the goal of the usability test is to test the ease of booking accommodations and flights. I invited 2 testees who love travelling and have never used the two websites before to complete the two tasks.

The scenario is that they are going to Thailand for a 7-day trip with a good friend and for the first destination, they will spend 3days (01/12/2017-03/12/2017) in Chiang Mai. Therefore, they need to book a room for 2 adults in Chiang Mai as well as two one-way flight tickets from Hong Kong to Chiang Mai.

II. Findings

The journey of both websites basically went in the sequences of searching→setting filters→comparing several hotels→making decisions→searching for flight→view details→making decisions.

The chart below shows the time spent, obstacles, shortcoming, advantage and preference of the testee.

User journey		Booking	Hotel reservation	Agoda	Booking	Flights	Agoda
Time spent	Sherry	Total: 20 min; Making comparison: 15 min; Others: 3 min	Total: 18 min; Making comparison: 15 min; Others: 3 min	Total: 18 min; Making comparison: 15 min; Others: 3 min	5 min	4 min	
Obstacles	Sherry	Basically smooth.	Basically smooth.				
Shortcoming	Sherry	The sold-out rooms were displayed, which was confusing.	The price filter was not flexible and the filters in the left side were so complex.	1. The filters are not flexible. 2. Still too many outcomes after filtering. 3. Too many texts.	The same with the above		
Advantage	Sherry	The price filter was not flexible and the filters in the left side were so complex.	Need to scroll down for comments.	1. The price filter is better than booking, which can set ranges. 2. Spacy design. 3. Classification of hotel photos, make it easier to see facilities.			
Preference	Sherry	1. Do not have to scroll down for comments. 2. Theme color (blue) is very salient.	Cleardar is good, no need to click twice for check-out date.	Automatically remembering the previous setting in room reservation so that the users don't have to type again.	The design is not distinguishing enough.	Both unsatisfying	Both unsatisfying
	Anna		Agoda	Booking			

Figure 18. Usability Findings

Obstacle. For Sherry, the obstacle mainly appears in flight reservation, where she got lost in the page because she cannot find the gateway of the flight reservation. It took about 2 seconds for her to find the searching box of flight. For Anna, it is confusing that booking displayed so-out rooms on the page.

Shortcoming. Both testees complained that the filters of Booking are not flexible, for example, the price is a fixed number but not a range.

The drawback of Agoda was that users should scroll down to see comments. And when booking flights, the searching box should be filled again.

The shortcomings of both websites are the errors emerged when booking flights. They intend to transfer the visitors to the reservation page of the airlines, but the responding speed was quite slow for users (10 seconds). And some airlines homepage only displayed texts, making the booking unpleasant.

Advantage. On Booking, the users can see comments while they view the hotel pictures. The theme color (blue) is unique. And it remembers the setting automatically when booking flights. Agoda is praised for its spacy design, convenient calendar, flexible price filter and hotel photo classifications.

Conclusion and Recommendations

I. Conclusion

In conclusion, Booking and Agoda stand for different types of OTAs. Booking provides services that cover more aspects of travelling than Agoda. Although Agoda doesn't provide that comprehensive services, it is considerate in details, such as the classification of travelers and hosts. It goes deeper in the field of accommodations and is a product under the background of the new trend of non-standard accommodations.

Agoda's website has an elaborated visual design and slightly better searching function. It is easy to find key information from the webpage within one to two clicks. Booking's web design is a little bit of messy and cannot cope well with the information, mainly in that the information is rich but not well-organized, which reduce the efficiency of information seeking and filtering.

As for the usability, Booking.com performs better in the comprehensiveness of content and scope, and Agoda.com is better at certain segment like providing homes. The biggest advantage of Agoda is its cheapness. The navigation of Agoda is also more efficient and easy to use.

In terms of the usability test, both websites have advantages and disadvantages. The user journeys of them are quite similar, the differences mainly exist in some details. Booking's design is distinguishing because of the colors and Agoda provides pleasure by enough white space. But Agoda's design is not unique enough. The biggest obstacle for both websites lies in the flight booking part.

II. Recommendations

1. For Booking.com

The web design can be improved by refining the information hierarchy and reducing the texts properly. Using more images and icons instead of texts will be better. Replacing some colors with achromatic colors will make the website look more elegant.

Improving the searching functions because it is the most important part of OTAs. Shortening the responding time of transferring to the airlines' websites and fixing the displaying problems.

2. For Agoda.com

Maybe adding some tourist guides will be better. Meanwhile, more featured symbols (e.g. a specific color) should be added to make the website stand out from competitors. Shortening the responding time of transferring to the airlines' websites and fixing the displaying problems.

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