DATE

Dear (Insert House member's name),

Knowing of your interest in Google and Big Tech, and the upcoming July 29 hearing on “Online Platforms and Market Power, Part 6: Examining the Dominance of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google” I am writing as the owner of *(insert name of business)* in *(insert Name of Town, State)*.

Google’s anti-competitive and discriminatory use of Google Search, Google Maps, and Google My Business hurts my business financially while enriching Google and its online travel agency partners (OTAs, notably Expedia and Priceline).

**Unfairness in Google Search and Google Maps**

Google Search is not a neutral and objective service, as Google claims. When consumers do a Google search for "bed and breakfast in *(insert Name of Town)*," they typically see what seems to be a helpful map. It's actually the open jaw of a sales funnel controlled by Google, steering the customer to book through an OTA. If the customer does so, Google gets a cut of the OTA's commission, which is 15 to 18 percent.

As a small business, I can ill-afford these usurious commissions, but Google's practices have made my own website less visible to prospective customers. To remain competitive, I am forced to make available to OTAs rooms that I formerly could sell directly for no commission. The typical customer is unaware that I pay a commission.

If consumers begin the same search with Google Maps or by using Google's fill-in-your-travel-dates function, they are steered in a similar way to OTAs.

**Lodging's problem with Google My Business**

If consumers search on Google for my inn's name and miss the option to click directly on my own website, they will see the Google My Business (GMB) listing for my inn. Google started GMB under a different name in 2014.

Every business of any size, from Ford Motor Company to your local Ford dealership, has a GMB. Business owners -- *except for owners of B&Bs and hotels* -- can choose to populate their GMBs with a variety of informative and consumer-friendly features.

Google denies to me and other lodging businesses the opportunity to utilize certain GMB features that could make it easier for prospective guests to book directly on my website.

Meanwhile, two things stand out in my GMB that are not present in the GMBs of virtually every other type of business:

1. Although a link to my website is shown right under the name of my business, what catches anyone's eye is a big, blue button saying "Book a Room" or "Check Availability." Google put it there.  *Research shows consumers think the button will connect them to my website. It does not.* It links to OTAs. I have no say in the matter if I use an OTA.
2. Google lists and links to OTAs that sell my rooms. Most OTAs are owned by either Expedia or Priceline, so no real choice is being offered. In the GMB of the local Ford dealership, does Google list other places you can buy a Ford? Of course not.

(Full disclosure: Last summer, Google made it possible for me to buy, listed among the OTAs, a tiny line linking to "Official Site." To get that, I would have to partner with a reseller that in turn partners with an official partner of Google. Google and these two other entities would divvy up my high monthly payment to the reseller.)

These GMB practices seem even more discriminatory when you realize that consumers can see my GMB only if they search for my B&B by name. What was their intent? To check out my inn.

**Summary**

These practices by Google also affect hotels, trip packages, and other travel bookings of the sort that people tend to book in advance. Through its steering of web traffic, Google makes money off small businesses like mine, and large ones too. It makes money from the use of data it collects. And it limits organic interaction between consumers and businesses like mine, leading to higher prices, and providing a worse and confusing user experience.

While Google continues to engage in anticompetitive behavior, U.S. regulators and policymakers have so far failed to act. However, we are encouraged by ongoing investigations of Google at the Department of Justice and the state attorneys general, and by your participation in the upcoming July 29 hearing on “Online Platforms and Market Power, Part 6: Examining the Dominance of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google.”

We urge you to take the opportunity of this hearing to press Google CEO Sundar Pichai on these abuses by Google. If Google is such a friend to business, as often claimed, how is it justifiable to treat businesses in our industry differently?

The hotel and lodging industry adds $660 billion to the U.S. GDP and accounts for nearly [1 in 25 U.S.](https://www.google.com/maps/search/1+in+25+U.S.?entry=gmail&source=g) jobs.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated this industry, many everyday Americans still book trips and stay in our B&Bs and hotels. When customers seek to book our rooms online, they deserve search results relevant to them and not manipulated according to Google’s business interests.

Sincerely,