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# Web Watch

Leslie Walker



## Expedia the Expedient

By Leslie Walker

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Online travel agents keep trying to put human ones out of a job by making it easy for us to book everything ourselves. They haven't reached that goal yet, but they are getting close.

Consider the build-your-own-trip tool Expedia.com rolled out Wednesday. It offers all-in-one package pricing while letting travelers customize each component, choosing which airline, hotel or other activity they want. With each change, Expedia will recalculate the total price automatically -- it's as if you could use a spreadsheet program to book your travel.

This is a change from Expedia's old setup, which let travelers who wanted a package deal select a hotel only after they had picked a flight. Now users also get an expanded choice of tickets for tours, shows, dinner cruises and other events after making their travel and lodging picks. Expedia says these add-ons cover more than 500 activities and services, including snorkeling in Maui and swamp tours near New Orleans.

Suzi LeVine, Expedia's product marketing director, said that while many hotel-flight combinations are offered at reduced prices, tickets for most of the attractions are not discounted.

Is this the future of the online travel market? It's not a big share of the present. Expedia sold only \$164 million worth of package deals in the first quarter of this year, out of \$1.1 billion in total sales.

### Citysearch Searches for Dollars

**Citysearch**, a struggling network of online city guides, got a facelift late last month. The Ticketmaster division -- a provider of the technology behind Washingtonpost.com's local entertainment guide, which wasn't affected by the redesign -- is trying to get establishments to pay for a presence on its guides.

To that end, Citysearch's redesign lets participating restaurants, bars, nightclubs and other venues display special offers. If the business doesn't offer any discounts, a button next to its listing invites users to request one. After enough mouse clicks on that button, Citysearch says, it will approach the merchant to negotiate a deal.

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*But this strategy won't work without a big audience -- something most city guides have lacked since they went online in the mid-1990s. Meanwhile, in the first quarter of this year, Citysearch's revenue dropped 41 percent, to \$7.4 million -- less than half its expenses.*

*The redesign offers Citysearch users personalized areas where they can save links to favorite establishments, plus the chance to submit numerical ratings and comments about those places. There's also a new "Getaways" area, featuring Expedia's travel-booking engine -- an easy choice, since Expedia, Citysearch and Ticketmaster are all subsidiaries of Barry Diller's USA Interactive.*

[www.citysearch.com](http://www.citysearch.com)

### **A Colosseum on Every Desk**

*Is there anything that can't be Web-enabled? Maybe not. The Colosseum in Rome has created a Web site and announced plans to wire itself with Web cameras and offer virtual tours of the ancient amphitheater.*

*But so far the site is available only in Italian and offers mostly static photos, plus some downloadable video clips. The webcams won't go online until early next year, and other extras, such as coverage of live events or interactive gladiator games, are still being sketched out.*

[www.colosseumweb.org](http://www.colosseumweb.org)

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