

- PRESS RELEASE -

HOTREC and UEAPME call the European Commission to ask Google to set fair online search practices

Brussels, 12 June 2014 – HOTREC, the umbrella Association of Hotels, Restaurants and Cafes in Europe, and UEAPME, the employers' organisation representing the interests of European crafts, trades and SMEs, call the European Commission not to close the competition case against Google, as the latter's proposed commitments – intending to fix practices for the years ahead – do not provide sufficient guarantees to ensure fair online searches for the benefits of all businesses and consumers alike.

As more than a third of bookings in the European hotel sector are already made via real-time online channels, like Online Travel Agents or the hotels' own booking engines, especially independent and small hotels as well as restaurants, and other SMEs are very much dependant on their proper online visibility. Therefore, HOTREC and UEAPME ask the European Commission to ensure that organic search results have a fair chance for top or at least prominent appearance in search result pages besides the commercial or promoted search results (Meta-Search Providers or Google's own specialised search results).

Both associations share the view that a clear differentiation between commercial and natural search results shall be ensured. *"The organic Google search results page is one of the most important places where SMEs, as for example individual and small hotels and restaurants, need a fair chance to be directly visible and to offer a direct link to their services"* – stressed UEAPME Secretary General, Peter Faross.

Furthermore, the use of brand names in Google's AdWords, advertisement page titles or meta tag results in online traffic being diverted from enterprises' (e.g. hotels') own websites to intermediate parties to the detriment of consumers and of hotels' direct visibility. *"Brand bidding is strongly misleading to the consumer, as they click on such misleading links in the belief of getting directly to the providers' own website, while they actually land on an intermediary's website, often without noticing. Therefore, such practices should be banned"* – said HOTREC President Kent Nyström.

What is HOTREC?

HOTREC represents the hotel, restaurant and café industry at European level. This industry includes around 1,8 million businesses, of which 99% are small and medium sized enterprises (91% of them micro enterprises, i.e. employing fewer than 10 people). These businesses make up some 59% of industry value added. The hospitality industry provides some 10.2 million jobs in the EU alone. Together with the other tourism industries, the sector is one of the largest industries in Europe. HOTREC brings together 42 national associations representing the sector in 27 different European countries.

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What is UEAPME?

UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 80 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information please visit <http://www.ueapme.com/> or follow @UEAPME on Twitter.

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