

Airbnb woos business travelers

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The Airbnb website is displayed on a laptop on April 21, 2014 in San Anselmo, California

Airbnb on Monday set out to woo business travelers to its service that lets people turn unused rooms in homes into de facto hotel space.

Airbnb announced new tools that include letting business travelers book lodging and have expense reports automatically generated using TripLink software from "spend management solutions" specialty firm Concur.

The service offered in partnership with Concur will be available late this year, according to Airbnb.

A 'Business Travel on Airbnb' website design to help people find and book lodging for work trips was launched. Airbnb said that 30 companies including Facebook, Salesforce.com and Eventbrite were already using its business travel lodgings program.

Searches at the Airbnb business travel page focus on lodgings more conducive to productivity, such as having wireless Internet or space for co-workers to collaborate.

"We know Airbnb isn't for every road warrior, but for larger groups, longer stays, and relocations, Airbnb offers inspired spaces in memorable places to make the most of any type of travel," company head of global hospitality Chip Conley said in a release.

"Nearly ten percent of Airbnb's customers travel for business already and we've heard from customers that this type of offering is high on their wish list."

Online home remodel

Airbnb last week took the wraps off a major remodel of its online home complete with a new logo.

"Airbnb has outgrown the original Airbnb brand," startup co-founder and chief Brian Chesky said in a post at the website.

"What started as a way for a few friends to pay the rent has now transformed into something bigger and more meaningful than we ever imagined."

The website lets people take in house guests who pay for stays in a variation of a "collective consumption" theme that taps into the power of the Internet to let folks share the benefits and costs of possessions such as cars and homes.

Changes included an improved "Discover" section to spotlight desirable nearby locales where Airbnb users can find lodging, and making it easier to explore listings and make reservations.

Airbnb has come under scrutiny in some US cities due to concerns that some people use the service to run what amount to illegal hotels.

The San Francisco-based startup was launched in 2008 and quickly became very popular.

Traditional hotel chains see it as a rival and accuse it of helping people avoid taxes and hosting illegal hotels on its website.

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