

EXIT READINESS · OPERATOR CANVAS

Operator Canvas №002:

a direct-booking practice

It makes a small business able to survive a buyer's inspection.

EPISODE COMPANION		ADJACENT SYNTHESIS
EPISODE	The One-Person Business That Gets Small Hotels Booking Direct	
BUYER	An owner-operated business with real profit, exiting in one to five years.	
OFFER	One fixed-scope readiness engagement.	
RESULT	A business that survives inspection, and a signed record of what was resolved.	
ECONOMICS	The base case does not clear the modeled livelihood requirement.	
FIRST STEP	Build and publish the checklist, then run one diagnostic unpaid and record the hours.	

ECONOMICS DISCLOSURE

Modeled scenario, not observed performance or an earnings forecast.

Scope boundary. Preparation only: never paid on a transaction, never advises on one. Not legal, tax or financial advice. **AI and host.** Episodes are presented by an AI avatar of the host, with narration in a clone of his voice. The research and the arguments are his. The host spent his first decade in hospitality, including Ace Hotel and Standard Hotels, and has managed hospitality operations. He has not sold this particular service. Nothing in this Canvas describes a delivered client engagement, and what a property will pay for it is untested.

How to read this Canvas

Overall evidence class: **adjacent synthesis**. Every material statement carries one of four evidence labels. The overall class and the per-statement labels are different things.

OBSERVED Sourced fact. Every one carries a claim ID resolved in Source notes.	PARALLEL Transferred from an adjacent model that already exists.	MODELED An assumption, with its arithmetic stated.	UNKNOWN An open question, carried rather than hidden.
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Public Canvas layer

SHORT PUBLIC CATEGORY TITLE	Direct-booking recovery
SHORT SPOKEN COMPANY NAME	a direct-booking practice
ONE-LINE PLAIN DEFINITION	It helps a small hotel get its returning guests to book direct, instead of paying a booking site to meet them again.
PRECISE INTERNAL OPERATING DESCRIPTION, RETAINED OUTSIDE FIRST-LISTEN NARRATION	see the editorial contract.
BUYER	an owner-run US property of roughly 20 to 40 rooms with no marketing hire, most bookings through the sites, no consented guest list.
PROBLEM	the site keeps the guest's contact, the desk has no time, the property pays to meet its own regulars.
OFFER	a fixed-fee audit, then a monthly retainer for three jobs.
RESULT	a baseline, a working direct path, a consented guest list, and one number monthly.
DELIVERY LOOP	audit and ceiling, direct-path test, findability fixes, consent capture, post-stay sequence, monthly scorecard.
STACK BY CAPABILITY	free booking links and a Google profile for findable, the property's booking engine for bookable, the property system's consent field plus a language model and an automation tool for remembered.
AI ROLE	drafts and schedules the post-stay messages, pulls the monthly report.
HUMAN JUDGMENT RETAINED	voice, offers, consent, who receives a message, the audit recommendation, the owner conversation.
BUSINESS-OF-ONE BOUNDARY	six retained properties at 8 modeled hours a month each.
FIRST-CUSTOMER PATH	properties the operator can drive to, the ceiling as the opener, associations and PMS partner lists as hypotheses.
ENTRY WEDGE	the audit.
ASPIRATIONAL DESTINATION	a handful of properties, growing up the band as audits show where the ceiling clears the operator's time.

PROOF REQUIRED BEFORE EXPANSION	one paid audit, one yes to a retainer under the ceiling, an audit inside 15 hours.
ECONOMICS DISCLOSURE	Modeled scenario, not observed performance or an earnings forecast.
MODELED LIVELIHOOD REQUIREMENT AND REQUIRED CUSTOMER COUNT	six properties. Roughly \$20,000 above imputed labor at the bottom of the band in the base case, \$2,640 in the stress case. A foothold, not a living, at 20 rooms.
REACHABLE-SHARE ASSUMPTION	six owners on a drivable route. No denominator, no conversion rate.
FIRST CONSTRUCTION STEP AND TEST	build the audit, run it on three properties, put a retainer under the ceiling in front of each owner.
BIGGEST RISK	no owner in the band pays.

§01 Operator

Who could credibly run this business: a marketing-and-operations generalist with hospitality judgment who can read a booking-mix report, work a booking engine and a Google Business Profile, write a guest message an innkeeper would be proud to send, handle consent and email-law hygiene, and hold a money conversation with an owner. **PARALLEL**: research brief, "Required skills or credentials".

Relevant experience, access, or advantage: hospitality work, an innkeeper relationship, or prior hotel-software sales or support. The advantage is being let into the extranet, the property system, and the front desk. **OBSERVED** for the host's own bounded vantage: CLM-016.

What the operator does personally at the beginning: every audit, every ceiling calculation, every direct-path test, the consent-capture design, the voice of every message, the owner conversation.

What the operator should not need to be: a hotel revenue manager, a licensed anything, an agency, a software reseller. No credential is required. **OBSERVED**: research brief.

Not a fit: someone who wants to sell software, run paid advertising, or promise a property it can leave the sites.

§02 Buyer and beneficiary

Economic buyer: the owner or owner-operator of a US independent lodging property of roughly 20 to 40 rooms with no marketing or revenue hire. **OBSERVED** for the buyer relationship, **UNKNOWN** for band size: CLM-012 (AHLA counts 33,200-plus small-business properties, not a room band).

Day-to-day user: the front desk, which carries the consent capture at check-in.

Ultimate beneficiary: the returning guest, who books direct at a rate the property sets.

Buyer trigger: a visible commission line on the monthly invoice, a 2026 Genius visibility change that asks for a deeper discount, a stretched desk, or the audit's own ceiling number placed in front of the owner. **MODELED**: triggers inferred from CLM-001, CLM-005, CLM-012, not surveyed.

Qualified-buyer rule: owner-run, roughly 20 to 40 rooms, no marketing or revenue hire, most bookings through the sites, no consented guest list.

Unsuitable-buyer rule: under roughly 20 rooms. On base commission with low site share (recoverable a few hundred a month). Already retaining an agency. Chain affiliated. Unwilling to grant extranet, property-system, and front-desk access.

§03

Costly problem

Job the buyer is trying to accomplish: fill rooms at the lowest sustainable cost of acquisition and keep the guests it has already served.

Current failure or friction: most reservations arrive through the sites with a commission attached. The site hides the guest's email behind an alias and asks partners to keep communication on-platform. The desk has no time to build a first-party list. So the property pays the same introduction fee for the same guest's next stay. **OBSERVED**: CLM-001 (63.4 percent OTA share of independent bookings in 2025, global, vendor), CLM-002 (direct channels 50.9 percent of European overnight stays, HOTREC), CLM-008 (alias policy, primary via amendment 01), CLM-012 (65 percent of surveyed hotels report staffing shortages).

Operational, financial, or strategic cost: a layered commission on most bookings (mechanics primary via CLM-005; base-rate band secondary, roughly 15 percent in most European markets plus Preferred Partner and Visibility Booster). Site bookings cancel at 21.8 percent versus 10.6 percent direct in the vendor dataset.

OBSERVED (vendor, attributed): CLM-001.

Why the buyer acts now rather than later: OTA share rose in 2025. The 2026 Genius change reduced guaranteed placement for the minimum discount. Free booking links exist and go unconfigured. **OBSERVED**: CLM-001, CLM-005 (secondary for the 2026 change), CLM-009.

Current alternatives and their limits: do nothing. Buy a PMS or booking-engine bundle and assume it produces direct bookings (Little Hotelier about \$29 to 39 plus 1 percent, or about \$109 flat, CLM-010). Hire a hotel marketing agency from \$1,500 a month (CLM-011). Engage an outsourced revenue manager, quote-only (CLM-011). The spend exists. The fit at 20 to 40 rooms is **UNKNOWN**.

What is not claimed: no RevPAR uplift, commission saved, or direct share gained as an observed result. The vendors' uplift claims are excluded (analogy map ANA-009).

READ THE HEDGES BEFORE THE NUMBERS

The share of independent-hotel bookings running through the sites is Cloudbeds' own reporting, worldwide, from about ninety million bookings. Cloudbeds sells to independents. The European counterweight is HOTREC's study, and it is Europe, not the US. Commission bands come from trade reporting, not from the sites, which publish no base rate. Treat all of them as directional.

§04

Offer

Plain-English offer: a paid direct-booking audit, then a flat monthly retainer covering three jobs (findable, bookable, remembered), with one number reported monthly, direct share of bookings before and after.

What is included, audit: booking mix, commission line, cancellation by channel, the ceiling on real inputs, a direct-path test as a guest (rate versus the site, mobile booking completion, cancellation-policy readability, phone at a busy hour), and a check of whether the registration card captures the guest's own email. A written recommendation: retainer, audit-only, or not this property.

What is included, retainer: findable (Google Business Profile current, free booking links live through the property's connectivity partner, photos and offers), bookable (direct rate parity, mobile booking flow, missed-call fallback), remembered (consent capture at check-in and on wifi with a stated purpose line, post-stay thank-you, review request, seasonal return offer, referral prompt, every sensitive send read by the operator), and the monthly direct-share scorecard.

What is excluded: pricing strategy and revenue management. Paid advertising and metasearch spend management. Any marketing to masked OTA addresses. Any advice to leave the sites. Software resale.

Engagement shape: audit, then managed service.

Time to first meaningful result: the audit returns the ceiling and the direct-path findings inside the engagement. Direct-share movement, if any, is measured monthly against the audit baseline and is **UNKNOWN** until observed.

Evidence label: **PARALLEL** for the format (ANA-002 outsourced revenue management, ANA-003 agency retainers with direct-share reporting), **MODELED** for the combination. No verified operator sells this bundle at disclosed economics (research brief, "Direct evidence").

§05 Buyer result

Result being purchased: a documented baseline, a tested and fixed direct path, a consented first-party guest list that grows monthly, and one number the owner can act on.

How the result is measured: direct share of bookings, monthly, against the audit baseline.

Baseline required: the audit's booking mix, commission line, cancellation by channel, and direct-path findings.

Primary acceptance measure: the audit is accepted when the owner holds the four inputs, the ceiling, the direct-path findings, and the written recommendation. The retainer is accepted month by month on the delivered scorecard.

Why one measure could mislead, and why it is used anyway: direct share moves with seasonality and with site promotions. It is still the honest single number because it is observable in the property's own reports and it is what the owner is buying. The scorecard carries cancellations, missed calls, and list size as explanation, never as the outcome.

Leading indicators: consented emails captured per month, direct-path test passing, free booking link live.

Lagging indicators: direct share, repeat-guest direct bookings.

What the operator can influence but not guarantee: whether direct share moves. Commission saved remains a labeled hypothesis until measured. **UNKNOWN**.

§06 Delivery system

Before delivery

Qualification and intake: apply the buyer rules. Ask for four numbers. Run the ceiling in the first conversation.

Decline unsuitable properties.

Required access, data, permissions, or integrations: extranet reports, property-system reports, Google Business Profile access, the property's booking engine, and a property-side consent process at check-in. All permissioned by the owner, all inside the owner's own accounts.

Core workflow

1. Pull extranet and property-system reports. Compute the commission line and the ceiling on real inputs. Owner: operator. Output: baseline and ceiling.
2. Test the direct path as a guest on a phone. Owner: operator. Output: findings and fix list.
3. Fix findability: Google Business Profile, free booking links through the connectivity partner, photos, offers. Owner: operator inside the property's accounts. Output: live direct placement.
4. Design consent capture at check-in and on wifi. The registration card asks for the guest's own email with a stated purpose. Owner: operator designs, front desk runs. Output: a growing consented list. **OBSERVED**
constraint: CLM-008.
5. Build the post-stay sequence. A language model drafts, an automation tool schedules off checkout dates, the operator approves voice and every sensitive send. Output: thank-you, review request, seasonal return offer, referral prompt.
6. Report direct share monthly against the baseline. Owner: operator. Output: the scorecard.

Quality and exception handling

Human review: the operator sets the voice, approves offers, decides who receives a message, and reads every sensitive send. No message goes to a masked address.

Failure route: if direct share does not move, the scorecard says so and the operator diagnoses (seasonality, site promotion, broken direct path, low consent capture) rather than decorating the report. If the audit shows base commission and low site share, the recommendation is audit-only or not this property.

Escalation boundary: anything touching rate-parity contract terms, consumer law on rate display, or EU guest data beyond consent-first handling routes to the owner's own counsel.

After delivery

Handoff, reporting, support, or renewal: the scorecard on the first of each month. Renewal depends on the number moving. The property owns every account, every list, and every message template. Revocation is immediate on request. **MODELED**

Capabilities and stack

CAPABILITY	REQUIRED JOB	POSSIBLE TOOL CLASS	NAMED EXAMPLE, IF APPROVED	HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY	COST STATUS
Findable	free direct placement beside site rates	Google Business Profile, free booking links via connectivity partner	Google Hotel Center free booking links (CLM-009)	operator configures, owner owns the account	public pricing (free)
Bookable	commission-free direct reservation	small-property booking engine	Little Hotelier, Cloudbeds (CLM-010)	operator tests, owner owns	public pricing (about \$29 to 109 a month) or quote
Remembered: capture	consented first-party email	property system consent field, registration card, wifi login	property's own PMS	front desk runs, operator designs	owned by property
Remembered: drafting	post-stay messages	language model	any model with an API	operator sets voice, reads sensitive sends	usage-based, modeled \$150 a month operator-side total
Remembered: scheduling	send off checkout dates	automation tool, transactional email	Make or n8n, a transactional email tool	operator approves	modeled inside the \$150
Reporting	direct share monthly	property-system reports, spreadsheet	property's own PMS	operator computes and explains	owned by property

Data and privacy boundary: no marketing to masked OTA addresses. On-platform communication where the site requires it. CAN-SPAM for the first-party list. GDPR for EU guests. Consent recorded at capture with a stated purpose. **OBSERVED**: CLM-008 and research brief, "Risks and constraints".

Vendor dependency: Booking.com and Expedia change programme rules (the 2026 Genius change is the live example). Google can change free booking links. PMS pricing changes. Refresh by 2026-12-03.

Manual fallback: every automated message can be sent by hand from the property system. The scorecard can be computed from the extranet report by hand.

§07A Business-of-one design

Work AI compresses, accelerates, or makes newly feasible: drafting the thank-you, review request, seasonal offer, and referral prompt in the property's voice. Scheduling them. Pulling the monthly report.

Work software can standardize: consent field, send scheduling, direct-path monitoring.

Judgment, relationships, permissions, quality, and accountability the operator retains: the voice, the offer, who receives a message, consent handling, the audit recommendation including no, and the owner conversation.

Bounded specialist or contractor help allowed: a photographer for the profile. Counsel for anything beyond consent-first handling.

Work that would force premature hiring: managing paid advertising, running a call centre, or serving properties above the band at agency scope.

Why one accountable operator can sell and deliver the initial offer responsibly: the audit is 12 modeled hours, the retainer 8 modeled hours a month per property, and six properties fit inside one person's year with the drafting automated. [MODELED].

Maximum customer or delivery load before quality, safety, or support fails: six retained properties in the base case. The stress case at 12 hours a property consumes 936 hours and nearly all the contribution. [MODELED].

§08 Go-to-market path

First reachable segment: properties the operator can drive to and owners the operator can sit across from, from hospitality experience, an innkeeper relationship, or prior hotel-software work.

Buyer signal or trigger: a commission line the owner can see, a Genius discount the owner resents, a registration card that never asks for an email.

How the operator finds the first 25 prospects: innkeeper associations (the Association of Lodging Professionals, state B&B associations), PMS and channel-manager partner directories, the property's own vendors. [UNKNOWN]: these are hypotheses, not observed channels (promotion record, "Go-to-market is weak").

Credibility artifact: the ceiling in four inputs, run in the first conversation on the owner's own numbers.

First conversation or diagnostic: the ceiling calculation.

Low-risk entry offer: the audit at a fixed fee.

Expected objections: "my PMS already does this", "I don't want to upset Booking.com", "the recoverable is too small to bother". The third objection is the honest one and may be correct at 20 rooms.

Expansion or referral path: PMS partner managers and association contacts, if they refer. [UNKNOWN].

Kill condition: agencies already retain 20 to 40 room properties at prices owners prefer. Tested by asking two agencies their smallest retained property.

§09 Entry wedge and expansion ladder

Short public category title: Direct-booking recovery

Short spoken company name: **a direct-booking practice**

One-sentence public definition: It helps a small hotel get its returning guests to book direct, instead of paying a booking site to meet them again.

Precise internal operating description: see the editorial contract. Held outside first-listen narration.

Mature company promise: a handful of small properties, each findable, bookable, and remembered, each reporting direct share monthly, each priced under its own ceiling.

Aspirational business: the practice grows up the band as audits show where the ceiling clears the operator's time. The audit becomes a repeatable diagnostic. The consent-capture design becomes a reusable asset.

Entry wedge: one fixed-fee audit for one property.

Why this wedge is commercially and operationally tractable: it is the thirty-day test sold as a product. Twelve modeled hours, a fixed fee, a written recommendation, and a valid no.

Scope invariant that survives expansion: priced under the property's own recoverable-commission ceiling. Guest data used only with consent and inside the sites' rules. The property is never told to leave the sites.

STAGE	OFFER OR CAPABILITY	BUYER PROOF REQUIRED BEFORE ADVANCING	OPERATOR CAPABILITY ADDED	STOP CONDITION
Entry	fixed-fee audit	none, this is the start	ceiling calculator, direct-path test, consent-capture check	audits show base commission and low site share across the band
Next	monthly retainer, three jobs, one number	one owner's yes at or under the ceiling, audit inside 15 hours	consent-capture design, post-stay sequence, scorecard	owner will not fund \$600 a month, or direct share does not move in a season
Then	six retained properties	three retainers renewed past a slow month	capacity discipline, seasonality baseline	hours run to the stress case
Redesign	move the band to 40 to 80 rooms, or sell the audit alone	audits show the ceiling clears the operator's time only above 40 rooms	agency-scope competition	agencies already own the band

What remains outside the initial offer but inside the aspirational business: missed-call coverage as an add-on, the audit-only product, the 40 to 80 room band.

Required public qualification: the practice is a proposed editorial label. No verified operator sells this bundle at disclosed economics.

Economics model

All forward-looking figures are scenarios, not expected earnings. **Modeled scenario, not observed performance or an earnings forecast.**

The property's ceiling (the buyer's rational maximum)

INPUT	WORKING VALUE	BASIS	LABEL
Rooms	20 (40 at the top of the band)	candidate bound	MODELED
ADR	\$180	assumption carried for comparability, not a market figure	MODELED
Occupancy	70 percent	assumption	MODELED
Room revenue	$20 \times 365 \times 0.70 = 5,110$ room-nights $\times \$180 = \$919,800$	arithmetic	MODELED
OTA share	63.4 percent, so \$583,153	CLM-001 (vendor, global)	PARALLEL
All-in commission	18 to 22 percent, so \$104,968 to \$128,294 a year	CLM-005 mechanics primary, band secondary	MODELED on a secondary band
Mix shift achieved	10 points (63.4 to 53.4), so \$91,980 of revenue moved	hypothesis	UNKNOWN
Commission saved	$18 \text{ to } 22 \text{ percent} \times \$91,980 = \$16,556$ to \$20,236 a year	arithmetic	MODELED
Direct cost on moved revenue	$3.5 \text{ to } 5 \text{ percent} \times \$91,980 = \$3,219$ to \$4,599	CLM-014 vendor low bound, 5 percent assumption	MODELED
Net recoverable	\$11,957 to \$17,017 a year = \$996 to \$1,418 a month	arithmetic	MODELED

Sensitivities: a 5-point shift halves it to \$498 to \$709 a month. A 40-room property doubles it to \$1,993 to \$2,836 a month at 10 points. A property funding a Genius discount and a Preferred badge recovers more per moved booking. A property on base commission only recovers less. The retainer must sit under this line.

The operator's business

Pricing basis and rationale: the retainer is set under the property's ceiling, not against the operator's hours and not transferred from agency tiers. **MODELED**. No observed operator price exists (CLM-011: the agency floor is \$1,500 for a broader scope).

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customers x price x billing frequency = modeled gross revenue
labor + tools + vendors + acquisition + delivery overhead = modeled direct cost
available delivery hours / hours per customer = modeled maximum active customers
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ASSUMPTION	LOW CASE	BASE CASE	HIGH CASE	EVIDENCE LABEL	SOURCE OR REASONING
Audit fee	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$1,200	MODELED	set under the ceiling
Retainer per property per month	\$600 (20 rooms)	\$800 blended	\$1,000 to \$1,250 (40 rooms)	MODELED	set under each property's ceiling
Active properties	6	6	6	MODELED	seasonal cycles and owner availability
Delivery hours per property per month	12 (stress)	8	8	MODELED	workflow estimate, consent design and message review do not compress
Audit hours	12	12	12	MODELED	workflow estimate
Operator-side tools	\$150 a month	\$150 a month	\$150 a month	MODELED	automation, email tool, call tracking; property tools owned by the property
Acquisition and overhead	\$500 per client plus \$1,200 admin and insurance	same	same	MODELED	assumption, replaced by tracked cost in validation
Imputed labor	\$60 an hour	\$60 an hour	\$60 an hour	MODELED	internal opportunity-cost assumption, not a wage or billable rate

Base case:

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6 x $800 x 12          = $57,600 retainer
6 x $1,200             = $7,200 audits
gross                  = $64,800
tools $1,800 + acquisition $3,000 + admin $1,200 = $6,000
contribution before owner compensation and tax = $58,800
imputed labor: (576 + 72) = 648 hours x $60 = $38,880
remaining after imputed labor = $19,920

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Stress case (12 hours a property a month): 936 hours x \$60 = \$56,160, remaining \$2,640.

Bottom-of-band case (six 20-room properties at \$600): \$43,200 a year of retainer. Top-of-band case (six 40-room properties at \$1,250): \$90,000 a year of retainer before costs, at the same modeled hours. Both derived from the assumptions above.

Modeled contribution before owner compensation and tax: \$58,800.

Break-even condition: one retained property covers modeled tools and admin. Break-even is not the interesting number.

Cash-timing or working-capital risk: low. Audit fee on delivery, retainer monthly.

Most sensitive assumption: **whether an owner in the band pays at all**, then delivery hours per property. The ten-point mix shift is the buyer-side hypothesis that sets the ceiling.

Modeled owner-compensation requirement: the model states an imputed cost of time of \$60 an hour rather than a salary target. At the bottom of the band the practice returns roughly \$20,000 above that cost in the base case

and \$2,640 in the stress case. **The Canvas records this as a foothold, not a living, and does not adjust the inputs until it passes.**

Customers or transactions required to meet that modeled requirement: six retained properties, and at the top of the band rather than the bottom for the practice to be more than a foothold.

Share of the reachable buyer set implied by that customer count: not computed. AHLA counts 33,200-plus small-business properties, not a band, and no conversion rate is observed. Six owners on a drivable route is the requirement.

Why the underlying problem is large and costly enough for that share to matter: the two largest sites ran \$186.1 billion and \$119.6 billion of gross bookings in 2025 by their own filings (CLM-003, CLM-004), and the vendor dataset covers 90 million bookings. Size is not the constraint. Whether six owners in the band say yes is.

Evidence or test needed to show the share is reachable: one paid audit and one owner's yes to a retainer under the ceiling.

Why this remains a sustainability model rather than an income promise: every input is an assumption with its arithmetic shown, and the bottom-of-band result is recorded as thin rather than adjusted.

REQUIRED PUBLIC DISCLOSURE

Modeled scenario, not observed performance or an earnings forecast.

EVERYTHING HERE IS ARITHMETIC ON AN INVENTED INN

The inn is illustrative: it is made up, and every input is one you would replace with the owner's own. The mix shift the recoverable amount turns on is a hypothesis nobody has measured. The low end of the direct-cost band is one vendor's own figure. The recoverable amount is a ceiling your fee sits under, not commission this service saves, and not earnings.

Risks and failure modes

RISK OR ASSUMPTION	WHY IT MATTERS	EARLY WARNING	MITIGATION	KILL CONDITION	EVIDENCE LABEL
Owner will not pay under the ceiling	the whole business	owners agree the number is real and decline the retainer	lead with the ceiling, sell the audit first	no owner in the band funds \$600 a month	UNKNOWN
Band's dependence is below the vendor figure	the ceiling shrinks	audits show base commission and low site share	audit-only recommendation	three audits in a row below the model	UNKNOWN
Agencies already serve the band	no front door at this size	agencies retain 30-room inns at \$1,500	ask two agencies their smallest retained property	owners prefer the agency	UNKNOWN
Delivery hours exceed the model	contribution collapses	first retainer runs past 8 hours	stopwatch on the free audit, cap scope	stress case becomes the base case	MODELED
Seasonality or site promotions move the mix	false credit or false blame	direct share swings with the calendar	keep the baseline, write down changes	owner cancels the first slow month	OBSERVED mechanism, MODELED effect
Guest-data misuse	OTA terms, CAN-SPAM, GDPR	any send to a masked address	consent-first design, on-platform where required	any breach	OBSERVED : CLM-008
Platform rule change	Genius, free links, PMS pricing	announced programme change	refresh by 2026-12-03	a change that removes free direct placement	OBSERVED : CLM-005, CLM-009
Access withdrawn	every engagement is permissioned	owner slow to grant extranet access	work inside the owner's accounts only	access refused	MODELED

GUEST DATA

Guest contact details are used only inside each site's partner terms, the American email law, and European rules for European guests. This is not legal advice. Check your own jurisdiction before you collect anything.

First 30-day construction and validation plan

Question being tested: will an owner in the band pay for the audit, and then fund a retainer priced under the property's own ceiling?

Business asset or capability constructed before testing: the audit (checklist, ceiling calculator, phone-side direct-path test, consent-capture check), written so it could be handed to someone.

First paid wedge to offer: the audit at \$1,200 (modeled).

Smallest credible test inside that construction: three audits, one unpaid for an owner already known, two at the fee. The ceiling and a retainer under it placed in front of each owner. The answer, the objection, and the owner's current approach to the commission line recorded.

Target participants: three properties in the band the operator can visit. Two PMS or channel-manager partner managers, one innkeeper-association contact, two independent-hotel agencies (smallest retained property).

What must be built before testing: the audit and the ceiling calculator.

What must not be built yet: the post-stay sequence, the automation, the scorecard template. Those follow the first yes.

Success signal: one owner pays the audit fee. One owner agrees to a retainer at or below the ceiling. Audit delivery lands inside 15 hours.

Failure signal: no owner funds \$600 a month. Agencies already serve the band at prices owners prefer. Audits show recoverable commission systematically below the model.

Decision at day 30: continue building / revise (move the band to 40 to 80 rooms, or sell the audit alone) / return / stop.

Maximum time and cash at risk: roughly 36 audit hours plus calls, and the operator-side tools for one month.

Days 31 to 90: deliver the first retainer. Replace the 8-hour assumption with recorded hours. Put the first scorecard in front of an owner. Rerun the operator's arithmetic on observed inputs. Decide: continue, move the band, or audit-only. Add nothing to the offer until a paying owner and the hours record say it should.

Unknowns and contradictions

ID	UNKNOWN OR CONTRADICTION	WHY IT MATTERS	OWNER	RESOLUTION PATH	BLOCKS LOCK?
U001	Will a 20 to 40 room owner pay a retainer under the ceiling?	the whole business	operator	test later, validation step 2	no, safe first-test question
U002	OTA share and commission profile of US properties in the band	the ceiling's inputs	Step 0	independent US source or audit data from step 1	no, the script states the figure as global and vendor-published and turns the band figure into the first measurement (owner decision recorded in handoff.md)
U003	Booking.com base-rate band and messaging-window durations	commission input and cold-open detail	Step 0	amendment 01 made mechanics and alias policy primary. Window durations remain secondary, step0-amendment-request-01.md raised	no, the script attributes both to trade reporting
U004	Do agencies already serve the band?	front door	operator	validation step 3	no, safe first-test question
U005	Actual audit and retainer hours	contribution	operator	stopwatch on the free audit	no, safe first-test question
U006	Guest consent rate at check-in and re-booking response	whether "remembered" moves direct share	operator	first retainer season	no, later-stage question
U007	Cloudbeds 63.4 percent (global, vendor) versus HOTREC 50.9 percent direct (Europe)	level of dependence	Step 0	both kept visible, attributed every time	no

No current E3 blocker. No narrative or scenario substitutes for an unresolved operating decision. The thin bottom-of-band result is recorded as thin.

Source notes and disclosures

- CLM-001 **OBSERVED** Cloudbeds, 2026 State of Independent Hotels (about 90 million bookings). <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2026/03/25/3262232/0/en/>
Vendor-published. Cloudbeds sells to independent hotels. Worldwide, not US. Directional.
- CLM-002 **OBSERVED** HOTREC / HES-SO, European hotel distribution study (3,000+ hotels, 2023). https://www.hotrec.eu/en/news_digital-trends-in-accommodation-hotels-booking-com-and-dma_C2_A0_C2_A0.html
Europe only. Do not read it as US behaviour; it is the counterweight to CLM-001, not a match.
- CLM-003 **OBSERVED** Booking Holdings FY2025 10-K, gross bookings. <https://www.stocktitan.net/sec-filings/BKNG/10-k-booking-holdings-inc-files-annual-report-7fb6c3d1394a.html>
Blended across everything the company sells, not a hotel commission rate. Read via a filing summary.
- CLM-004 **OBSERVED** Expedia Group FY2025 results, gross bookings. <https://ir.expediagroup.com/news-and-events/news/news-details/2026/Expedia-Group-Reports-Fourth-Quarter-and-Full-Year->
Blended, as above. Never add the two companies together.
- CLM-005 **SECONDARY** Trade reporting on Booking.com commission mechanics. <https://kimisuite.com/en/blog/booking-com-commissions-explained>
Secondary. Booking.com publishes no base rate. Most European markets, not a US figure.
- CLM-007 **OBSERVED** HOTREC, collective damages action over parity clauses. https://www.hotrec.eu/en/news_collective-action-against-booking-com-over-15-000-hotels-participating.html
Europe, not here. Registration is not a finding of damages.
- CLM-008 **OBSERVED** Booking.com Partner Help, contacting your guests. <https://partner.booking.com/en-gb/help/reservations/contact-extranet/contacting-your-guests>
Primary, the site's own help. The messaging-window durations come from trade press, not the site.
- CLM-009 **OBSERVED** Google Hotel Center Help, free booking links. <https://support.google.com/hotelprices/answer/10472394?hl=en>
Primary. Eligibility runs through a Hotel Center account or an integration partner; not every small property qualifies on its own.
- CLM-010 **PUBLIC PRICING** Booking-engine pricing (Little Hotelier via Roommaster; Cloudbeds). <https://www.cloudbeds.com/pricing/>
Public tool pricing. Secondary for Little Hotelier. Open the vendor page before you quote it.
- CLM-011 **OBSERVED** Egochi, hotel marketing agency published entry price. <https://www.egochi.com/hotel-marketing-agency/>
Self-published, for its own price only. It is not evidence that agencies serve the 20 to 40 room band, and it carries no outcome claim.
- CLM-012 **OBSERVED** AHLA industry pages and the AHLA / Hireology staffing survey (282 hoteliers). <https://www.ahla.com/news/65-surveyed-hotels-report-staffing-shortages>
Association data, member-skewed, not size-specific. AHLA counts small-business properties, not a room band; nobody has counted the 20 to 40 band.
- CLM-014 **MODELED** D-EDGE direct distribution cost reporting. <https://www.d-edge.com/2025-hotel-direct-distribution-report/>
Vendor-reported, and it is the low end of the direct-cost band the model uses. The band is a modelling assumption, not a measured cost for any property.

All fees, hours, property counts and costs are the Canvas's own \$10 assumptions, labeled **MODELED**, computed on an illustrative inn that does not exist. Nobody has built this practice and published what it earns.

ECONOMICS DISCLOSURE

Modeled scenario, not observed performance or an earnings forecast.

SCOPE BOUNDARY

The three recurring jobs only: findable, bookable, remembered. Rates and revenue management stay outside, and so does anything that touches what a room should cost. The guest list belongs to the property, never to the operator. Guest contact details are used only inside each booking site's own partner terms, the American email law, and European rules for European guests; no marketing to a relay address, ever. Nothing in this Canvas is legal advice, and the recoverable amount it models is a ceiling a fee sits under, not commission this service saves.

AI AND HOST DISCLOSURE

Episodes are presented by an AI avatar of the host, with narration in a clone of his voice. The research and the arguments are his. The host spent his first decade in hospitality, including Ace Hotel and Standard Hotels, and has managed hospitality operations. He has not sold this particular service. Nothing in this Canvas describes a delivered client engagement, and what a property will pay for it is untested.

Public print edition of the locked EP009 Operator Canvas (locked 2026-09-03, header reconciled 2026-10-12, template operator-blueprint-v2-step1-v1.5). Text is transcribed from the lock. Omitted as internal: the pitch-deck and episode coverage map, the E3 readiness check and the lock record. No figure is withheld: EP009's publication rules require every modelled figure to carry its hedge rather than be removed, and those hedges sit on the page with the figures they qualify.

Source Canvas SHA-256: 4cadea93e2fe7fd49e55a34a8adab94228e56bec33bbd9bc54ad141b7d10a43c

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