

NAD Fast-Track SWIFT Case #7448 (04/17/2025)
Parties: VRBO / Airbnb, Inc.
Product: Short Term Vacation Rental
Product Type: Travel / Lodging
Disposition: Substantiated In Part / Modified-Discontinued In Part
Claim: Implied Claims / Consumer Perception

BBB NATIONAL PROGRAMS

NATIONAL ADVERTISING DIVISION

AIRBNB, INC.,
Challenger,

VRBO,
Advertiser.

Case No. 7448
Closed 04/17/2025

FAST-TRACK SWIFT CASE

Basis of Inquiry: As part of NAD’s Fast-Track SWIFT program designed to quickly and efficiently review advertising claims that involve a single well-defined advertising issue, Airbnb, Inc. (“Airbnb” or “Challenger”) challenged the implied claims made by VRBO (“VRBO” or “Advertiser”) that VRBO does not have hosts and Airbnb always has hosts that cohabit with consumers during their stay.

I. The Challenged Advertising

Airbnb and VRBO (Vacation Rentals by Owner) are competitors within the short-term rental market. Airbnb is a platform that allows individuals to list and book unique spaces, including entire homes, apartments, and rooms. VRBO focuses on providing a comprehensive inventory of vacation rentals, including condos, townhouses, and single-family homes. Both platforms facilitate booking and payment processes, offering a range of features and services to support hosts and guests.

Both Airbnb and VRBO share a common purpose: to provide travelers with alternative accommodations to traditional hotels. According to Airbnb, it provides a range of accommodation options, including entire homes and private rooms, catering to consumers seeking diverse choices. Airbnb offers a suite of options for travelers that includes shared spaces where the hosts are present during the stay as well as spaces where the hosts are not present during the stay. VRBO hosts, on the other hand, never share their vacation rental homes with travelers during their stay and are not present.

Airbnb challenged claims in VRBO’s advertising campaigns, which assert that its short-term rental services are “host-free,” conveying the message that other services like Airbnb always require guests to cohabit with their hosts. NAD determined that the challenge was appropriate for Fast-Track SWIFT as it presented the single issue of whether the advertising reasonably conveys the unsupported message that other services like Airbnb always require guests to cohabit with their hosts.

Airbnb's initial argument addressed the consumer perception of the term "host." According to Airbnb, in the context of VRBO's campaign, one interpretation of the term "host" refers to the homeowner or property manager who rents out their property to guests, regardless of the host's presence on the property. Airbnb interprets VRBO's use of "host" to pertain to the ownership entity of the property such that reasonable consumers take away the unsupported message that VRBO owns all rental properties and that no individual hosts exist.

Airbnb argued that VRBO's advertising campaign falsely suggests guests must always share spaces with hosts on Airbnb. For example, one commercial depicts Nick Saban, a well-known retired college football coach known for his demanding personality, as a host that stays with guests, while enforcing strict rules.¹ He is seen awaiting the guests on the front porch as they arrive and remains ever-present throughout the stay, overseeing their activities and interactions. He enforces absurdly strict rules (e.g., "no fun") and at one point joins the visiting couple in the hot tub. The end of the commercial includes a voiceover which states, "when other vacation rentals make you share your turf with a host, try one you have all to yourself." The commercial humorously highlights the downside of staying with a host to illustrate the potential clash between a host's personality and the guest's expectations for privacy and relaxation.

Airbnb's challenge also includes billboard advertisements with statements such as "Airbnb's hotter, cooler, friendlier, long-lost twin that never has hosts," "What do you call an Airbnb without a host? - VRBO," and "What do you call the perfect Airbnb you can't find on Airbnb?" Airbnb argued that these advertisements also convey an unsupported message that VRBO does not have hosts, and Airbnb always has hosts that cohabit with consumers during their stay.

VRBO argued that the challenged claims center on the fundamental differences between the two vacation rental platforms regarding hosted stays. VRBO emphasized its long-standing policy that prohibits hosts from sharing living space with travelers during their stay, ensuring privacy, peace of mind, and relaxation for guests. Conversely, VRBO argued that Airbnb's business model includes hosts cohabitating with travelers, which is a core part of Airbnb's identity and marketing.

II. Decision

A. Analysis

NAD evaluated the challenged implied claim to determine whether VRBO's "host-free" campaign conveys the message that "host-free" implies that VRBO does not have hosts and Airbnb always has hosts that cohabit with consumers during their stay.

It is well settled that an Advertiser is responsible for all reasonable interpretations of its claims, not simply the messages it intended to convey.² In the absence of any consumer perception evidence, NAD

¹ The commercial has been broadcast during major sporting events, including Super Bowl LIX in February 2025.

² See *Procter & Gamble Company (Swiffer Dust & Shine with Febreze Freshness)*, Report #5141, NAD/CARU Case Reports (February 2010). In the absence of consumer perception evidence, NAD uses its expertise to determine the messages reasonably conveyed by the challenged advertisements. In analyzing the express and implied messages conveyed by a particular advertisement, NAD typically reviews the totality or overall net impression

steps into the shoes of the reasonable consumer and uses its expertise to evaluate the messages reasonably conveyed in the context in which the advertising is presented.³ In evaluating the messages reasonably conveyed by an ad, NAD reviews the overall net impression created by the advertisement.⁴

Airbnb argued that VRBO's "host-free" campaign is inaccurate because VRBO properties have hosts, even if those hosts are not physically present during the guest's stay. Consumers are likely familiar with platforms like VRBO and Airbnb, where property owners rent out their homes or apartments to guests. Given this widespread understanding, reasonable consumers, when encountering the term "host-free" in the context of VRBO's advertising, will interpret it to mean that the host is not physically present at the rental property during the guest's stay. Therefore, NAD concluded that consumers would understand "host-free" to be a claim about the absence of hosts being present during the stay, rather than a claim about the ownership structure of the rental property itself.

Airbnb challenged claims made in a commercial featuring Nick Saban as a host enforcing strict rules on guests, and billboards ads with statements such as "Airbnb's hotter, cooler, friendlier, long-lost twin that never has hosts," "What do you call an Airbnb without a host? - VRBO," and "What do you call the perfect Airbnb you can't find on Airbnb?" Each ad was assessed based on its overall net impression.

NAD determined that one message reasonably conveyed by the Nick Saban commercial is that VRBO distinguishes itself from competitors like Airbnb by offering a "host-free" experience, implying that Airbnb and similar platforms always require guests to cohabitate with hosts during their stay. The commercial, featuring Nick Saban as an overbearing host, humorously highlights the potential drawbacks of hosted stays and positions VRBO's no-host-present policy as a desirable alternative, promising a more private and stress-free vacation rental experience. While advertisers may use humor to highlight truthful distinctions between their products or services and those of their competitors, the commercial does more than highlight the advantages of a "host-free" stay.⁵ Most significantly, the commercial ends with a voiceover statement, "when other vacation rentals make you share your turf with a host, try one you have all to yourself." NAD found that the commercial reasonably conveys the message that VRBO's host-free stays are superior to those offered by competitors like Airbnb, which always require cohabitation with hosts. Because Airbnb also offers "host-free" rental options, NAD concluded that the message is unsupported and recommended that VRBO discontinue the challenged "host-free" claim or modify it to avoid conveying the message that competitors such as Airbnb always have hosts that cohabitate with guests during their stay.

Similarly, NAD determined that the VRBO billboard advertisement featuring the statement "What do you call an Airbnb without a host? - VRBO" also conveys an unsupported message that Airbnb's

created by an advertisement as a whole, not merely words or phrases standing alone, taking into consideration both the words and the visual images. Any claim found to be reasonably implied by NAD need not be the only message conveyed by an advertisement, it need only be one of the reasonable messages conveyed by an advertisement. *See Your Baby Can, LLC (Your Baby Can Read! Early Language Development System)*, Report #5313, NAD/CARU Case Reports, (March 2011).

³ *AT&T Services, Inc. (AT&T Internet)*, Report #6981, NAD/CARU Case Reports (November 2021).

⁴ *The Gillette Company (Venus & Olay Razor)*, Report #5547, NAD/CARU Case Reports (January 2013).

⁵ *Traeger Pellet Grills, LLC (Traeger Grills)*, Report #6327, NAD/CARU Case Reports (December 2017).

business model always involves hosted stays, and that VRBO, by contrast, exclusively offers an experience without hosts. Therefore, NAD recommended that VRBO discontinue the challenged claim “What do you call an Airbnb without a host? – VRBO” or modify its advertising to avoid conveying the message that Airbnb always has hosts.

Finally, NAD examined two additional advertisements: (1) “Airbnb’s hotter, cooler, friendlier, long-lost twin that never has hosts,”⁶ and (2) “What do you call the perfect Airbnb you can’t find on Airbnb?” The first advertisement accurately explains that VRBO guests never cohabitate with their host. In this context, the phrase “never has hosts” accurately conveys the message to consumers that the host does not remain on-site with the guest, rather than implying that there is no designated person or entity serving as the “host” for the property. Rather than conveying an unsupported message that Airbnb requires that guests share space with hosts, it points to the accurate message that VRBO only offers spaces that are not shared by a guest with a host. NAD found that the second advertisement does not convey any messages regarding host-occupied or unoccupied stays. Consequently, NAD determined that these advertisements do not convey the message that Airbnb always has hosts that cohabitate with consumers during their stay.

III. Conclusion

NAD recommended that VRBO discontinue the challenged host-free claim or modify its advertising to avoid conveying the message that competitors such as Airbnb always has hosts that cohabitate with guests during their stay.

NAD further recommended that VRBO discontinue the claims in billboard advertising stating “What do you call an Airbnb without a host? – VRBO” or modify the claim to avoid conveying the message that competitors such as Airbnb always have hosts that cohabitate with guests during their stay.

NAD determined that the billboard advertisements stating “Airbnb’s hotter, cooler, friendlier, long-lost twin that never has hosts” was supported. NAD further found that the claim “What do you call the perfect Airbnb you can’t find on Airbnb?” does not convey the message that Airbnb always has hosts that cohabit with consumers during their stay.

IV. Advertiser’s Statement

VRBO will comply with NAD’s recommendation. VRBO maintains its belief that the net impression of each ad is only that VRBO does not allow hosts to remain with guests during a stay. VRBO thanks the National Advertising Division for its prompt review of the matter and appreciates its efforts. **(#7448 TR, closed 04/17/2025)**

⁶ In this Fast-Track SWIFT proceeding, NAD did not address the billboard ad to the extent it may claim that VRBO is “hotter, cooler, and friendlier.”

