

Tech Goes BIG, Security to the FORE, Gray is IN

BY GARRETT LAI

One of the big advantages to being at The International Travel Goods Show is the global overview. To tune in to what's trending, walk the aisles and peer into the booths at the world's biggest showcase for new travel products: 3.6 acres containing 314 exhibitors representing 450 brands and tens of thousands of items. It's a lot to absorb, but it's an invaluable perspective.

Luggage Goes Wired (and Wireless)

The big trend of this year's Show is within your arm's reach: sitting on the desk, or nestled in your pocket or purse. It's portable tech, and travel goods are the new category in the Internet of Things. Not long ago, self-

weighing luggage was the height of electronics integration in luggage. Today, we have suitcases that not only weigh themselves but can report their location, have biometric security features or locks that will only open at the urging of smart devices. They can charge your device, even function as a cellular hotspot.

Last year we saw some cases with technology integration that looked incredibly interesting, but didn't make it to market in 2015. Fast forward to this year, and while we have a lot of connected cases still in the prototype-for-show stage, firm delivery dates have been set (and in some cases, already come to pass) – so it looks like the technologically connected case has finally arrived.

Charging capability is the most

popular new technical feature in luggage, unsurprising given our addiction to always-on smart devices (which these days may store our boarding passes, our access to ground transportation à la Uber or Lyft, even our hotel room keys or luggage keys – more on that below). And the USB port has become the feature of the moment. In some cases, the charging device isn't included, but supporting accommodations have been made. Travelpro's Crew 11 series lets you connect your own USB power block inside the case, sending power to the bag's externally accessible USB port. Some companies brand their own battery packs, as Genius Pack does with its 4500 mAh unit. But third-party charging solutions such as the Joey charger



PHOTO: GARRETT LAI

RETAILER IMPRESSIONS

From Show Floor to Sales Floor

BY SARA ECCLESINE

Travel goods retailers, freshly returned from The International Travel Goods Show, are sorting through their notes, writing orders, and displaying their first shipments of new bags and accessories. Which products made the transition from show floor to sales floor? We call a handful of great retailers to get the inside scoop. Read on to find out which picks you agree with, and what treasures you may have missed.



KEVIN T. MASHBURN

Owner
Kamber's, Oklahoma City, OK

"Kamber's was founded in 1922, when 'Papa' Kamber was stranded in Oklahoma City by a snowstorm. I started working at Kamber's when I was 19, eventually purchasing the business. I've been going to The Show since 1974, more than 40 years. This year I saw a lot more hardsides, which is not great news for Kamber's, because our customers prefer softside 2-wheeled luggage. I was able to find some great softside luggage from Italian company RONCATO as well as DELSEY. I did appreciate the new finishes and textures that manufacturers are introducing on hardside luggage. They should hide scratches and scuffs, which are the number one complaint our customers have about hardside luggage."



MARK STERN

Owner
Savinar Luggage, Los Angeles, CA

"Savinar Luggage was founded in 1916, so we're celebrating our 100th anniversary this year. Because we've been around for so long

PHOTOS: ADAM TRECARTIN

(used by Urban Junket and Numinous London) are gaining ground, and may become the dominant format in our industry since this lets travel goods manufacturers focus on developing the luggage itself, and lets battery/electronics companies use their increasingly specialized expertise to provide the power solution.

A notable twist on portable device charging was Knomo's Drop & Go Wireless In-Bag Charging Purse, which uses magnets to position an iPhone 6/6s or iPhone 6 Plus/Plus S for hyper-efficient wireless charging (said to be 95-98% efficient, versus 60-70% from typical wireless induction chargers). The idea being that you can just drop your phone into the purse's charge pocket so it's continuously topped up, but also instantly available without the awkwardness of connecting/disconnecting a cable or the inefficiency of conventional induction chargers. It could be too device-specific to gain a lot of traction, but it doesn't take a genius to see how wireless charging will probably come to be the dominant technology – albeit quite a few years down the road.

Another interesting entry to the suitcase-with-battery ranks is Andiamo's iQ Collection, which includes a massive 6,000 mAh battery – enough to restore

a typical smartphone from zero to 100% five times over, and then some – and a cellular/Wi-Fi hotspot. You have to provide an appropriate SIM card from a cell carrier, but then you're good for hours of Internet access and wireless networking.

Electronic, biometric locks first surfaced at The Show a few years ago, more as conceptual proofs than actual items, but this year might be the tipping point toward retail realization. Planet Traveler's Space Case, touted as the world's most advanced smart suitcase, raised more than \$920,000 on Kickstarter and includes a fingerprint lock on its laundry list of tech features. Numinous London's smart suitcases also sport fingerprint security.

Bluesmart's TSA-accepted lock interacts with smart devices for security access; and Digipas USA was present to show off its eGeeTouch electronic locks keyed to NFC, RFID and Bluetooth-enabled smart devices for potential OEM customers, so we may see more electronic security in future luggage.

The specter of lost luggage continues to make luggage tracking a popular avenue for technology integration. It's

a selling feature for the Trunkster and Bluesmart suitcases, as well as Planet Traveler's Space Case. Last year's first-place Product Innovation Award winner, Lugloc, was at The Show selling its cell phone-size locator that you slip into luggage. It reports its location using GSM cell networks, and you can find your bag via a web portal, iOS or Android app. And the device is gaining traction, powering the location tracking feature for Samsonite, Trunkster, and other luggage manufacturers. Trakdot was also there, with its own tracker that provides location updates via website, iOS or Android device, but it can also send text or email updates of its location so it doesn't require a smartphone to function.

Bluesmart and Planet Traveler's Space Case featured proximity sensing as well, using Bluetooth technology to sound an alert if your smartphone and bag drift out of range of each other. It's similar in some ways to Royce Leather's Tracker and the Chipolo, which we highlighted last year as part of an emerging trend. Welcome to the age of integrated tech.

Self-weighting luggage, once a novelty, has become more mainstream. An increasing number of brands are

Continued on page 24

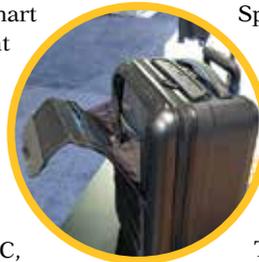


PHOTO: ADAM TRECARTIN

PHOTO: GARRETT LAI

and have grown up with the market, we're really diversified. We don't have a specific customer base; we do it all."

"This is my 35th year at The Show, and the most interesting innovations I saw this year were in luggage. Briggs & Riley had a great 4-wheeled garment bag, and added the CX expansion system to a hardside bag. Victorinox Swiss Army also showed an expandable hardside. It's a smart feature to add, it removes one of the perceived downsides of polycarbonate luggage. Hartmann redesigned the shape of a standard rolling bag in order to make it better balanced and easier to maneuver. I appreciate their effort, it's good to have a new technology story to tell our customers."



LINDA GREENBERG

Owner
Capital City Luggage, Ottawa, Canada

"At The Show, our first stop is the New Products Pavilion. After 20 years attending The Show, it never ceases to amaze me how manufacturers manage to reinvent travel industry staples - especially the neck pillow. The most creative new product we saw was Zinc Flyte, the luggage with a built in scooter. My 30-year-old daughter wanted one to ride around The Show. Luggage trends we liked included blue colorways, and hardside luggage fea-

turing beautiful new textures. Hardside luggage has become critical to our business, and now makes up 50% of our bag sales."

"This might not be considered a trend, but we very much appreciate how Briggs & Riley, Samsonite and our other vendors at The Show this year have helped us with our challenging exchange rate through special programs and discounts."



GAYNELL TROIANO

Travel Store Manager
AAA Findlay, Findlay, OH

"I love The International Travel Goods Show. People think I'm crazy because I get so excited to go to The Show, but what a great way to see everything."

"AAA customers are mostly leisure travelers, both families and individuals. They're concerned about security, and this year Travelon® was showing an attractive women's concealed-carry bag. The bag was well thought out and very safe. Luggage covers from Fancy Armor also really caught my eye, people worry about lighter colored hardside luggage getting scuffed up. I placed an order with DELSEY while I was there, and I also thought Travelers Club looked great. I would have bought more but we're in a middle of a remodel and there's no place to put product. I'm just itching to put orders together!"

PHOTO: ADAM TRECARTIN

Continued from page 23

including self-weighting bags in their lineups, such as Planet Traveler, Princess Traveller (with seven self-weighting collections), and tech-enhanced newcomers Trunkster and Bluesmart, among others.

One ingeniously simple application of technology came from Traveler's Choice, in the form of its patented HIBEAM LED Lighting System, an LED light strip that illuminates the suitcase's interior like a car's trunk light. It's currently featured on some private label pieces, but if you've ever rummaged in your suitcase trying to match socks inside an unlit hotel closet, you know it's worth keeping an eye out for this technology to appear in retail channels. It just makes too much sense.

Selling Restfulness

The other unmistakable trend of this year's Show: travel pillows. It felt like last year's Show hit a saturation point for these in-flight amenities, but if anything, the 2016 crop of slumber augmenters was even bigger. Besides the dozens of already-established pillows in the exhibit hall, this year's New Products Pavilion played host to eight puffy sleep enhancers, all of them with their own twist on in-flight restfulness.

Bullrest might have had the most

unique take on the subject with its highly structured, incredibly compact design. The pillow – about the size and shape of ski goggles – fits just behind the neck to cradle and support the cervical vertebrae, and the lower base of the skull.

Sitting on a table, the inflatable Cloudz has a silhouette that resembles a small mushroom cloud. It's a face-forward pillow, designed to rest on a tray table and cradle your head with its ring-like pillow, resembling a massage table. One unique feature: wrist pass-throughs, which let you view your tablet, phone or a book held within the hollow, vertical supporting column.

FaceCradle and the Kaz Headrest are both front-facing pillows; FaceCradle rests against your chest or attaches to the seat back to support your head in hammock-like fashion, the Kaz Headrest sits atop a tray table or desk.

Grand Trunk's Adjustable Travel Pillow cinches to vary its level of support, while the Hooded Travel Pillow covers the eyes and ears for more isolated slumber.

The flipillow™ combines horseshoe and contour pillows so it can be a face pillow when lying prone, a conventional

travel pillow with additional support for the head or upper back, or its horseshoe and wedge-shape portions could be separated and used independently.

Cabeau, which basically launched with a travel pillow in 2009, is proof that you can go far with this category. It currently lists four pillows in its product lineup, including the new Evolution Cool that got enough retailer attention to garner the Buzz Award as the most talked-about new item at The Show. Its U-shape form was punctuated by large, radially oriented vents to minimize skin contact and enhance cooling, so while it has a familiar shape it's visually quite different, and that's often enough to start a sales conversation.

Hardside Domination Continues

Hardside luggage continues to dominate at The Show. Polycarbonate clamshells still rule the roost, but there's also a lot of inventive use of other structurally tough plastics like molded ABS. This isn't to say softside luggage is dead – we saw plenty of beautifully stitched 4-wheelers and the more outdoor-oriented companies like Granite Gear, Athalon, High Sierra and Eagle Creek had plenty of rolling duffels on display. But look around the train

Continued on page 26



PAMM JULIAN
Buyer
National Stores, Inc., Los Angeles, CA

"National Stores Inc., a chain of 300 stores based out of L.A., is known for our good deals on famous-name brands. Our travel goods department is focused on luggage, backpacks, rolling bags, and rolling duffels. Most of our clients are Hispanic families purchasing luggage for family vacations. They have a lot of pride: while they want to get a good price, they also want to show they're doing well by carrying a bag with a designer label. I was impressed by the collections from Travelers Club, Travelpro, the Adrienne Vittadini Collection by Rugged Equipment, and Guess? from Signal Brands. We appreciate the many manufacturers that understand that there is a value to doing business with all levels of trade."



MATT HOWE
General Manager
It's...In The Bag, Palm Desert, CA

"At It's...In The Bag! our customers are able to budget a substantial amount of disposable income to travel, and as a result they travel

more frequently, take longer trips (often 2-3 weeks) and visit a wider range of countries than the national average. Safari trips to Africa are still popular, but we're seeing a lot of travel within South America, and a new trend is Antarctica. Our clients come to us to fully outfit them for their trips, including attending packing seminars that emphasize travel accessories. Travel clothing is huge this time of year, and lightweight luggage continues to be strong."

"Printed hardside bags are the big trend in the industry, and Heys printed luggage sets the bar high. We're also an exhibitor (TagsForBags) and our booth was across the aisle from Heys. We were staring at their printed bags all day long. Just unbelievable. Other collections we liked included the new lines from Ricardo Beverly Hills, and the Briggs & Riley limited edition navy for holiday. We have done well with the Briggs & Riley Baseline CX and I think the Sympatico CX will take off! LOMS Luggage was also a standout. What a beautiful line of bags, and it's all made in America. The bags are a lightweight polycarbonate with a molded diamond pattern, and a carbon fiber reinforcement band. They're on our sales floor already!"

"A smart new product we've brought in and started selling is the ORGO. While people will buy the ORGO for toiletries, it has so many uses. I think they'd be great for my kids for car trips. Another product that I thought was pretty cool and will be a great travel accessory for our store is the Arm-Share. The Arm-Share attaches to the arm rest on the plane and gives both passengers ample arm room."

PHOTOS: ADAM TRECARTIN

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MATT HOWE; PHOTO: ADAM TRECARTIN

Continued from page 24

station, the cruise ship terminal and the airport baggage carousel and there's no denying the fact that hardsides are increasingly the dominant species on planet luggage.

A couple years ago we reported on the phenomenon of "softsiding," giving hardsides more softside-like features such as external pockets or easier access. The trend has definitely gained momentum for 2016, with a variety of interpretations.

The Spectra 2.0 carry-on from Victorinox Swiss Army is a typical zippered clamshell, but includes a zippered front panel that allows access to the interior without having to fully open the expandable clamshell halves.

Mia Toro's Esotico and Profondita hardsides add front-panel zippered access to their clamshell configurations.

Antler's Neptune incorporates a front-access workspace for laptop, tablet and working accessories.

Nuki showed its Front Opening Hardshell luggage, in ABS and layered polycarbonate.

Other front-load access hardsides were displayed by Adrienne Vittadini, Andiamo, it Luggage, J World, Kingport Trading, Lojel, the Long Run Group, Mia Toro, Rockland, and Traveler's Choice (whose Barcelona front-loader

came with packing cubes – a logical way to add value). Olympia showed a case with a unique take on external access: an external, detachable cargo net.

Another developing hardside feature cribbed from the softside playbook: expansion. Briggs & Riley applied its CX™ expansion-compression technology to its Sympatico™ polycarbonate hardsides. The cases expand for 25% more capacity, but compress down to hold items in place and minimize bulk. And the just-introduced Victorinox Spectra 2.0 Collection, which ships in June, features bellows-like expansion panels between its two polycarbonate halves. The carry-on bags expand about an inch (3 cm, to be exact), while the checked bags provide 5" (13 cm) of expansion, with exterior compression straps that can fine-tune the size and snug down to prevent the contents from shifting.

Good Year for the Grays and Blues?

The color game is always interesting at The Show. There's definitely potential for a sales advantage when

making fashion-forward selections from the color wheel. But at the same time, with 10-year and lifetime warranties we can expect luggage to enjoy a lengthier service life than most wardrobes, so it's a fine art – you want to be fashionable, but pick colors that look like they'll have the legs to go a few seasons without looking dated.

Walking the aisles and looking at colors, the big winners for 2016 seemed to be grays and silvers; and a lot of blue. Aside from being neutral – essentially falling somewhere on the continuum between black and white, depending on the shade – silvers and grays offer up a lot of range. You can go with conservative charcoals and gun-metal tones, or lean toward playfully brighter ash and metallic hues. And the same can be said for the spectrum of blues, from midnight blue and navy to fun tones like teal, sky and baby blue.

Granite Gear's new Reticu-Lite Collection featured contrasting, irregularly shaped silver-gray panels that were eye catching, and also highlighted the bags' functional forms.

Ricardo Beverly Hills included silver and gray in its new Roxbury 3.0 and Malibu Bay Collections.

Continued on page 28



GWIN HAMMOND

Director of Marketing, Category Buyer
Mori Luggage & Gifts, Atlanta, GA

"A big trend I saw was smart luggage with features like USB charging, Bluetooth, and GPS tracking. We haven't had many customers ask for it yet but we're going to test it in a couple stores. I also took a second look at DELSEY's Chatelet Collection, the luggage with brakes. It came out last year, and I think it's time for us to try it out. I can see the value of luggage with brakes, I've had a few bags run away from me. I'm also excited about the Hartmann Ratio Collection. We ordered them right away and they should arrive in April. Licensed bags have been popular for us, so I was happy to see a lot of good-looking Disney and Marvel products."

"We've already received a shipment of the Cabeau Evolution Cool™ cooling neck pillows that we found at The Show, and I'm sure they're going to sell well. Cabeau has been our number one pillow for a few years now. People don't really think twice about paying more for their quality pillows. Another smart accessory I found is a travel pill case from Talus with a built in alarm. It makes sense for traveling when you're out of your routine, but it's so well designed and practical, I think our customers will end up using it every day."



SHANE LEWIS

President
Elephant Trunk/Newton Luggage, Tulsa, OK

"Tulsa has aerospace as well as oil and gas industries, so our customers travel a lot for work. I was impressed with the Korchmar and Scully premium briefcase lines. Jack Georges also expanded their American-made buffalo leather collection. It was very popular last Christmas, so we're bringing in more. The Briggs & Riley lifestyle bags are very fresh and exciting, it's great to see them continue to grow. This year Knomo had some nice blues, and Briggs & Riley, Granite Gear and Knomo had some very attractive gray colors in their collections. The Pendleton bags look great, we put in an order for this fall. We have a Pendleton store here so our customers already have good brand awareness."

"After 20 years in the industry (and 18 years at The Show) I've learned that accessories sales carry us through the down years. I love seeing what my friends at LCI are up to, as well as CCL Security Products, COCOON travel pillows, Travelon® and Go Travel. KeySmart is new vendor I picked up at The Show. We immediately brought it in and their product is selling already. I carry a lot of accessories but we can always sell more. Travel industry: make us more gadgets!"

PHOTOS: GARRETT LAI

PHOTOS: GARRETT LAI

Continued from page 26

The new Kinzie Street™ Collection from Briggs & Riley came cloaked in proprietary Tartex™ fabric, which was gray with a silvery sheen.

Antler brought its metallic-sheen Atom hardside, a brand new case two years in the making, constructed from Armordon®, a self-reinforcing thermoplastic originally used to safely contain and channel the blast of improvised explosive devices (true fact, and a terrific sales story).

24-7 International's Steve Madden Collection includes a gray collection for the fashion-forward brand.

Victorinox split the difference between the gray/silver camp and the blue camp with its Spectra 2.0 in Navy Blue that, with its polycarbonate sheen, was more steel blue than classic navy.

Briggs & Riley's Sympatico hardsides showcased an eye-catchingly intense blue, with matching weekender tote and backpack; the company's BRX line debuted an intensely rich "BRX Blue," a deeply vibrant variant of sea blue.

The blue motif even spilled over into packaging: LCI Brands unveiled new branding for its Lewis N. Clark line, making heavy use of light and dark blue product packaging.

Earth tones, which last hit a high point about eight years ago, seem to be making a comeback. The more "outdoorsy" or millennial-focused the brand, the more likely it was to lean on olives, forest greens, beiges and tans. Bellmonde and United by Blue made good use of this end of the color spectrum with their canvas selections; Travelpro's new Marquis 2 came in sage green. Antler's Tundra and Urbanite sported sage and beige fabrics. And Hex, with its VW Microbus and hipster-bearded staffers, showcased a number of earth tone items as well as a selection of gray offerings.

It also appears that plain, solid colors are disappearing from the hardside landscape. If a case is monochromatic, it's likely to feature a textured shell rather than a smoothly polished front. There are a couple of functional reasons for this – an irregular surface provides some scratch protection, and helps hide scuffs and scrapes; plus a textured pat-

tern, especially corrugations and ribbing, can stiffen a shell and add to the perception of strength without adding hefty reinforcing members.

Standouts in this arena included Antler's new Atom with its distinctive honeycomb pyramid, Briggs & Riley's ribbed Sympatico, various offerings from 24-7 International and its stable of brands, and ZERO HALLIBURTON's iconic banded ribbing. Textures varied from geometric patterns

like ribs and striations to Luggage's visually impressive embossed artwork that included skulls, landmarks like bridges and towers, roses and other strong graphics.

Artwork on hardsides is big, and getting bigger, as manufacturers seek ways to differentiate their products.

Brands which got this trend rolling, like Heys Luggage and Travelpro, with its National Geographic license, have seemingly doubled down with more and more photo- and artwork-festooned hardsides.

There are too many brands to list altogether, but good examples include Visionair (Felix the Cat and Charles Fazzino), Mia Toro (pop artist Jozza) and BG Berlin (various world artists).

Last year's fondness for whites and off-whites appears to have faded. And, thankfully, our brief flirtation with day-glo also appears to have left the building, at least where luggage is concerned (but those retina-searing hues will remain in luggage tags, straps and identifier-type accessories, where their attention-getting is a functional enhancement).

Anti-theft is Rising

Pacsafe, which launched in 1998, built its reputation on thwarting theft and, arguably, created the anti-theft luggage category. It started as a mesh net of stainless steel cable for hostellers to secure their bags during day trips about town, but once the company developed its Exomesh material in 2001, integrating the steel strands into the fabric itself, it really gained a following. Many of the bags feature locking zippers and snap links on cable-

reinforced shoulder straps, so they may be secured to fixed objects like the train station bench you're dozing on, waiting for the Orient Express.

Travelon has had similarly armored luggage in its lineup for a couple of years. Its Heritage Collection, which has a vintage canvas-and-leather look, is backed up with hidden stainless steel mesh to fight slash-and-grab theft, and snap-locking zipper pulls to ward off pilferage. Numinous London also includes anti-slash technology and puncture-resistant zippers on many of its offerings.

But the most prolific anti-theft technology at The Show didn't guard against physical theft, but information/identity theft, now a pervasive feature in some categories.

With the proliferation of RFID-enhanced passports and driver's licenses, along with the rising popularity of contactless, NFC technologies in smart devices and credit cards, the general public has become more aware of this potential vulnerability, and if that smells like a good sales opportunity, it is. Almost every manufacturer of carry-ons, business cases, purses and wallets includes RFID in its lineup, if not all across the line (and this includes Pacsafe, Travelon and Numinous, who augment their physical anti-theft features with RFID shielding).

Loksak showed its Shieldsak, a standalone 4.5" x 5.5" RFID-locking pouch, and many travel accessory purveyors had similar offerings that are an easy way to add RFID protection to existing bags or clothing (read: ideal for add-on sales).

Fewer, Stronger Trends

Longtime Show-goers remarked that this year's Show seemed to have fewer evident trends. But the trends that were apparent this year were quite strong, and are likely to continue building momentum.

One thing is for sure: change is inevitable, and as travel evolves, and as lifestyles alter around things like connectedness and electronics, we'll see those changes reflected in travel goods. And the best way to see change happen is to attend The International Travel Goods Show every year.

