Lost Your Luggage? Your Stuff May Be for Sale in This Store

The Unclaimed Baggage Center in the tiny town of Scottsboro, Alabama is a huge shopping destination, drawing more than one million visitors per year from all over the United States, as well as 40 countries and counting. What’s so special about this strip mall store?

It contains the contents of “mishandled” luggage from various airlines that, upon waiting the required 90 days after a bag goes missing (during which time the airline is to be tracking down the original owner), is sold at deep discounts in bulk to “Unclaimed” (as it is known to the locals). The contents vary from the mundane (lots and lots of clothes), to the expensive (tablets, jewelry and laptops) to the one-of-a-kind (African tribal regalia, a saddle mounted on a faux horse), and shoppers have been flocking to the family-owned store since its humble beginnings in 1970. For every 1,000 airline travelers in the U.S. this year, nearly four of them dealt with lost luggage. As luggage makers and airlines increasingly implement “smart” luggage tags with RFID tracking technology, fewer bags are likely to go missing. But until then, Unclaimed's business is sure to keep booming.

SOURCE: NEW YORK TIMES

Airbus Patents a Virtual Reality Helmet for Passengers

Airline manufacturer Airbus has patented a virtual reality (VR) helmet that is designed to help passengers forget that they’re on an airplane. In a filing with the United States Patent and Trademark Office, Airbus has outlined a design for helmets that provide “sensorial isolation” via headphones for music and an “optoelectronic screen” to watch movies or television. A virtual keyboard can appear on the tray table so, in conjunction with motion capture gloves, passengers can type easily. Olfactory inputs and ventilation mean wearers can even enjoy custom odors and fresh air. The manufacturer has no immediate plans to bring the VR helmet to market, but the fact that the company has even filed for a patent, says Wired’s Alex Davies, serves as a tacit acknowledgement of just how unpleasant air travel can be.

SOURCE: WIRED

Set Sail with This Year’s Hottest New Cruise Ship

The first of a new class of cruise ships, Royal Caribbean’s Quantum of the Seas, was recently christened in New York Harbor after its maiden voyage from Southampton, England. Though it’s not the largest ship in Royal Caribbean’s fleet, (that honor is held by its Oasis class of vessels) it is one of the 10 largest ships in the world, and it’s particularly notable for some unique features. USA Today says it may be the decade’s hottest new cruise ship, thanks in part to industry-first amenities like bumper cars, a skydiving simulator and an articulating crane arm called NorthStar, which can carry 14 passengers in a glass capsule up to 300 feet above the water. With nearly 2,100 staterooms, the Quantum of the Seas can accommodate 4,905 passengers at maximum occupancy. Unlike most Royal Caribbean ships, it features no main dining room nor traditional cruise dinners where passengers are seated together every night. Instead, travelers make reservations at one of more than a dozen restaurants on board. The Quantum of the Seas will spend its inaugural season based in Cape Liberty, New Jersey, sailing to the Caribbean and Bahamas, before repositioning in May of 2015 to Shanghai, China where it will sail 3- and 8-day itineraries to Japan and Korea.
Hilton Hotels to Turn Smartphones into Desk Clerks and Room Keys

Members of Hilton's HHonors rewards program can now select specific rooms and make special requests, even check in and out and unlock their rooms, all via an app on their smartphones. The long-term plan is for guests to skip the normal check-in process entirely, heading straight to their pre-selected room and accessing it with their phone. Hilton has invested more than $580 million in IT infrastructure since 2007, and the HHonors app for Apple and Android devices is designed to cash in on the upgraded networking of the company's increasingly “smart” hotels across all of its brands. Hilton joins other hotel chains, including Marriott and Starwood, who have apps with similar capabilities. Choice Hotels, for instance, recently announced it would begin accepting reservations directly from the hands-free system of new Ford vehicles.

Podtels Shrink the Hotel Experience

British company Podtime has pioneered personal sleeping pods that are about seven feet long and three feet in diameter — just big enough for a single individual to climb in for a private night's rest. It's part of the capsule hotel movement. While these little pods might look futuristic, they're gaining popularity around the world. Put a couple of pods together, and suddenly you've got a pod bunk; a few more and you've got a podtel. Podtels are a fraction of the cost of a traditional hotel — literally, about one fifth the cost — and so are targeted at young travelers on tight budgets. According to Podtime founder Jon Gray, the company has deals in place to build podtels in Israel and Finland, and they're even investigating the possibility of building podtels in airports.

Internet Access is Critically Important to Travelers

According to ITC Infotech, the age of the “always on” business traveler means hotels must ensure they step up their IT game with reliable, round-the-clock technical support. The company cites Arqiva, a British telecommunications company, which recently reported that hospitality businesses without proper IT infrastructure are compromising customer loyalty. 87% of guests say they've accessed hotel wireless networks, while 75% said they'd rather have a week without coffee than a week without internet access. For the modern traveler, internet access is of utmost importance.

Travel Trendspotting

The WTM Global Trends Report from World Travel Market identifies key changes to traveler habits for 2014. The findings include a handful of particularly notable trends. For instance, an increase in cycling among middle aged men could cut into the golf industry's share of travel and tourism dollars. Hostels are giving themselves facelifts, turning them into glamorous “Poshtels” in order to attract a more style-conscious traveler. The Airbnb approach to crowdsourcing is expected to cross over into restaurants, as European-traveling foodies seek out more authentic dining experiences. Hotels are offering better perks and rewards to travelers who use social media to post pictures and positive reviews of their visits, and an increase in surfing tourism is putting African destinations on the sustainable travel map. Ultimately, the report finds, the travel market continues to grow worldwide, up 5% this year.

Andiamo Announces New Luggage Collections and a New Brand Ambassador

Luggage maker 24-7 International LLC has brought back award-winning luxury brand Andiamo via its Andiamo Luggage LLC subsidiary, and partnered with a new brand ambassador. The brand's two collections are the Avanti, a soft-side luggage line, and Pantera, a hard-side collection — and both are already available in stores. “As we relaunch this legacy brand,” said Scott Kosmin, president of 24-7 International LLC, “we have honored its history of uncompromised luxury. The retailer and customer response has been warm and welcoming. The addition of author, fashion mogul and television host of ABC's 'Shark Tank,' Daymond John, has brought heightened visibility to the brand. Daymond represents success, and success translates to the desire for luxury goods at all levels. There's a synergy that's unique to this category.”
Pivotal Granted Patent for Innovative Pivot-Grip Luggage Handle

Luggage maker Pivotal has been granted a United States patent for its unique Pivot-Grip handle, which rotates 360° for effortless maneuverability during travel. The rotating handle is designed to reduce arm and wrist strain, and make handling multiple pieces of luggage much easier, even in crowded airports and parking lots. The Pivot-Grip handle is featured on the Pivotal Soft Case and Transport Case gear bags.

SOURCE: PIVOTAL

Samsonite’s Plans for Hartmann Luggage

Samsonite, known for its sensible luggage, purchased luggage brand Hartmann for $35 million back in 2012. Now the company is relaunching the 137-year-old classic line favored by the likes of fictional characters Don Draper and James Bond, as well as a couple of real life American presidents. Based on Samsonite’s skill with technology and distribution, the company expects retailers will be keen to give the revived luxury brand a place in the market. Samsonite’s own luxury brand, Black Label, was deemed a failure because shoppers associated it with the company’s traditional mid-tier offerings. Hartmann, though, is expected to reach $500 million in annual sales within five to seven years, according to Samsonite’s new CEO Ramesh Tainwala. The brand has a new flagship store on Manhattan’s Madison Avenue to help increase sales from $7.9 million in the first half of 2014, down significantly since the acquisition of the label. Hartmann products are sold at department stores worldwide, but Samsonite’s plan is to increase sales primarily via its own branded stores.

SOURCE: FORTUNE

SNI’s Exclusive Agreement with The Travel Halo

Sourcing Network International has signed an exclusive licensing agreement with the inventor of The Travel Halo to develop, launch and exclusively supply the innovative travel pillow. SNI is a major wholesale manufacturer and distributor of travel and fashion accessories, including brands such as Cloudz, Travelab and B-Iconic. The Travel Halo is a compact and portable travel pillow that recently won a Product Innovation Award from the Travel Goods Association. Its two stabilizing pillows, which attach to a headband with an eye mask, cradle the back of the head to fight the kinks and cramps that come with sleeping upright.

SOURCE: SOURCING NETWORK INTERNATIONAL

National Geographic Partners with Craghoppers

Craghoppers has become an official travel apparel partner of National Geographic, providing National Geographic-branded apparel throughout North America. “We are thrilled to partner with such a storied and revered organization,” said Lindsey Hayes, CEO of Craghoppers North America. “We take great pride in the heritage and quality of our apparel, but we’re equally as proud of our philanthropic efforts around the world. We are privileged to be able to partner with an organization whose brand vision aligns with our own and who will help further cement the Craghoppers brand as a leader in travel apparel.” Craghoppers’ National Geographic apparel will be available in spring 2015. National Geographic will use net proceeds from the sale of its branded products to support exploration, conservation, research and education.

SOURCE: CRAGHOPPERS

Lipault of Paris Becomes Celebrity Gift Bag

At the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards, celebrities and performers the likes of Beyoncé, Ariana Grande and Iggy Azalea were presented with Lipault of Paris stylish wheeled satchel bags as red carpet gifts. The gifts were presented by Backstage Creations, one of the premier gift bag companies in the country. The Lipault satchels featured a variety of prestigious products and gift certificates inside. According to Karen Wood, president of Backstage Creations, “We chose Lipault for the VMAs star gift bags as they are so stylish and sleek. With celebrities’ jet-setting lifestyles, we expect to see stars carrying these fashionable bags on their travels soon.”

SOURCE: LIPAUlT OF PARIS

Royce Leather Named to Inc. 5000 List of Fastest Growing Companies

With its eighth annual Inc. 500/5000 list, Inc. magazine has named Royce Leather number 4475 among the nation’s fastest-growing private companies. For the second year in a row, Royce Leather has been recognized as a top performing small business. The family business began 40 years ago in New York to create handcrafted luggage and travel accessories, and has grown to become a global brand. Its GPS Tracking and RFID Blocking wallets have garnered widespread acclaim from the likes of “The Today Show,” “Fox News” and The Los Angeles Times. “Our growth is not an accident,” says Royce marketing director Billy Bauer. “It is the product of a company with well-defined values.”

SOURCE: ROYCE LEATHER

Lipault’s stylish wheeled satchel bag was selected as the official celebrity gift bag of this year’s MTV Video Music Awards
Bugatti-Sedona Acquires Bond Street and Stebco

Bugatti-Sedona, a Canadian company that produces and distributes business accessories, has made its first business acquisition. Michael Schwartz, owner of Bond Street Ltd., sold his 85-year-old brands Bond Street and Stebco to Bugatti-Sedona in order to provide the firm a strong foothold in both Canada and the United States via Bond Street’s New York headquarters, as well as a “good, better, best” approach for growing the merged company’s brands. “This acquisition will help continue our rapid growth and market share in the United States and Canada,” Andrew Hattern, president of Bugatti-Sedona, told Schwartz. “Our companies are committed to growing your business with new and innovative products, and maintaining high inventories with quick shipping to meet your best expectations.” Bugatti-Sedona specializes in the design, import and distribution of business accessories such as briefcases, writing cases, travel bags and luggage. SOURCE: BUGATTI-SEDONA INC.

RejuvaHealth Launches Kickstarter Campaign

Compression legwear maker RejuvaHealth wanted to expand its popular line of RejuvaSocks, so it turned to a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign in order to raise the necessary funds. Because compression legwear is an everyday necessity for many, particularly during travel, RejuvaHealth’s founder Kelsey Minarik wants to expand the company’s designer offerings to make the lineup even more appealing for fashion-conscious consumers. Minarik hoped to raise $20,000 in a month-long campaign, but she far surpassed her goal with plenty of time to spare. The funds will be put toward four new patterns: chevron, houndstooth, argyle and herringbone. SOURCE: REJUVĂHEALTH

Eagle Creek Wins Supplier of the Year Award

The largest outdoor retailer in Germany, Globetrotter Equipment, has awarded Eagle Creek the 2013-2014 Supplier of the Year Award. Known for its quality, durable, innovative products, Eagle Creek is becoming increasingly well known in the European market. The honor shows that Eagle Creek is dedicated to top-level customer service to its clients around the world. “We are really excited to receive this award,” said Oliver Messing, managing director at Eagle Creek Europe. “Our international team works very hard to provide top level service to all our retailers and it’s nice to have that work recognized by such an important partner, especially as an up and coming brand in Europe.” SOURCE: EAGLE CREEK

RIMOWA Opens New Stores in New York and Miami

Luxury hardside luggage maker RIMOWA has opened its first stores in New York City and Miami. The Miami location is found in that city’s design district, while the prestigious Madison Avenue location of the New York offering brings to six the total of RIMOWA stores across the country. Other locations include Beverly Hills, Waikiki, Las Vegas and San Francisco. SOURCE: RIMOWA

Sumdex Updates Logo

Case accessory maker Sumdex, Inc. has updated its logo to reflect the company’s new “fashion driven style of quality.” The Southern California-based company plans to continue bringing innovation, technology and high-class quality to its cases for e-readers, tablets and notebook computers. SOURCE: SUMDEX

Psi Bands, ‘Shark Tank’ and the Mission Main Street Grants Program

In March of 2013, Romy Taormina, inventor of the acupressure motion sickness relief device Psi Bands, appeared on ABC’s “Shark Tank” television show. On the show, inventors and entrepreneurs try to convince one of four high-profile financiers to invest in their budding companies. As a result of that initial appearance, Psi Bands partnered with the National Breast Cancer Foundation (NBCF), which reached out to join forces with Psi Bands after seeing the episode. As part of October’s Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Psi Bands donated a portion of the proceeds from the sale of every Color Play Psi Band design to the NBCF. “Shark Tank” has moved to CNBC, and now the Psi Band episode can be seen amid reruns airing five nights a week. Psi Bands has also recently advanced to the panel review process of Chase Bank’s Mission Main Street Grants Program, and will present the story of its small business to the panel of judges who will ultimately provide 20 grants of $150,000 to support small businesses. Grant recipients will be announced in January 2015. SOURCE: PSI BANDS
Edwards Changes Name, Updates Store

Edwards Luggage, a destination travel store that has been serving San Francisco’s bay area for 68 years, has recently remodeled its space and updated its brand with a new name. The newly remodeled Edwards Everything Travel store features a fresh new look of chrome, light gray and white, with hardwood floors and a more open, customer-friendly environment. The state-of-the-art store features beautiful new shop-in-shops by Briggs & Riley, RIMOWA, Tumi and Victorinox. Learn more at the company’s new website, edwardseverythingtravel.com. SOURCE: EDWARDS EVERYTHING TRAVEL

Some Digital Merchants Take Traditional Retail to School

According to National Retail Federation (NRF), some digital retailers are disrupting the traditional boundaries of selling, and they’re shaking up the retail industry. NRF offered a list of the top 11 companies to consider. That list includes: Beautycounter, which offers products for hair and skin made from the industry’s strictest selection process; Novosbed, which offers American-made memory foam mattresses at half the price of prominent competitors; Plated, HelloFresh and Blue Apron, all of which handle food shopping and meal preparation for those with specific tastes and busy lifestyles; Quirky, a site that allows creative people to submit their own ideas for products and influence the design of those that are voted into production; Everlane, a company that offers a glimpse behind the curtain of its luxury apparel and accessories manufacturing process in a bid for total transparency; Zady, which fights disposable culture with deliberately sustainable fashions; Keep, an app that makes it easy to purchase fashions and accessories from a variety of notable retailers; and The Legaspi Company, which is actually a brick and mortar commercial real estate broker that repurposes empty malls into thriving non-traditional retail and community spaces. All of these companies are disruptive, and all of them have a thing or two to teach traditional retailers. Learn more at nrf.com. SOURCE: NATIONAL RETAIL FEDERATION

E-Retailers Use Dynamic Pricing to Compete with Amazon.com

E-retailers such as eBags.com are working to compete with online retailing giant Amazon by emulating that company’s dynamic pricing strategy. Dynamic pricing means that the price on an item fluctuates regularly depending upon the influence of competitor pricing and demand. On Amazon, for instance, a price may change multiple times in a single day. At eBags, prices move within a range that allows the company to find “the revenue and profitability sweet spot for every SKU.” It’s a tactic that retailers must increasingly consider in the face of constant downward pricing pressure from the earth’s largest store, and a trend that is likely to continue. Even though, as Peter Cobb, cofounder of eBags says, price is only part of the puzzle. eBags uses loyalty programs and top-notch customer service, as well as participation in Google’s Trusted Stores program for purchase protection, to help customers feel confident about their purchases. SOURCE: INTERNET RETAILER

Luggage & Leather Awards Employee a Free Trip to Disney World

Rick Gilger, president of Houston-based travel retailer Luggage & Leather, had long wanted to offer an employee sales contest with a great grand prize: a trip to Walt Disney World Resort near Orlando, Fla. From May to June of this year, all employees received one entry in the drawing when sales goals were met, plus the top salesperson from each location would receive an extra entry. In the end, Dayra Escaler, “a top notch sales assistant from our number one store,” won the contest, and took her son to the Magic Kingdom on an all-expenses-paid five-day, four-night vacation in August. “We were all excited that she would get to take her five-year-old son to such a magical place,” said Devon Corley, vice president of sales and marketing for Luggage & Leather. Ricardo Beverly Hills and Hartmann contributed to the contest.

Shoppers Use a Smartphone App to Help Keep Shelves Stocked

With the goal of helping retailers reduce the incidence of empty shelves, marketing analysts Datacrowd has developed the Shelfie smartphone app. When a customer encounters a sold out item, they simply take a picture of the empty shelf and its accompanying product tag, then submit it via the app which also records GPS location data so that Datacrowd can notify the retailer about which products are out of stock. For their good work, the customer receives rewards points that can be redeemed in-store, and even used to purchase other participating brands. To download the Shelfie app for Android and iPhone, visit takeashelfie.com. SOURCE: NATIONAL RETAIL FEDERATION
Meet Fred Healey, NLDA’s New Executive Director

The National Luggage Dealers Association (NLDA) welcomes a new executive director, Fred Healey, who’s bringing some new energy and vision to his post. Healey comes to NLDA with 30 years of experience in the retail sector, including the last 14 years in various positions with Sears Holding Company.

Q: How does it feel to be joining NLDA?
A: Joining the NLDA team is an exciting opportunity. We focus on what really matters to our members, buyers and partners, and what ultimately helps drive traffic into our members’ stores.

Q: What are some of the new things NLDA is doing to help its members?
A: New cost-effective marketing opportunities leveraging NLDA buying power will become available to members, external buyers and vendors. NLDA will have even more goods and services that buyers cannot get or find anywhere else.

Q: What are you most excited about with the changes to come?
A: The word is out that the NLDA is growing and changing. We have new members already committing for 2015, as well as higher engagement levels from many of our current members. Members are noticing the evolution of the NLDA, including aspects such as great promotions, more services and new opportunities.

SOURCE: NLDA