New Biometric Screening Service Speeds Travelers Through TSA Checkpoints

A new concierge service offers biometric screening for air travelers who want to skip long lines at Transportation Security Association checkpoints. The company, Clear, uses iris scanning and fingerprint checks to verify a passenger’s identity and move them past long lines directly to TSA screening stations. TSA’s newest measures show average traveler wait times have dropped below the 30-minute mark. Services such as Clear’s biometric scanning improve on that time by enabling travelers to skip lines altogether. Clear charges $179 per year for its service which, when combined with TSA PreCheck (at a cost of $85 for five years), provides valuable time savings for frequent travelers. The screening service is currently available in 13 airports throughout the U.S. and Clear says it plans to have 24 airports on board by year’s end.

Source: CBS News

Latest Trends in Cruising

In its July 2016 CruiseTrends report, CruiseCompete, a travel website where travel agents compete to offer customers the best cruise deals, lists the most popular cruise lines, ships and itineraries for cruises all over the world. The most popular cruise lines in July were Carnival, Oceania and Viking River Cruises in Premium, Luxury and River categories, respectively. The most popular ships in those same categories were Oasis of the Seas, Queen Mary 2 and American Queen. The Caribbean is the most popular premium cruise destination, with Europe leading in both Luxury and River cruise categories. Miami is the most popular port of departure for Premium and Luxury cruises, while Amsterdam leads the River cruise category. CruiseTrends produces its monthly CruiseTrends report for an inside look at consumer trends in cruise vacations.

Source: CruiseCompete

USTA’s Travel Outlook

The Federal Reserve is fairly optimistic about the state of the U.S. economy, but overall growth is slow. Consumer confidence astounds and the labor market is solid, yet real GDP grew at just 1.2% in the second quarter of the year. Travel-related spending was minimal and, aside from net exports, the rest of the economy was expected to contract. Deutsche Bank economists wrote that current trends could be a sign of long-term changes to the economy – namely that economic growth and the natural rate of interest for the U.S. economy are structurally low, or even negative. Other economists are more optimistic, citing the economy’s resilience in the face of factors that have historically triggered recessions. Ultimately, it appears the U.S. economy is on a dual track with bullish consumers and hesitant businesses.

Source: USTA

The Effects of Brexit on American Travel

When Britain voted this summer to exit the European Union, the ramifications extended far beyond the kingdom’s shores. For American travelers heading to Europe and the U.K. some of the effects are immediate. The British pound dropped precipitously at the announcement that Brexit was a success. That means American dollars buy more in the U.K. thanks to more favorable exchange rates than have been seen in 30 years. The dollar has also improved against the euro, making travel to the continent more affordable, too. One impact on American travel may be a decline in U.S. visits from Britons whose pounds don’t take them as far as they did last year.

Source: The New York Times

Many Credit Cards Cover Lost or Delayed Luggage

The best credit cards for travel insurance are Chase Sapphire Preferred, City ThankYou Premier, Citi Prestige and Wells Fargo Visa Signature, according to the 2016 Travel Insurance Report issued by CardHub, a credit card comparison website. The report examines travel insurance provided by most popular credit cards for things like trip interruptions, lost luggage and accidents. According to the report, 42% of credit cards provide lost luggage insurance, while 26% provide insurance against delayed luggage and just 9% provide coverage against both. One third of those cards offers more than $300,000 in coverage. Illness and natural disasters, the report says, interfere with the travel plans of one out of every six Americans.

Source: CardHub

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**J.D. Power’s 2016 Hotel Guest Satisfaction Survey**

Overall hotel guest satisfaction has increased for the fourth consecutive year. So finds J.D. Power in its newest hotel guest satisfaction survey. The increase in satisfaction rates is smaller, however, than in recent years, which may indicate that guest satisfaction is reaching a plateau thanks to features that were at one time considered “extras” now being considered standard. The study uses a 1,000-point scale to grade hotels across eight categories, from extended stay to luxury, judging them on seven key indicators of overall satisfaction: reservations, check-in/checkout, guest room, food and beverage, hotel services, facilities and costs. Overall satisfaction increased this year just two points, to 806. Luxury hotels, however, saw the biggest increase in satisfaction, up 12 points from 2015. Satisfaction is notably higher among older guests who are members of a hotel’s rewards program. The study also found that only 3% of guests take advantage of mobile check-in and checkout, but satisfaction is highest among users of those mobile tools. The three most important free perks are Wi-Fi, breakfast and parking, followed by luxury bed linens, offered in just 37% of rooms. Ritz-Carlton, Moni Hotels and Resorts and Hilton Garden Inn all ranked highest in upscale and luxury categories. Drury and Wingate by Wyndham ranked highest in the mid-scale categories, while Microtel Inn and Suites by Wyndham, Hyatt House and Home2 Suites by Hilton were favorites in economy and extended stay hotels.

**Source:** J.D. Power

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**Comparing Airfares**

Airfare is an airfare, right? Not so, as seasoned travelers know. From seat size and spacing to in-flight entertainment options and fees for everything from head-phones to carry-on baggage, it can be difficult to compare apples to apples when shopping for airfare. Routehappy, a product differentiation platform for air travel, makes it easier for consumers to compare amenities while comparing fares. Its recent agreement with Trivax, a Dutch global travel agency, brings the improved shopping results to travelers who want to compare amenities on travel sites in 28 countries. Trivax and Routehappy are inviting airlines to share comprehensive product content for flights all over the world so customers can easily compare food and beverage options, entertainment options, aircraft, seats and more. Photos, videos and virtual tours are designed to make the shopping experience even more meaningful for consumers.

**Source:** Trivax

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**Travelers Waste Most of Their Loyalty Points**

New research reveals that, for the last five years at least, the vast majority of travel loyalty points have gone unused. It seems that travelers leave more than 70% of their points unredeemed. That’s more than one trillion reward points wasted since 2010. The data comes from Switchfly, a travel commerce and loyalty platform that powers websites and rewards programs for some of the world’s biggest names in air travel and lodging. So far in 2016, 195 billion points have gone unused.

**Source:** Switchfly

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**Hotels Sell Experiences, Not Just Rooms**

New hotel brands have stopped selling rooms and started selling experiences. Marriott’s Moxy brand doesn’t just book rooms for guests, it offers communal spaces for socializing and gaming. Guests aren’t called guests, they’re “fun hunters.” Hilton’s Canopy brand promises to reflect the neighborhoods in which they’re located, meaning that the days of uniformity and conformity within a brand identity are over. Hyatt’s Centric brand, now with seven locations, caters to “modern explorers,” a term the company says isn’t just reflective of an aesthetic but of their travel philosophy as well.

**Source:** CNN

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**Five Myths About Online Travel Agencies**

U.S. News and World Report recently busted five myths about online travel agencies. First, the myth that there are lots of OTAs to choose from. In fact, consolidation means Expedia owns Hotwire, Travelocity, Hotels.com and Orbitz Worldwide, while Priceline owns Booking.com and Kayak, among others. Another myth is that OTAs always offer the best rates, when in fact that’s no guarantee. Online travel agencies also usually mean a compromise when it comes to loyalty rewards points, but they don’t necessarily mean a compromise on customer service. Lastly, while online travel agencies may have originated as a method for finding deals, these days OTAs are also useful for finding travel inspiration, no matter how a traveler ultimately books a trip.

**Source:** U.S. News and World Report

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**The Top 10 Reasons Travel is Better Than Ever**

Bloomberg recently compiled a list of 10 innovations that make travel today better than ever: TSA is receiving a much-needed overhaul. Expedia’s 30K plugin makes it easier than ever to track airline miles. Standard Hotels lets travelers check in and out at any time of day. Last-minute flights are no longer exorbitantly priced thanks to apps like Hopper and DealRay, and a wealth of restaurant apps make last-minute dining reservations easy as well. For air travelers, lost luggage is at an all-time low, airline Wi-Fi is better than ever and premium economy seating is increasingly available. Avis offers a Tinder-like rental car app that allows users to browse available cars at their destination, swiping right when they find one that suits them. And in the near future, more options will be available for high-speed planes and trains, including a NASA-led supersonic airplane that the space agency expects to be in production in just a few years. It is, indeed, a great time to travel.

**Source:** Bloomberg
**DELSEY Partners on a Power Trip**

Luggage maker DELSEY recently partnered with Marie Claire magazine on its exclusive Marie Claire Power Trip. It was a first-of-its-kind in-flight networking event and pop-up conference for a select group of women at the top of their fields. The unique 36-hour experience transported attendees from New York City to San Francisco, where powerful women from technology, media, fashion and public policy met for a networking event at the W Hotel. Each attendee traveled in style with her own DELSEY Chatelet carry-on bag. Attendees and speakers included Tyra Banks, Drew Barrymore and Gwyneth Paltrow, among many others. As part of the deal, the Chatelet was also featured in Marie Claire’s “The Mix” section of its June 2016 issue.

**LifeGear Design Partners with Numinous London**

LifeGear Design, makers of an earth-friendly collection of light luggage, travel bags and accessories, recently inked a deal with Numinous London to bring the British maker’s high-tech, high-quality bags to the North American market. Built by craftsmen and made of the finest materials, Numinous London’s bags include innovative touches such as biometric locks that use a fingerprint to release, as well as anti-slash fabrics, anti-puncture zippers and built-in chargers for mobile devices. Magi Raible, CEO and creative director of LifeGear, calls Numinous London’s fine products “the perfect complement to our LifeGear brand.”

**Walter + Ray News**

Walter + Ray, makers of stylish and functional space-saving travel gear, has been the recent beneficiary of tremendous press coverage. Peter Greenberg wrote about the company’s Bendyman flashlight, which offers a compact lighting solution that doubles as a stand for tablets and smartphones. In a feature on summer travel gadgets, “Great Day Washington” (produced by CBS affiliate WUSA 9 in Washington, D.C.) recommended the versatile Bendyman flashlight, as well as the ArmPillow, which covers an airplane armrest for comfort. The summer 2016 issue of Allergic Living magazine featured the Tab Messenger seatback organizer, the perfect place to store essentials for a flight. It fits in a seatback pocket, or it can hang from tray table legs or stow under the seat.

**Travelpro Sold**

American luggage brand Travelpro International, Inc. and Canada’s Holiday Group, Inc., which together form the Travelpro Group, a leading supplier of luggage and travel accessories, have been sold to private equity firm MidOcean Partners. Other MidOcean portfolio companies include Bushnell Outdoor Products, Hunter Fan, Freshpet and Water Pik. Travelpro Group’s senior leadership team will stay on to expand the company’s market presence in partnership with MidOcean’s management and acquisition resources. “We see tremendous opportunity for growth and investment in both businesses,” said new CEO Blake Lipham, “and [we] are excited to get to work on those initiatives. [The brands] have very esteemed reputations for quality, durability and dependability and we plan to continue to deliver on those tenets of success while driving growth both organically and through acquisition.”
Eagle Creek Named Best in Class

Eagle Creek’s Gear Warrior 32, from the newly redesigned Outdoor Gear luggage line, received the 2016 Best In Class Award from The Gear Institute. Testers responded well to the ease of use, durability and separation of gear and clothing in the Gear Warrior 32, as well as features like multiple grab handles and the Equipment Keeper with bottle opener that allows equipment to be attached to the top of the bag. “We are really honored to be presented with the Best In Class Award from The Gear Institute,” said Roger Spatz, president of Eagle Creek. “We are known for building the best performing, longest lasting luggage on the market, and we are pleased the testers appreciated the time, energy and devotion that went into designing and reinventing the newest Outdoor Gear bags.” For more information on The Gear Institute, visit www.gearinstitute.com.

SOURCE: EAGLE CREEK

Innovative Luggage Calls for Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding websites such as Indiegogo and Kickstarter have become very popular vehicles for launching innovative new luggage designs. Last year saw the zipperless Trunkster become the most successful crowdfunding travel campaign ever, earning more than $1.4 million on its way to an eventual $28 million valuation from investors on ABC’s “Shark Tank.” This year, bags such as the TLS Connect, the Modobag and the Cowarobot R1 are hoping to become the next big thing in travel as they, too, were launched with crowdfunding. The TLS Connect, spawned from a partnership between eBags and Twyst, is a smart backpack that not only knows what it’s holding but also can track individual items via RFID tags and an integrated smartphone app. The Modobag is a carry-on bag with wheels, a seat and telescoping handlebars, making it the first truly rideable carry-on luggage. And the Cowarobot R1 is the world’s first robotic suitcase. The autonomous bag rolls along on four wheels, following its owner and avoiding obstacles in the process. Whatever might be next in the high-tech world of luggage innovation, crowdsourcing is sure to introduce it.

SOURCES: INDIEGOGO AND KICKSTARTER

Bric’s Launches New Moleskine Line

Bric’s USA has partnered with Moleskine to launch a new luggage collection this fall. Moleskine by Bric’s is a capsule collection of trolleys and travel bags the company says are “designed for ordinary and extraordinary journeys.” To celebrate the new collection, Bric’s hosted a special preview launch event in New York City at the top of the TRUMP SoHo. The line was very well received, particularly some of the unique new features and styling that make it a more urban collection, designed to appeal to millennials who increasingly consider their luggage and accessories as a means of personal expression.

SOURCE: BRIC’S USA

Lojel’s Flagship Retail Stores

Boutique travelware company Lojel partnered with Canadian architect Jonathan Kan on two flagship retail spaces in Hong Kong and Jakarta. Several more locations are planned. Kan’s vision for retail takes inspiration from Lojel’s young and young-at-heart customers. “As a starting point,” Kan says, “we took inspiration from urban youth culture such as parkour, which we saw as an act that reimagines how an urban inhabitant ought to interact with the cityscape.”

Sliding ladders and peg-board systems make use of vertical space and create ever-changing arrangements of matrices to highlight new products. The retail displays evolve with each season and new product line.

SOURCE: LOJEL

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eBags is Innovating and Growing

With sales up 23% year over year, eBags has recorded record growth for the second fiscal quarter of 2016. It was aided by online retail giant Amazon and its July 12 Prime Day event, when eBags saw 25% more sales volume than the next highest 2-day period in the quarter. Amazon Marketplace growth increased 43% over 2015, and on eBags.com itself sales were up 25% year over year. Site visits grew 34% since the same quarter a year before, and mobile users increased by 55%. At a time when many retailers are struggling, eBags’ business is thriving. The Denver Post recently featured eBags prominently in an article about how retailers can hope to successfully compete with Amazon. In the case of eBags, it’s an effort largely shaped by constant innovation. The company tested 12 new technologies last year and adopted eight of them. For instance, eBags adopted mobile-specific technologies to make shopping easier on small screen devices, a coupon-code page to attract coupon-based shoppers in search of deep discounts, and another smart technology that suggests similar products if a particular item is out of stock. eBags is also working to develop what it calls “The World’s Smartest Backpack.” In partnership with technology company Twyst, eBags is using Kickstarter to fund the development of the new TLS Connect, which enables travelers to tag up to 50 belongings with RFID tags, create custom packing lists with the bag’s accompanying app and receive immediate notification if an item goes missing. The backpack can also recharge devices thanks to its integrated Lifeboat battery. After 17 years in business and more than 26 million bags sold, eBags has become the largest online retailer of luggage, backpacks and accessories.

Retail Faces Ever-Increasing Challenges

In its 2016 Top 100 Retailers report, the National Retail Federation outlined many of the challenges facing retailers. Brick and mortar stores account for 90% of all retail sales, but the challenges continue to mount. That nine-tenths share has been steadily falling in recent years thanks to increasing acceptance of online shopping. Retail experts agree that it will continue to drop until the distinction between online and physical retail becomes indistinguishable to consumers. That’s not the only challenge facing physical retailers; by 2020, consumers will spend $2 on experiences for every dollar they spend on stuff. Also making life difficult for physical retailers are digital marketplaces that cater to small or individual retailers – sites like Etsy, eBay and Amazon Marketplace. The Top 100 Retailers themselves are directly addressing these challenges. The number one retailer, Wal-Mart Stores, is investing more than $2 billion into its e-commerce technology and logistics. Number two retailer Kroger is expanding its CheckList program that allows customers to shop online and pick up groceries curbside. The company is even experimenting with at-home delivery. Some stores, such as number 37 retailer Gap, are taking the “if you can’t beat them, join them” approach. Gap is even considering selling its clothes via Amazon. Speaking of the ecommerce goliath, Amazon is putting the pressure on its competition, both online and off, as it expands its distribution centers to 160 facilities nationwide – 42 of which are capable of delivering Prime Now orders in two hours or less. The company is also expected to become a major force in the grocery business as well, as its Amazon Fresh and Prime Fresh services are expanded from the handful of cities currently served. Following the lead of its 7,400-square-foot Seattle store that sells books and the company’s proprietary line of electronics, Amazon is planning additional retail locations. Rounding out the top five retailers are Costco, Home Depot and Walgreens. For more information and to view the complete top 100 list visit www.nrf.com.

NLDA Partners with JUMP Paris

The National Luggage Dealers Association (NLDA) has formed an exclusive partnership with luggage brand JUMP Paris to distribute its products throughout the United States. JUMP’s 2016 collections will launch this fall in nearly 100 retail stores across the country. “NLDA members are top-ranking luggage professionals,” said JUMP’s Managing Director, Julien Ehret. “It gives us confidence in the success of the JUMP brand to secure sales in the best shops throughout the United States.”

Julien Ehret, managing director of JUMP Paris, and Scott Niekelski, NLDA’s import manager, shaking hands in honor of the new partnership.