

RECOGNIZED and *Inspired*

BY GARRETT LAI

Inspiration is the best form of leadership. It can take the guise of entities: people and companies. It can come in the form of products and designs. It can be a philosophy, an outlook.

Inspiration challenges the status quo. It moves us to action, to break out of the ordinary and strive for something bigger. To be something better.

In an industry that serves travelers, it's only fitting to find among ourselves inspiration in forms as diverse as there are destinations and reasons to travel, pointing the way forward.

These are the people, the products and the ideas that were recognized at this year's Awards Ceremony, at The 2018 International Travel Goods Show.

Corporate Crusaders – Doing Business for a Cause

Each year, we have a large number of nominees for **TGA's Community Service Award** – a reflection on the quality of our members, and how TGA is as much a community as it is a trade association. This year, confronted by an unusually worthy slate of nominations, the Community Service Awards Committee was unable to narrow down the finalists to a single winner, and declared a draw.

Both of this year's winners have community tightly woven into their corporate DNA, where giving back isn't a special event, but business as usual. They both practice a brand of philanthropy that goes beyond occasional help and charitable giving. This is full-time contribution and direct action – corporate activism at its finest.

This year's winners literally roll up their sleeves and dig in. Please join us in congratulating United By Blue and YaY Novelty, winners of this year's Community Service Award.

United By Blue Saving Earth's Waterways, One Item at a Time



United By Blue was founded in 2010 with a single product, and a simple customer pledge: For every organic cotton, made-in-USA t-shirt sold, United By Blue would remove a pound of trash from the world's waterways.

The company hosted its first cleanup the same week it made its first sale. It's grown enormously since then, but still holds true to that founding promise, removing one pound of trash from the waterways for every item sold. To date, company-led cleanups have cleared more than a million pounds of

trash – from plastic straws and bags to construction materials and whole cars – from waterways in 28 states, with more to come.

United By Blue takes its name from the idea that every living thing on earth is unified by water, in the form of the planet's oceans and waterways. "We had a desire to preserve the place where we play," explained Dave Laegen, a wholesale rep and an early UBB employee. "Instead of writing checks or accepting donations, we wanted to make a real, tangible impact on our oceans – and there are few things more tangible than hauling tires out of riverbeds or picking up plastic bottles along the shoreline."

Continued on page 68

Scott Kosmin (center) presents Jake Nalls (left) and Dave Laegen (right) of United By Blue with this year's Community Service Award.

Continued from page 67

Cleanups are scheduled, carefully orchestrated grassroots events at the local level, which in the summer may number as many as five a month. As the company has grown, its cleanup power has too. “Our cleanup team has a method of identifying illegal dump sites and trashy public hotspots using Google Maps in conjunction with local municipalities. For example, in our hometown of Philadelphia, we work with the Philadelphia Water Department to target key trash areas and access sites that would normally be off limits.”

“A huge progression has been in finding where fridges and tires and mattresses and cars are being dumped, and being able to utilize our infrastructure and planning abilities to get the right equipment out there. We’ve had scuba divers go down and leash together shopping carts, so they could be yanked out with a tow truck. As we’ve advanced as a company we’re able to really get into these hotspot trash areas.”

Mobilizing – and Building – Community



United By Blue’s simple customer pledge: For every item sold, we’ll remove one pound of trash from the earth’s waterways.

Cleanups are every UBB employee’s responsibility, not just the cleanup team’s. “It’s every person that works for our company. It’s their responsibility to get their buddies out, their families out, and themselves participate,” stated Laegen, who has personally gotten his hands dirty at more than 20 cleanups.

The company sees its cleanups as a 50/50 effort between themselves and its volunteer base. To date, UBB has mobilized more than 10,000 volunteers to wade in and contribute – not with

money, or purchasing a special product – but by actually putting in personal time and muscle. “Without our community and the ability to engage volunteers, we wouldn’t be able to accomplish anything near the weight totals we’ve seen over the years,” Laegen noted. And the key word here is engagement, which shapes United By Blue’s products and permeates every aspect of its customer relationship.

Visit the company site, and Cleanups is one of the most prominent links. UBB champions its activist ethic – removing trash doesn’t mean writing checks or accepting donations, but actually getting out there and picking up trash, with the stats prominently displayed on its website like stock tickers: Pounds of trash removed (1,057,416), number of cleanups (209), number of states (28). There are links to volunteer for upcoming cleanups, even to nominate a local eyesore or dumping ground as a candidate for cleanup, including the nature of the trash in question: paper; bottles and cans; household castoffs; construction debris; tires; cars; appliances.

“When it comes time to choose



United By Blue doesn’t write checks or take donations, they run the cleanups themselves, joining volunteers for cleanup events. UBB has mobilized 10,000 volunteers, and hauled over a million pounds of trash from waterways in 28 states to date. And counting.

cleanup sites, there are two questions to ask,” Laegen said. “Is it a waterway? And is there trash? Then it’s a game of where exactly is the site, who owns the land that it’s on, and how do we work through the red tape to get hundreds of people out to clean the area?” At the time of this writing, there were nine cleanups you could sign up for on UBB’s calendar, stretching through August 2018. Past cleanups have a group photo of the cleanup crew, with the trash totals below, posted the way

sport fishing boats ballyhoo their haul: 4,187 lbs removed from Philadelphia’s lakes at FDR Park, 1,464 lbs taken from Manhattan’s East River; 3,085 lbs fished from the Delaware River in Pennsylvania.

The write-ups play up the fun. And, surprisingly, these cleanups are not all-day affairs – two hours seems pretty typical. For example, the lakes at FDR Park event hosted 88 volunteers, and netted more than two tons of trash in just two hours. Weird finds included a discarded Phillies hat, a rusty bucket of golf balls, and a burnt memory box (perhaps marking the fiery end to someone’s relationship?). Hit up UBB’s Facebook page and you’ll see photos of volunteers collectively shouldering a colossal concrete pillar, people of all ages filling garbage sacks and dredging up all manner of man-made detritus. Volunteers seem to enjoy posing with trash like big game hunters with their kills. This is the kind of community feel marketers dream of, and it’s 100% authentic. This isn’t contrived, but a natural outgrowth of UBB’s conservation outreach.



UBB identifies trash hotspots, and gets the equipment in to remove it, like using divers and tow trucks to pull big items from the muck.

One key to UBB’s ability to mobilize volunteers is partnering with local organizations, extending its reach beyond its customer base. These cleanup partners can be environmental, like the Surfrider Foundation and Newport Bay Conservancy; they can be institutional, like the local parks and rec department or water utility; they can be retail partners like REI, which carries UBB products. They can even be like-minded stores like honeygrow, a regional fast casual restaurant chain with a locavore

menu and environmental ethos.

Partnering with other organizations for cleanups also helps spread UBB's message – providing brand awareness that reaches potential customers who share its environmental ethic. Mega corporations and big brands are trying to manufacture authenticity and lifestyle messaging. UBB simply lives it. There is a gritty, hands-on aspect to literally wading in and pulling trash out of the environment. And this resonates with its customers, who aren't shy about posting their brand loyalty – and love – on social media.

Authentic Product Story



The bison is a terrific symbol of environmental enlightenment – it was nearly hunted to extinction, but now enjoys sustainable numbers – and the perfect backstory to connect UBB's customers and products.

What began as an initial run of four t-shirt designs has since blossomed into a full collection of responsible, durable goods that includes apparel, bags, personal accessories like sunglasses and boots, home decor and camping gear. Sustainable materials are central to United By Blue's identity, and its product story.

One terrific example is the Ultimate American Sock, which also happens to be the company's fastest-growing product. Bison are farmed for their meat and leather, but not their fur. "We found a way to shave hides before they go into leather production, sort and separate the fiber (the fur), and we use the soft insulation – the inner 'down' – to make socks, gloves and beanies. And we use the coarse material to insulate our jackets. Bison fiber is 30% warmer than wool by weight, and it was completely discarded before we were using it," Laegen explained. "We now operate a shaving facility in Alberta, Canada, where we have seven full-time employees who shave bison."

The bison story works for United By Blue on so many levels. It's a sustainabil-

ity story that resonates with its customers. It's pragmatic, creating better products. And it fits its environmental ethos, which drove the company to seek B Corporation status, which is to business what Fair Trade certification is to coffee, or USDA Organic certification is to milk. B Corps are for-profit companies certified to meet rigorous social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency standards. "We became a B Corp because we have one hand in the apparel industry and the other in waste management – and both hands are making a difference," quipped Laegen.

It's not really fair to call this millennial marketing, because that's not the



Bison fur was a waste product until United By Blue began putting it to use. Inner, insulating "down" is woven into fiber for socks, gloves and hats. The coarse hair becomes insulation in jackets.

motivation, but United By Blue's ethos does align it with the awakening trend of story-based marketing. Consumers – millennials and Gen-Y especially – are increasingly drawn to products with a story. As the industrial/manufacturing world keeps shrinking, as the marketplace has become more and more global, this has become a key tactic against commodification. Story enables you to differentiate your wares in a world of me-too goods, where you can find a near-identical widget at a cheaper price online, if not the store down the street. It's a problem plaguing every industry, and definitely afflicts a lot of categories within travel goods.

In less than eight years, United By Blue has grown from a manufacturer with an online store to opening four brick-and-mortar retail locations, beginning in 2013 with its flagship space in an early 1900s building in Old City, Philadelphia. But it's not so much a retail space as it is a coffee house and gathering place. "Our purpose was to create a welcoming, collaborative space grounded in sustainability for the Philadelphia community, a place

where adventurers can discuss weekend getaways, laptop warriors can get whatever-it-may-be done, and customers and volunteers can meet and experience our mission," explained Laegen, who notes the company's home city is hardly an outdoor hub. "We're sort of the shepherds of the outdoors. We're bringing people outside, showing them how they can experience the outdoors, and also making them aware of the effects of plastics in the ocean. We're able to get people through our doors, educate them on our mission, they now shop our sustainable products, and it's this full life cycle that didn't exist in Philadelphia before."



Environmental messaging is core to UBB's message, image and products. Bison fiber wool finds its way into gloves, beanies and socks.

That strong environmental ethos is UBB's compass. "We'll continue to live by our mission and all products will continue to be made from sustainable materials or promote a sustainable lifestyle. This means that as we grow, we'll push what it means to be sustainable in design, using only the most sustainable fibers and fabrics as well as engineering our own unique materials," Laegen enthused, noting a greater product reach also enables the company to clean more trash from the world's oceans, and engage more volunteers in more locations.

United By Blue's ambitious goal for 2018 is conducting cleanups in the remaining 22 states they've yet to touch directly, removing another 500,000 lbs of trash. It's a laudable goal, one in keeping with this young company that's as much about the planet as it is the product. ■

YaY Novelty

Going Back, Giving Back



YaY Novelty's Sunchea Phou was presented with this year's Community Service Award by Scott Kosmin.

In 1983, when she was seven years old, Sunchea Phou went for a walk with her mother. They didn't return. They walked for two weeks, fearing discovery – on pain of death – escaping to spend five years in refugee camps. It was an experience that shaped her life's trajectory.

Sunchea Phou (pronounced "sun-chee pooh") was born in Cambodia in 1977. It was the Khmer Rouge era, which ruled 1975-1979 with an ideology of peasant communism, brutally attempting to create a purely agrarian society. They forbade all imports, including food and medicine, and executed all white-collar professionals and non-ethnic Cambodians. They killed over 2 million people, in a country of 8 million, leaving a legacy of more than 20,000 documented mass graves.

"When I was one year old they took my dad and my brother. We assume they were killed, we never heard from them again," Phou said. She ultimately lost another brother, an aunt, an uncle and her grandfather. Vietnamese-led forces ousted the Khmer Rouge, triggering a 10-year civil war. This was the



Khao-I-Dang's bamboo and thatch huts once housed 160,000 Cambodian refugees. The camp opened in November, 1979, and for a time averaged 1,600 new arrivals daily. It closed in March 1993.

state of Cambodia in 1983, when Phou escaped to Thailand.

"We crossed the border by foot, we walked. I still remember. It took us about two weeks to cross the border. I didn't really understand what was going on, but I do remember every day what happened." At seven, Phou couldn't fathom war, but she recalls frequent gunfire. She knew to hide, but didn't know the stakes. Her aunt was robbed and killed attempting this same crossing – soldiers shot her on sight. If caught in Thailand they'd be repatriated, probably killed. They had to sneak into a refugee camp, Khao-I-Dang, a compound of 40,000 souls.

"In the camp, we didn't have an ID," Phou recalled. "So we were still illegal. If you got caught, they sent you back." The process of gaining an ID was almost Orwellian in its absurdity. The camp was regularly swept for infiltrators, but during periods of leniency the undocumented could gain legal status. All you had to do was evade capture until then.

"One day I saw so many soldiers. I told my mom, and she said this was the day they're going to catch people, so we hid. I remember people hiding inside the latrine, down the hole. Some people hid in water containers, and they drowned. Or they'd hide underground, and die in a collapse. A lot of people got killed that day. A lot of people got caught and sent back. We got lucky, and escaped. Whoever was left, they gave an ID."

Phou and her mother remained in Khao-I-Dang for four years. They were held in another camp for a year before immigrating to Canada. Phou was now 12 years old, a 5-year resident of the camps.

Montreal, School, and the States

They arrived in Montreal with no money at all. Her mom began doing piecework, production sewing. Phou helped, working every day after school, before homework. And she made it to college. "I chose computer science because I was good with computers. I was already a teaching assistant for that. But at the last minute – I'd already paid my fee and everything – I changed my mind and switched to fashion design."

Phou graduated and went to work at Explosive Fashion. "They did high-



Phou with the 2014 Super Bowl trophy, won by her hometown Seattle Seahawks in Nike uniforms of her design, and also a YaY Wallet with the number 12, for the Seahawks' famous "12th man."

end clothing for mature and plus-size ladies. I started as a sample sewer, and the pattern maker wanted to support me and gave me the chance to work on pattern making on the computer; because I was good at computers I could get through fast. I started doing that job, and did custom clothing at home. It helped me with the skill of fitting, and I became a fit expert."

Montreal was a saturated job market for Phou's skills, so she moved to Seattle, WA, where there was more demand. "I worked for REI about five years. I was a pattern maker and fit expert. Then I moved to Eddie Bauer, working as a pattern maker and on fit and technical design. I took charge of Japanese fit. I took the U.S. designs and changed them to Japanese fit. That was my job. I did that about five years."

Phou's history was an advantage. "I started in manufacturing, before it was sent overseas. When I moved to Seattle, not many people here knew the whole process of manufacturing, who also knew fit and pattern making, so my skills are rare."

Phou was contacted by a recruiter for Nike, which had just won the contract for NFL uniforms. They'd spent six months searching for someone who knew fit, manufacturing and technical design. Phou was a shoo-in, moving to Portland, OR.

NFL rules only permit uniform changes every five years. By chance, Phou's adopted hometown team, the Seattle Seahawks, were first up. It was a 2-year process, with Phou at its center. "The Seahawks had their concept of

what they wanted, it had to go through the NFL commissioner, and the designer comes up with the graphic. I had to take that design, apply it to the garment in 3D, and it had to be producible. Sometimes the factory said they couldn't do it. I had the manufacturing background and had been a production sewer so I had to teach the factory how to do it. If it couldn't be done I had to come back to the designer and ask for changes."

And it's more than one uniform. "The NFL, they have linemen, linebackers, runners, everybody has a different fit and shape. But the design has to be exactly the same in all shapes. That is the challenge, to make sure the design is intact when sized up, and can be executed by manufacturing."

It was a grueling 2-year push. Phou often slept at Nike, keeping odd hours to coordinate with Asian production and team owner Paul Allen's whereabouts (she remembers flying a uniform sample to South Africa, by private jet, to get Allen's approval overnight). She was no stranger to hard work, once holding four jobs – running a donut business, contract production sewing, a permitting business for septic systems and her full-time job. But it was grinding. After squiring the NFL project through to completion – the Seahawks would win the 2014 Super Bowl, in her uniforms – she left Nike to pursue an idea she'd nurtured over a decade.

Why and Why



Phou with one of her workers, a Cambodian work-at-home sewer like she and her mom once were growing up in Montreal, Canada.

In 2003, Phou returned to Cambodia for the first time. "I wanted to go see. I left there so young, I don't have much memory of it. I do have memories of what I went through, the drama, but not the country." She was there a month, and

saw houses flooded to the roof, crops destroyed and families without income or access to food. "I started with a rice donation, for three villages. It's a corrupted country, and all the NGOs (non-government organizations) can't help everybody."

The trip's imprint prompted Phou to begin incubating an idea, a company that used its profits to help. This would be her cause, post-Nike. She visited 21 of Cambodia's 24 provinces in a month, to learn first-hand where help was needed most.

Cambodia is still tremendously impoverished – 30-40% of the government budget is foreign aid, and NGOs provide many essential services. "But there are places where NGOs can't go – it's too far from water or electricity, or too dangerous." Phou focused on Ratanakiri Province, bordering Laos and Vietnam. "I went all the way to the edge of it, this small village. And I asked this kid, 'Tell me one thing you want from me.' And he said 'school.' All the kids told me they just want school."

"Most of the kids only speak their own dialect. In the whole village, only one person can read and write in Cambodian. The land all around the village has already been taken," said Phou, who explained how swindlers exploit the ignorant and illiterate. Witnessing the village's sole literate person labor-



YaY Novelty's Sunchea Phou, distributing school supplies at the school she personally funded and built, in Cambodia's Ratanakiri Province. Founded in 2013, it's still operating today.

ing over a piece of metal roof used as a desk, and how the kids were without books, prompted Phou to act.

She drove to the capital, nine hours away, and returned with supplies – chalk, pencils, books. She brought

water filters – villagers were drinking from the same stream where they'd do their laundry. She found building materials, arranged transport and labor, and in a few days built a schoolhouse for 35 kids. A month after she left, she learned the neighboring village heard about the school and asked to share. The school began hosting day and night shifts, educating children from both villages. She'd spent \$15,000 USD out of pocket, impacting dozens of lives.

YaY, in YaY Novelty, stands for "Why and Why," as in Why the company exists, and Why the products exist. The former provides resources for Cambodians. The latter connects fun with function and self-expression, evident in YaY's line of soft goods that includes wallets, totes, luggage tags and passport holders – there are even pet products – with more to come.

YaY also benefits stateside refugees. Phou's work force is pieceworkers, like she and her mom were. "A lot of ladies who came here have no education and no skill. They have a hard time finding jobs. I try to give them that opportunity by training them. Some of these ladies have young kids; they cannot afford day care. They can do this work at home, with their schedule, and still take care of their family."

YaY Novelty contributes 20% of profits to the YaY Foundation, which Phou founded to provide Cambodian relief. The next project is ambitious. "There are a lot of orphaned elderly who need help in basic needs like food and medicine," she declared. A large percentage are women whose husbands and children were killed. Many in Phou's generation emigrated and are no longer present. With no social services in Cambodia, the elderly rely on the generosity of neighbors, many of them also impoverished. "I'm gathering data, trying to find a village that needs this help. I want to bring the elderly together and give them support, like a community, with a cook and regular doctor visits. My goal is to have them lead their lives worry free, in this last stage of their lives."

Phou's inspiring story is one of personal survival and triumph, of finding one's footing in a foreign place, a new adopted country. And it's about going back to where you came from, and empowering others so they might have the chance to experience your same good fortune. ■

Product Innovation Awards

If products are the engine that drives the travel goods industry, innovation is the fuel that keeps it going.

Travel is evolving, and travel gear is keeping pace, and in some cases even leading the way. Today's travel gear is as indispensable to the travel experience as airliners, cars, or any other form of transport. And global on-the-go culture makes travel goods an indispensable part of everyday life.

Product innovation is what keeps our industry relevant and thriving, which makes TGA's Product Innovation Awards akin to the industry's Academy Awards. The 5-member Product Innovation Awards Committee meets and votes on the entries, which are all taken from the New Products Pavilion, with the winners announced during the TGA Awards Ceremony during The Show.

These are the refreshing new items the committee found to be interesting and current with how people travel, where they're headed, and what they take with them. Our winners:



First Place Travelmate Robotics



Jerry Kallman presented Angelina Hueltt of Travelmate Robotics with the First Place Product Innovation Award.

The purpose of luggage – and one of the best parts of travel – is being able to bring along all the things you want

to have with you. And the worst part of luggage is that you have to actually bring it – carry it or roll it or somehow take it with you. This is the problem Travelmate Robotics solves.

The Travelmate suitcase is a robotic suitcase – think of it as a self-driving car, in carry-on form. The case will follow its owner, autonomously, like a well-trained dog. Its autonomy comes in the form of automatic speed-matching and obstacle avoidance, so you don't need to worry about it running you over, or turning around to discover your suitcase has gotten itself wedged beneath an airport kiosk halfway down the concourse.

Travelmate is controlled via Bluetooth-connected smartphone, and can also obey voice commands. You can even name your suitcase, teaching it to know when it's being addressed.

The case itself is striking in appearance, with “omni wheels,” oversize wheels with rollers around their circumference, so they permit movement like swiveling wheels, without castering. The wheels also allow Travelmate to drive itself while upright, or laid down, for more stability. Its pullout handle allows it to be wheeled about manually, like a regular suitcase.

The ABS and polycarbonate case includes GPS tracking, self-weighting, and the removable battery that powers

the robot can also charge devices via USB 3.0 as well as a 110-volt outlet.

It's an extremely future-reaching item, pitched not as a robotic suitcase, so much as it is a suitcase from a robotics company. “Our plan is to keep adding features and making your Travelmate a smarter gadget,” declared Maximillian Kovtun, company president.

Travelmate's 21” case retails for \$1,099, and is currently in production, with anticipated delivery to commence in late April.

Second Place Travel Mat by thermalay



James Bounsall, the inventor of Travel Mat, was presented with the Second Place Product Innovation Award by Jerry Kallman.

Non-restful flights have inspired countless would-be inventors to try improving the travel pillow. Travel Mat inventor James Bounsall went beyond, to create a whole-body sleep surface that wowed the Product Innovation Awards Committee.

In essence, Travel Mat is a neck pillow with a 60” convoluted foam mattress attached, that can be deployed to provide whole-body support in airline seats, airport lounges or other public transportation. It can be used on the floor as an impromptu sleeping pad,

or rolled up or folded to function like a more conventional cushion. The Travel Mat – MSRP \$50 – rolls up for portability, and features a washable cover of bamboo fabric.

“I think I’ve circled the world four times, so I know what it is like to travel,” said thermalay Director James Bounsall. “I wanted the Travel Mat to be as close to perfect as I could get it before introducing it at The International Travel Goods Show. When they announced number two was the Travel Mat by thermalay I was stunned. It has definitely opened doors and gives Travel Mat recognition.”

Third Place

TUPLUS One 20" Aluminum Carry-on Suitcase



Jerry Kallman presented the Third Place Product Innovation Award to Zhen Lin of TUPLUS.

With its distinctive profile that is at once sharp-edged and rounded, the TUPLUS One 20" Aluminum Carry-on is visually distinctive, a striking stand-out in the suitcase category, from a first-time Show exhibitor.

Grade 6 aircraft aluminum construction is partly responsible for the carry-on’s unique look, and in fact the

company invested in specific machines to bend and form the suitcase’s distinctive frame. “The material, and the manufacturing techniques, were very important to realize this design,” stated Evan Chee, TUPLUS marketing and sales.

Other unique features include the carry-on’s one-touch lock/latch mechanism, which secures the case at multiple points that are all operated by a single latch that’s also a TSA-accepted lock. Another is the 2-stage opening system, which automatically stops at a 20°

opening angle to permit access while the case is still upright – the case may also be laid down and opened a full 90° for unimpeded access.

“The best part of being at The Show was getting to show the audience that we do have an amazing suitcase,” said Chee. “We tried to show the suitcase online, through social media and our own website, but it’s better to show it in person, where people can touch it and feel it. We feel so excited that people, especially industry professionals, recognized our design and innovation.”

The Buzz Award

If the Product Innovation Awards is the critics’ choice competition, The Buzz Award is the people’s choice award. The winner is the one that resonated with The Show’s attending retailers and media who cast their votes from among the hundreds of products displayed in the New Products Pavilion.

Matador FlatPak™ Soap Bar Case and Toiletry Bottle

This year’s winner was Matador, which won for its FlatPak™ Soap Bar Case and Toiletry Bottle. The youthful Boulder, CO-based company was exhibiting for only the second time at The Show, but wowed the crowd with its innovative take on toiletry containment.

Welded Cordura construction allows these flat, 2-dimensional shapes to assume 3D forms once filled. “Cordura flex-fabric™ design changes the travel bottle and soap bar case volume with the contents, ensuring maximum lightweight portability,” explained Tamara Keller, Matador’s director of sales. She also noted Matador is the first to use Cordura fabric for this application, resulting in containers 5-6 times lighter than their traditional silicone or plastic counterparts.

The Soap Bar Case is particularly clever, with Dry-Through™ tech that “keeps the soapy mess inside while allowing the soap bar to dry directly through the fabric” so travelers don’t arrive to discover they’ve accidentally converted their bar soap into soft soap.

This was a huge win for Matador, which was only founded in 2014. “It really feels incredible,” Keller enthused. “We’ve worked extremely hard in the past four years to bring fresh, new, high-quality products to the travel industry. This award vindicates all of our hard work and effort.”



Chris Clearman of Matador was presented with The Buzz Award by David Lomas.

The Best Booth Awards

Showmanship at Its Best

Without showmanship – attention-getting visuals and arresting product displays – The International Travel Goods Show would just be an exhibit hall full of product. The Best Booth Awards go to companies maximizing their limited booth space with clever presentation, showcasing their wares with pop and pizzazz. These are the booths that elevate themselves above the ordinary, with good stagecraft that infuses The Show with positive visual energy, helping show off our industry at its best.

400-600 square feet

GoPlug

Three-time exhibitor GoPlug's approach to booth design was not complex: "We wanted it to be simple and attractive and let the product stand out," said Josh Cross, company founder and CEO.

The minimalist booth featured white stretch fabric over a full-width, full-height rounded framework that effectively framed the company's SMART Power Banks, offset by a logo'd backdrop showing its namesake products in use.

The welcoming, open-plan design featured geometric pendulum lighting that literally highlighted the company's wares, with an up-front podium that put booth staff out front to engage passersby, instead of burying them in the back of the booth.

GoPlug's core product requires explanation – the key features aren't visual, but internal – and the booth was effectively an open invite that made it easy to engage with customers and show off the benefits of the product, a power bank with USB and AC power, GPS tracking and movement alarm. It was a strategy that paid off. "This is our third year. Every year's been great, but we

had the most foot traffic. All three days we had maybe 20 minutes of downtime through the day, total," Cross enthused.

200-300 square feet

Popticals

"We always have to do something to show that we are a little bit different, because we are," explained Preston Porter, marketing manager for Popticals, which sells a very different kind of fold-up sunglasses. "It's easy for people going by to say, 'Oh, sunglasses.' We have to do everything we can to show that we're different."

Popticals sunglasses fold by sliding one lens behind the other, nesting them into a compact, egg-like shape. "Video is the most natural way to demonstrate our product, so we have two big video monitors that are the two anchors of the booth."

Corner booth placement was a bonus, permitting a wider field of view for people to see Popticals in action on the big screens, with an open plan for unobstructed sight lines.

"We play in a lot of different spaces, as an outdoor sunglasses company,"

said Porter, and the booth graphics and art riffs on those lifestyle elements, with a middle countertop display showing off in-store merchandising and the product range. He added, "Having been to a lot of trade shows and industries, The International Travel Goods Show feels more like a community and family than any others. It's a good sign of a healthy industry."

100 square feet

BAGSMART

Working within a 10x10-foot space is challenging, especially when you're positioned as a lifestyle brand in a crowded market niche – personal bags and business cases.

BAGSMART did it right, setting the mood immediately with two full-height background photo panels in blue-gray tonality evoking city life. The near-life-size photo of a customer commuting by skateboard, wearing a BAGSMART backpack, hints at a youthful edginess that underlies all of BAGSMART's products. "The design concept comes from our brand. BAGSMART is dedicated to make traveling smarter and easier," said Lynn Chen, marketing executive. "The mission is to combine function and style perfectly in one bag."

The rest was simple: Showcase the product. Different-height box shelves literally put BAGSMART's products on pedestals, inviting Show attendees to pick up and examine the company's array of computer bags, electronics organizers and urban-flavored backpacks, making it easy to discover their features and selling points for themselves. ■



Josh Cross of GoPlug was presented with The Best Booth Plaque for the 400-600 square-foot category by David Lomas.



David Lomas presents John Swanson of Popticals with The Best Booth Plaque for the 200-300 square-foot category.



RikkiAnn Boshears of BAGSMART was presented with The Best Booth Plaque for the 100 square-foot category by David Lomas.