

# Best of Show

The TGA Awards Ceremony pulls from the very best at The Show. With hundreds of exhibiting companies, and hundreds upon hundreds of new, debut items at The Show, standing out here makes a statement about peer recognition and accomplishment.

These are the companies and products that distinguished themselves enough to catch the eyes of discerning Awards Committee judges and Travel Goods Show attendees alike.

By Garrett Lai

## Community Service Award:

**Randa Luggage**, this year's Community Service Award winner, is a little out of the ordinary. Most recipients of the Community Service Award are recognized for their close work with one particular organization or cause, but Randa was singled out by the Awards Committee for its work with not one, but two community service organizations – Eva's Village/Kitchen, and Volunteers of America-Great New York's Operation Backpack. And, it turns out that's just the tip of the iceberg.

The website for Randa Accessories, the parent company, includes a page – Randa Gives Back – with links to 17 philanthropic programs the company is directly involved with, running the gamut from scholarship funds to anti-illness causes like AIDS Walk, the American Cancer Society and American Heart Association. This isn't to say Randa is more philanthropic than others, but it does speak to a deep level of commitment, especially for a company billing itself as one of the world's largest accessories companies, with a portfolio of 50 brands spanning 11 countries and a century of experience. It's obvious that at Randa, corporate social responsibility is integral to the company, woven into the cultural fabric. And it should be no wonder it received a unanimous vote from the Awards Committee for this year's honor.

Eva's Village is an interconnected community of recovery and support services in Paterson, NJ, seeking to break the cycle of poverty and addiction with an integrated approach. The organization helps thousands of men, women and children by aiding with food, shelter, and assistance tackling the issues of addiction, mental illness and chronic homelessness that can derail people on their way to recovery. Its 3-block campus in Paterson is



Social responsibility is woven into the corporate fiber of Randa Luggage and its parent company, Randa Accessories, with dozens of companies benefiting from Randa's philanthropy. Moe Paradiso and Judy Person (left and center) accept this year's Community Service Award from Committee Chair Scott Kosmin.



Randa volunteers at a recent event for Operation Backpack

not far from Randa's own New Jersey offices and across the Hudson River from NYC and Randa's global headquarters. Eva's Village operates a community kitchen, emergency overnight shelters, transitional apartments and

permanent, affordable housing.

"Over the past three years Randa has been donating time and resources, with groups to help at the shelters and soup kitchen," said Moe Paradiso, SVP of sales at Randa. "Eva's Village and Eva's Kitchen are a local organization that has a food pantry, and we help them stock, and donate time with our people in the kitchen."

The company also donates merchandise, which to the recipient can represent a lot more than a piece of luggage.

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gave. “It’s hard when a child in a shelter gets a foster home, and they travel to the foster home with their things in a garbage bag,” explained Paradiso. “It gives them a sense of respect, walking into someone’s home with a piece of luggage, not a Hefty trash bag.”

Randa is also a longtime contributor – with product donations and volunteers – to Operation Backpack, run by the Volunteers of America-Greater New York. “One of our large initiatives is Operation Backpack,” said Seth Howard, director of marketing. “We do everything from stuffing supplies into backpacks for children to having boxes around our offices where people can drop stuff off.”

“Operation Backpack is an organization where they supply students with a backpack and the essentials they would need for the first day of school – ruler, pencil, markers. So they arrive equipped, versus going with a shopping bag to class,” said Paradiso.

An integral part of the program is sort week, when the backpacks are filled with school supplies prior to going

to their recipients. “We set up a team of about 12 people – it’s in a warehouse, almost like a line – and the backpack goes down the line to the next person getting filled with supplies,” Paradiso explained.


“It’s really easy to get employees to come with us,” said Mindi Cooke, Randa’s VP of design. “We’re a luggage company. We make bags, we make luggage. It’s kind of natural to give away the thing we create and spend so much time on, so the employees are excited to come.”

“We really get involved in the process. We’re able to come in and work, to have an effect,” Cooke continued. “There’s really a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day, that we piled the backpacks high. It’s a great experience because not only can we give back, but we feel like we’ve really helped and accomplished something.”

“I grew up in the rural south,” related Seth Howard, director of marketing. “So growing up and sometimes needing things myself, and having friends who did, it’s really rewarding to be with a company that supports an initiative like

this to provide those supplies for kids in need.”

The company makes a point of acting on the local level, and the result is an experience that is personally touching for many of the employees, with a ripple effect that reaches almost company wide. “It really boosts morale with team building and bonding outside the office. It’s a way to deepen relationships with your colleagues. We usually stuff backpacks over a 2-week span, generally three or four days a week, and we do shifts. There could be 25 to 30 people a week going in, and all in all we have 100 to 150 people participating through our New Jersey and New York offices. If we include people who drop things off it would be almost 100% engagement,” said Howard.

“To us it’s no big deal, it’s just backpacks. But it makes such a difference to them, to give a sense of, ‘Here I have everything I need, the first day of school. I’m good. I’m ready!’” Paradiso said, with a big smile that’s more than just his own. It’s the reflection of a thankful kid’s face, a life touched. It says everything. 

# Best Booth Awards

Without showmanship, a trade show is simply another business event. What builds excitement is showing off the best products using the ability to create spectacle in a very limited space, to make the most of available resources. The Best Booth Awards are voted on by attending retailers and media, and are designed to recognize the companies that make the biggest splash at The Show – those who create an outside personality using the smallest full-fledged booths on the exhibit floor.

## Sub 100 Square Feet: Bracketron

The confines of a 10’x10’ hardwall space are tough, but Bracketron showed how it’s done by thinking outside the box. Instead of just using its Show-provided overhead signage for the company name or logo like everyone else, the Minnesota-based maker of electronic accessory mounts included its company slogan as well: It’s What’s Next.

A pair of flat screens showed its range of phone, tablet, GPS and camera mounts and related accessories in action, with a couple of stand-up booths for company spokespeople to display and demo the wares.



Sometimes a simple solution, with a little light staging, lets the product shine through. And Bracketron ably demonstrated the point.

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From left to right: Travel Goods Show Committee Chair David Lomas presents Son Nguyen and Andy Chow with Bracketron’s Best Booth Award, which made the most of its 100-square-foot space and showed off its range of mounts for mobile electronic devices.



200-300 Square Feet:

**Brookstone**

Brookstone, the company that perfected the art of showcasing products people didn't previously know about – but suddenly can't live without – brought its travel-centric items to The Show and set them off in a showcase that felt like a walk-in version of its old catalogs.

ples to show off available colorways flanked the company's oversize logo at center stage, over an eye-catching array of travel pillows. Just one glance and you knew: Brookstone is serious about travel accessories.

It's a relatively modest, simple booth that makes the products the stars, with a welcoming open plan that invites entry and exploration. And not coin-



Jeffrey Beyda (right) accepts the Best Booth Award for Brookstone, which used best retail practices with its all-white showcasing of the company's myriad travel accessories.

The all-white space played on the time-honored truth used by Apple stores and fine dining establishments the world over: Everything looks great on white. Displays using multiple sam-

plarily evocative of the company's formerly ubiquitous mall stores and catalog pages. It was a good display formula then – and judging by our voting tally, it still works today.

400-600 Square Feet:

**Matador**

The Matador booth was stark, simple, but effective as a well-placed blow from an ice axe. Fadeaway images of rugged, snow-capped mountains on black hardwall dropped unmis-

off-roader's RV, like the factory-finished version of Mad Max's dream vehicle for patrolling the post-apocalyptic wasteland.

Matador's simple strategy made its ruggedly lightweight packs, bags and travel accessories visual standouts. And



Matador's burly off-road RV and ghosted-back mountain landscape images evoked the company's influences without stealing the spotlight from its ever-growing line of packable luggage and travel accessories. Company founder Chris Clearman accepts the award from David Lomas.

takable hints of Matador's outdoors influence. And just in case you were too obtuse to catch on, the company anchored its booth with a statement vehicle – what might be the ultimate

with nothing else to draw the eye, you couldn't help but take in all the fine details that make the company's products resonate with die-hard travelers and outdoor enthusiasts.

# Buzz Award:

**Briggs & Riley – Torq International Carry-on Spinner**

The Buzz Award is The Show's version of the people's choice awards, recognizing the most attention-getting item in the New Products Pavilion, as voted on by retailers and attending media. This year's winner came from perennial exhibitor Briggs & Riley, for its Torq International Carry-on Spinner, a 21" x 14" x 9" polycarbonate spinner the company says is "designed for the rigors of world travel."



Briggs & Riley's Richard Krulik and Georgene Rada with the coveted Buzz Award, the item voted most noteworthy by attending retailers and press.



The sleek case features a 70/30 opening main compartment for easier packing, and incorporates a patented, front-hinged compartment that accommodates a 15" laptop and 10.5" tablet and provides easy in-flight access, as well as at the security checkpoint. The whole works is covered by Briggs & Riley's famous simple as that® unconditional lifetime guarantee, rolls on double spinner ball-bearing wheels, and both the main compartment and the front laptop/tablet section are secured by a TSA-accepted combo lock. It carries a suggested retail price of \$499, and will be available September 2019.

# Product Innovation

The Show is more than a product showcase – it's also a crystal ball and mirror. The Product Innovation Awards are a look into the future. And a reflection of today's circumstances.

Traveling with all carry-on luggage was almost exclusively a frequent flyer's hallmark until the 2008 recession, when checked bag fees became the norm, pushing carry-on into a mainstream travel habit. And you would have predicted this if you'd attended The 2009 Travel Goods Show.

As product has evolved, it became apparent the Product Innovation Awards needed to keep pace, leading to this year's all-new format.

This year's Product Innovation Award candidates were evaluated in five categories:

- Best New Design – Luggage
- Best New Design – Business
- Best New Design – Accessories
- Best Use of Technology
- Most Eco-friendly Product

Awards candidates were submitted by their respective manufacturers. And just like the Academy Awards, entrants were able to choose the category they wanted their products to compete in.

The makeup of the Product Innovation Awards Committee has shifted as well, with six members drawn exclusively from the ranks of industry retailers, and not a mix of manufacturers and retailers as it was in the past, to better reflect what's happening at the point of consumer contact. "We look for things like functionality and practicality," said Jerry Kallman, Committee Chair. "We're looking for things that can sell right now. It could be an evolutionary change or a revolutionary change. It could be seriously next generation, or something that already existed, but nobody's done it better."

## Best New Design – Luggage **FUGU Luggage**

FUGU Luggage took the best luggage honors with its Rollux, a \$249 carry-on that transforms from a 15.7" tall 4-wheel spinner on a 19.6" x 8.6" footprint into a 36" tall checked bag. And it does so quickly



FUGU Luggage's Isaac Atlas accepts the Best New Design – Luggage Award from Product Innovation Awards Committee Chair Jerry Kallman, for its innovative carry-on that converts to a 36" checked bag.



and cleverly – the transformation from carry-on to checked configuration takes mere seconds. The full-featured bag incorporates a USB power bank, cellular GPS tracking; laundry, shoe and toiletry bags; detachable wheels and TSA-accepted locks. And at 8.5 lbs it's still a lightweight bag, despite being packed with features.

## Best New Design – Business **Nomatic Travel Pack**

First-time exhibitor Nomatic wowed the judges with its Travel Pack, a laptop backpack that would be entirely appropriate to carry as an everyday bag, or use as a business-oriented carry-on. This sleek bag includes a packing system, magnetic



Jacob Durham accepts the Best New Design – Business Award for Nomatic's multi-compartment Travel Pack that wowed judges with its myriad features that let it function as an everyday business case and laptop carry-on.



water bottle pouch, tuckaway straps, waterproof zippers, RFID pocket, removable sunglasses shell, retractable key leash and cord pass-throughs, all packed into the 20-liter pack – with expansion room to take it to 30 liters.

This company has already wowed the public with multiple, multi-million-dollar Kickstarter and Indiegogo crowdfunding campaigns that include \$2.9 million garnered from backers. This winning Travel Pack retails for \$249.99.

## Best New Design – Accessories **The Airhook 2.0**

In-flight comfort continues to be a hot area for product innovation, and this year's Show saw dozens of newly launched items hoping to bring some calm and comfort to the airplane cabin. The Airhook brought its new design to

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Inventor Craig Rabin and the Airhook 2.0 took the Best New Design – Accessories Award with its phone/tablet mount and drink holder for in-flight and in-car use.



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 this year's Show, and took home the trophy for best new accessory with its Airhook 2.0.

If you've ever spilled something while trying to cross your legs in flight beneath the tray table, you'll appreciate the merits of this winning accessory. This ingenious device attaches to an airline tray table while it's in the stowed/upright position, and holds a phone or tablet; plus a cup, can or bottle. Your electronic screen is parked much closer to head height than it would be on the tray table, for more comfortable viewing. And you aren't pinned in the seat with legs immobilized by the tray table hovering mere inches above your lap.

The Airhook 2.0 is a more streamlined design than its predecessor, which was displayed at The Show previously, in being adaptable for in-car use by attaching to the front seat headrests for the use of rear seat passengers, better angle adjustment for stability, and an easier-to-use tablet/phone holder. It's



Jeff Magsitza (left) and Ambiorix Polanco of GetSet Luggage, with the Best Use of Technology trophy earned with its self-weighting luggage that progressively displays its weight as you pack.



a terrific example of a good idea that only gets better.

### Best Use of Technology GetSet Luggage

New exhibitor GetSet Luggage stole the Best Use of Technology category with a fresh new take on self-weighting luggage, with its 21.5" polycarbonate carry-on with built-in scale that progressively reports the total weight of case and contents as you pack, in pounds or kilograms.

While the idea of self-weighting luggage is not new, previous designs have required that the bag be loaded and closed up to get a weight reading, and most of them only work when the case itself is lifted up. This is a cleaner execution and can more readily help travelers answer the "Take it or leave it?" question that invariably arises during packing.

The scale itself is powered by a 9-volt battery, sidestepping restrictions on lithium-ion battery packs, although it is power-bank ready with an interior battery compartment and USB pass-



LiteGear Bags' Magi Raible accepts the Most Eco-friendly Product Award for the company's 3 in 1 Gear Bag, a convertible tote, shoulder bag or backpack made from recycled plastic bottles.



through ports. The polycarbonate hard-side includes a clip-on tray table that can support a laptop, tablet, phone or a meal, making it a boon for airport waiting areas.

### Most Eco-friendly Product LiteGear Bags 3-in-1 Gear Bag

LiteGear Bags wowed the Awards Committee with its 3-in-1 Gear Bag, an incredibly versatile tote that is perfect for travel or everyday use and is made from recycled plastic water bottles. The adjustable-length tote handles make it easy to carry by hand or over the shoulder; or deploy the stowaway shoulder straps for backpack-style carry.

Despite weighing a mere 1.25 lbs, the multi-pocketed tote can swallow 2,300 cubic inches of gear in its 16" x 16" x 9" form factor. Multiple, externally accessible organizer pockets help keep things in their place, while the cinch top and side compression straps keep things contained. It's a lot of features for \$69.95, and with an environmentally tiny footprint to boot.