

The luggage evolution: Smarter, stronger, lighter

According to Samsonite Europe President, Arne Borrey on a recent trip to South Africa, the world is in a state of perpetual motion and luggage is getting smarter, stronger and lighter. With Samsonite's legacy of trendsetting travel solutions, investment and development have yielded products that are strong and light, and that's what consumers want says Borrey. "Brand loyalty is an import but what's also crucial is how well brands fulfill the needs of consumers."



Tom O'Faherty, Arne Borrey, Gert Weyers, Rob Kunze

Taking Samsonite's revolutionary Curv material, which is exclusive to the brand, as an example, this next generation composite made from highly drawn polypropylene rather than the conventional polypropylene unites the functional versatility of thermoplastics and the impact-resistant performance of a fibre-reinforced composite. Five times stronger than conventional materials, it delivers a suitcase that is light and durable, has high impact resistance even at low temperature and is less sensitive to scratches and damage.

Unpacking what the consumer wants

"We have invented this new market segment of pressure formed woven polypropylene that sells well in South Africa. If you are a long haul traveller, you want to be really sure about the protection of your goods," he said.

Borrey said that the starting point for Samsonite's innovation team was unpacking exactly what consumers wanted.

"You have to understand trends and stay ahead of them – and then you also need to drive the trends. For starters, we need to know how fast a consumer will replace his or her suitcase. Millions of our suitcases were sold during the nineties. Because they are strong and well made, people could still travel with them. The big question is, do they want to? Technology and fashion have evolved and they want different shapes and forms now," he explained.

A growing stream of innovation in the luggage space

Weight matters

Innovations that could soon come to market include built in scales that will tell the traveller how much a suitcase weighs or a capacity meter that would indicate whether a half, a third or all of the volume has been utilised.

Solving the perennial bugbear of lost suitcases

Telemetry tags will help solve the perennial bugbear of lost suitcases. According to Borrey, in 2015, 23.1 million pieces of baggage were mishandled (either temporarily or permanently lost) worldwide.

Earlier this year, Samsonite announced that it was working closely with Vodafone to develop an innovative luggage tracking solution called Track&Go. The technology partners are currently trialling a new longer battery life, wider range technology called Narrowband-IoT (NB-IoT) that can be easily and privately tracked by its owner. This Track&Go solution is based on two principles - proximity alerts and geolocation. A traveller instantly receives a smartphone notification when a bag moves out of range. This is ideal for cruise, bus or train passengers wishing to leave their suitcases in a compartment. If a bag is lost, a traveller will be able to see its current location so that it can be traced.

TUMI, acquired by Samsonite in August 2016, will take this into the air travel arena. Borrey said that he is currently travelling with a Tumi luggage locator that will launch later this year. This informs the passenger whether a suitcase has been loaded onto a plane. When the plane takes off, the acceleration turns the device off. On landing, the deceleration reactivates the device.

“You have to give your suitcase a name online. It then sends you a message to say that it has arrived at the destination,” he said.

Not enough power is a problem

He added that there was growing stream of innovation in the luggage space - including power assisted wheels similar to those used on bicycles.

“If you look at the business traveller, one of the worst things that can happen is to not have enough power for your tools. Suitcases and laptop bags could have built in solar panels or power packs so that you can charge your phone or your laptop. We are looking at how you could put solar panels or power banks inside business bags without making them too expensive and too heavy.”

Business bags for business women

When it comes to aesthetics, Borrey said Samsonite was going all out to solve the ultimate business traveller challenge – creating a business bag for the growing number of female executives that are travelling between boardrooms. “Even today, we still sell mostly male oriented business bags. Many women put their computers in their handbags. That makes them awfully heavy and they're not made for that,” he noted.

Personalisation

Another important new trend is the personalisation of luggage. TUMI shops worldwide – including the one in Johannesburg

– allow customers to put their initials or symbols on their luggage and bags. They choose the font and the colour and it is done in store as an incentive to purchase.

Borrey said the jury was still out on what innovations consumers would find most useful. But one thing's for sure – all new innovations will be sensitive to safety and security and comply with all airline regulations. He said that Samsonite worked closely with bodies such as IATA to ensure the best possible solutions.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>