

A Briefcase By Any Other Name...

By Katie Reeder



PHOTOGRAPH BY KERRY PITTENGER

The not-quite-ready-for-retirement boardroom denizen is carrying a nylon briefcase with expandable compartment. The nonsensical woman business exec is toting a tote — and showing she isn't all work and no play. The up-and-comer is packing a messenger bag or backpack tricked out with a padded compartment for laptops or netbooks — and locked and loaded for success. And the conservationist is leaving his virtual office with an eco-friendly sleeve constructed from recycled plastic bottles.

Does anyone carry an actual briefcase anymore?

The executive suite has been hit by a revolution that has transformed the standard issue boxy black briefcase from back in the day to the snappy totes, uber functioning messenger bags, powered-up backpacks and sleek cases in leopard, crocodile and giraffe prints of today. This designing uprising hasn't just reinvented the basic case; it's shoved it off the corporate ladder and replaced it with innovations that include slim "green" sleeves that contain everything that used to bulk out a bag.

Manufacturers are reinventing business-related products to meet the needs of the retailer. Retailers are reinventing their services and overall marketing strategies to meet the needs of the business traveler. Or are they? Who is prompting whom to change and where does the consumer fit into this business case conundrum?

Meeting Mavens Demand High-tech with Specs When It Comes to Business Cases

According to Delsey Marketing Director Karen Schiefler, "we're now in the 'busyness' business."

And, as executives everywhere are finding time shorter and the need to travel greater, there's no better business to be in. So what gear will get executive travelers from here to there with minimal wear? Delsey's latest series of

Helium Ballistic brief bags (*see page 34*) keeps the businessperson moving through even the most unpredictable travel roadblocks. The Helium Business Leather Double Gusset Flapover, available this October, is smart and stylish with just the right amount of space to be efficient, yet still functional. This lightweight laptop-compatible bag is

July, Travelpro's Crew 8 line also offers a sleek, stylish and lightweight business briefcase. The brand's 20-inch Business Carry-on is a full-featured business organizer with computer sleeve. Expect checkpoint-friendly features on cases as the trend continues full-throttle.

One thing is for sure — when it comes to business travel, size mat-

Case Logic emphasizes intuitive features, helping execs hurdle past travel obstacles with ease.



Travelpro's Crew 8 line is sleek, stylish and lightweight.

made of durable leather and features an organizer front panel, front zippered pocket and a backslash pocket for last-minute items.

In the fast-paced world of business travel, being able to keep your computer in the case when passing through security is a minute saved and a dollar earned. The Case Logic LL line of lightweight, expandable carry-on gear showcases an organizational panel to store magazines, portable electronics and travel accessories. Launched in

ters. Guy Paquette, director of operations at Bagot Leather Goods/Luggage Plus, indicates consumers are asking two questions when it comes to business cases: What is the weight of the bag and what size of computer will it hold? A third popular inquiry: Does the product come with a warranty? Today's road warriors want lightweight functionality that will withstand the tribulations of travel. In anticipation of consumer demands, Bagot Leather Goods/Luggage Plus focuses on pur-



The narrow design of McKlein USA's LaGrange Vertical, Detachable-Wheeled Laptop/Carry-on makes navigating tight spaces a cinch.



Mandarina Duck's WORK Double-Handle Briefcase is a restyled and redesigned version of the brand's best-selling travel line.



Extras like a push-button handle and fully-padded interior pockets make Travelers Club's Naples Collection a must for business travelers.



Delsey's SuperLite Trolley Tote packs a punch with room for computer and clothes.

chasing better-quality, established and brand-recognized cases to meet consumer demand.

Paquette says many vendors are reinventing the traditional computer case: "New TSA cases make for easier and quicker scanning at the airport. Business cases on wheels have also steadily increased in sales over the past few years, as have cases designed specifically for women."

McKlein USA's LaGrange Vertical, Detachable-Wheeled Laptop/Carry-

on debuted in June with a narrow design that allows for easier navigation through tight, crowded spaces: airplane aisles, buses, trains and sidewalks. Plus, a two-in-one removable wheel and handle system grants users the option to remove the bag from the wheel frame and carry it to the desired destination. And, available in six conservative and vibrant colors: black, orange, aqua blue, burgundy red, pink and green — the executive can exercise flair or err on the side of caution while preserving profes-



Korchmar's Chic and Stylish Computer Handbag screams "ooh-la-la" without compromising functionality.



sionalism and functionality.

Philip Kahan, CEO of Andrew Philips, recommends the Metro Collection, specifically the Vertical Laptop Briefcase for today's business traveler. Composed of high-quality, full-grain leather cowhide and 810-denier nylon, the case is savvy and city-chic, yet lightweight.

Coming mid-September, Mandarin Duck's WORK double-handle briefcase retails for \$225, is available in black and blue and is a restyled and redesigned version of the brand's best-selling travel line. Its features include: a shallow, front pocket with Velcro-closure to access documents; a zippered, organizational compartment for holding personals; a wide-gusset, central-padded compartment with removable 15-inch computer case; a compression band to hold documents; zippered pocket for additional storage; removable rain cover for added protection; trolley sleeve; tone-on-tone hardware; large-grip zipper pulls; and removable and adjustable, padded shoulder strap. It is lightweight and easy to spot clean.

Also debuting this September, the Bel Aire Wheeled Business Brief from Ricardo Beverly Hills (see page 34) features a Quickpass Laptop Protector so a computer can be easily removed from the wheeled business brief during security checks while remaining protected via thick and shock-absorbing padding. Additional padded compartments make room for electronics like smart phones.

According to Steve Felsen, vice president of marketing for RBH, "The orientation of cases is starting to change

from horizontal to vertical to allow for easier transport as you wheel the business brief up and down the airplane aisle."

Totes Make Light of All Work and No Play

For the executive who prefers to tote in style, Delsey's SuperLite Trolley Tote, launched in May and available in black, grey and mocha, holds computer and clothing while making traveling easy.

For a collection with style and sophistication, look no further than Travelers Club's Naples Collection 17-inch Laptop Carry-on Tote or 21-inch Rolling Laptop Carry-on, debuting this month. The tote features a padded laptop nest and fully-padded interior and zippered interior pockets. Expanded in size, the Rolling Laptop Carry-on showcases clear, in-line blade wheels, a luxurious mono-tube, push-button handle, as well as a padded laptop nest and a plush, fully-lined interior with room for additional accessories.

Tom Larsen, GreenSmart president and co-founder, believes women business travelers are more discerning about aesthetics when it comes to selecting travel pieces, adding, "If the silhouette doesn't resonate for a woman, it's a deal-breaker." Adds Larsen, "It is for men as well; but, a man will be comfortable with a rectangle or boxy product, whereas a woman likely is not. You only need to look at your own purchasing

habits and how many handbags, wallets or other types of bags you personally own and compare that to a man."

When style reigns supreme, execs reach no further than Korchmar's Chic and Stylish Computer Handbag. The bag, which debuted this spring, resulted from focus group feedback and input from real traveling business women. With tone-on-tone coloring, this tote is handcrafted from glove-soft, full-grain leather and trimmed in full-grain, oil-tanned American saddle leather for a luxurious look and feel in a lightweight, durable silhouette. Additionally, it features a large, secure, padded computer compartment sized to fit most 17-inch computers, two interior zippered pockets, four expandable interior business organizer pockets, an interior ring for key fob, secure magnetic closure, exterior, zippered pocket for tickets and travel documents and soft, tubular handles with 11-inch drop for easy shoulder carry. And you thought it was just about looks!

Purses serve double-duty with SOLO's Sterling Rolling Laptop Case and the Sterling Ladies' Laptop Tote, both launched in early 2010. The tote holds a laptop while also standing in as a purse. There is no need to check any bags when traveling with the rolling case, and organizer compartments in both bags allow the traveler to easily locate items. Not only do both of these pieces offer convenience, the ladies' tote features a fashionable and sophisticated plum lining.

Available in black, titanium and grey and retailing for \$395, Mandarin Duck's Times Leather Briefcase, which debuted this past March, features three compartments, an organizational compartment for electronics, as well as multiple shallow pockets for business cards. A removable key ring, central, padded compartment for a netbook, a snap-closure compartment for holding documents and a removable and adjustable shoulder strap make for a minimal, but chic and functional, bag that can take business women from meetings to Mambo.

Up and Comers Break the Mold

Backpacks as business cases are becoming increasingly prevalent. And, not



No need to carry a purse with SOLO's Sterling Rolling Laptop Case and the Sterling Ladies' Laptop Tote



Available in black, titanium and grey, Mandarin Duck's Times Leather Briefcase makes business travel look good.



Iconic Zero Halliburton "double bars" accent the Network Bag, part of the Mobility Collection.



up again, are now the norm.

Capitalizing on the trend of non-traditional cases, A. Saks Luggage offers computer/backpack combination bags. The company's Expandable Lightweight Computer Trolley Wheeled Backpack retails at \$195, is lightweight and expands. But, the pull-up handle system zips back into the bag so it doesn't look like a wheeling bag, making it possible to maintain a traditionally professional silhouette in the office. The rear of the bag also zips down, covering the wheels when not in use, and the padded backpack straps hide fold into a pocket.

To meet the demands of the modern-day business traveler, who carries a plethora of electronic business tools, Zero Halliburton created the Network bag for the Mobility collection, which will be available September 25. Available in black and grey, these Network bags vary in size, and carrying style. Metal accents on the bag will appeal to women and are symbolic of the iconic Zero Halliburton "double bars." From a cross-over shoulder bag, vertical and horizontal messenger bags to a backpack, the design mission of this line originated from the synergy of desire for intelligent designs and lifestyle need.

The Travelware Single-Compartment Laptop Briefcase from Traveler's Choice keeps it light with fun colors like orange and yellow while providing serious power!



just for young people. Worn over one shoulder or both, this type of bag, combined with the broad popularity of messenger profiles for the same purpose, has broken the 9 to 5 briefcase mold in favor of a daily bag that is multi-purpose, says Larsen.

For the young up and comer, Case Logic adds thoughtful features to cases, backpacks and messenger bags, like those within the CL line and ZL lines, to accommodate the needs of customers living in an increasingly mobile society. Intuitive features are becoming essential elements of backpacks and messengers. Cases that completely unzip and lay flat on the TSA conveyor belt, so screeners have an unobstructed view of the laptop without removing it, and grab-and-go handles that allow users to pick up a bag without needing to zip it

Go Green on the Go

Preservation, *go green*, and recycle have become more than trendy catch phrases for eco-absorbed tree huggers. Taking care of the environment is now

Laptop Sleeves from Design Go provide protection with impact-absorbing, cushioned neoprene.



Delsey's Helium Neoprene Computer Sleeve makes it easy to move from meeting to meeting without a traditional briefcase.



a concern fully-ingrained in day-to-day activities — whether you're a housewife or frequent flyer.

Peter Garrison, president of e-commerce site, "Life's a Trip," recommends KIVA for "eco-friendly green" products composed of 100%-recycled, high-density polyester. The bags are durable and ultra-lightweight, backed by KIVA's 20 years of experience in designing functionality and accessibility. KIVA's Tour Collection offers a traditional Messenger Brief and a newly-designed Vertical Brief, maximizing space and quick access to a laptop.

Beyond providing exceptional eco-friendly business products, Garrison knows what it takes to keep customers returning. Garrison advises, "Treat your previous customers like gold. Communicate with them regularly via email without overdoing it. The law of diminishing returns applies here."

Garrison suggests the Rick Steves Collection as another eco-friendly choice since the brand offers luggage made from durable, 100%-recycled polyester. Several updated styles in the 2010 collection, including the Veloce series and

the Autobahn Collection (Messenger Brief and Laptop Messenger Bag) are large enough for a computer, business files and office necessities, but can still be placed under the seat for takeoff and landing.

And how about a solar-powered briefcase? Traveler's Choice offers the Travelware Single-Compartment Laptop Briefcase with a padded adjustable shoulder strap. A side water bottle pocket keeps travelers hydrated on-the-go while sleek colors — black, orange, yellow and charcoal — makes powering up, sans outlet, look stylish.

Let's Talk Accessories

The business exec on the go clearly has it in the bag, or tote, or case. So, what accessories complete the savvy travel ensemble?

Covering her iPad with Delsey's Helium neoprene sleeve, complete with outside, organizer pocket, and available in four colors, allows the executive to ease into the next meeting without the

cumbersome full briefcase.

For travelers who like to carry their computers within a purse or another bag, Case Logic's ENS Sleeves provide an on-the-go solution. Clean lines and no pockets make it possible to place this security-friendly sleeve in the screening tub for a clear scan without scratches to the precious electronic.

A perfect companion for the laptop, the 11-inch and 15-inch Laptop Sleeve from Design Go provides protection with its impact-absorbing, cushioned neoprene. The sleeve, available in black and grey, zips neatly around the laptop to keep it snug.

"As more consumers buy into the smart phone craze evolution, the needs of the business traveler are changing rapidly," says Garrison. "A savvy business person will be able to do more and more over the next couple of years with smart phones without having to necessarily carry a bunch of paperwork."

A "Brief" Conclusion

So, will the future bring an onslaught of smaller and more protective electronic cases and accessories as even the most cutting-edge, file-toting briefs and messengers become a memory of yesteryear? Compact, lightweight and durable — with pockets for organizing and accessing on the go — cases carried by frequent-flying business execs are locked and loaded with features to ease the stress of travel and up the efficiency factor. Others are choosing to tote a tote. And, unwilling to compromise when it comes to style or functionality, these cases have it in the bag with options like full-grain, oil-tanned leather and sophisticated, plum-colored lining alongside organizing compartments aplenty. Techies are changing the traditional orientation of briefcases, opting for backpacks and messengers with over-the-top padding and electronic protection galore. And, environmentalists are bringing their mission to the boardroom with cases constructed from eco-friendly materials. Whatever shapes the cases of tomorrow hold, you can bet it's game-on when it comes to making lighter, more durable, and environmentally-friendly products that continue to maintain a TSA-inspection-friendly format. ■

Please see the Buyer's Guide on pages 49 and 51 for a directory of the companies whose products are included in this feature.