

Accessibility

WALKING THE FLOOR AT THE SHOW REMINDED ME HOW MUCH OPPORTUNITY THERE is in travel goods. One of the wonderful things about our industry — and probably the one that gets me so excited — is its accessibility.

Unlike some industries which are completely controlled by giants, there is still room for the little guy. It's possible to be a small player — a start-up surrounded by the Briggs & Rileys, Hartmanns, Swiss Army Brands and Travelpros — and make an impact, to become a success.

Travel goods are things that everyone can relate to, mostly because everyone uses them. And, everyone has his or her own ideas about what makes the best piece of luggage, or the perfect handbag, or the ultimate tote. But, unlike some industries — like cars, or computers, or even kitchen appliances — the price of developing new travel gear is something that is within reach if you're determined. And if you have a good idea, and manage to reach consumers with it, you can make it.

Timbuk2 started out as a home operation making bags for San Francisco's close-knit bike messenger community. Timbuk2's sturdy construction, function-driven design and all-around utility won people over, and non-messengers started carrying them in lieu of briefcases and backpacks. Today, Timbuk2's line extends to totes, iPod players and computer cases, and you can find them in REI, Apple Stores and specialty retailers. It's a far cry from the 1980s when you had to know whose door to knock on in San Francisco to get one.

Just a few years ago, Zip It Gear was a small start-up at the Show, a one-man operation propelled by a simple idea — a sock with a pocket — and run from the 26-year-old inventor's apartment. Today, it's a viable company with four full-time employees, nationwide distribution, and is widely recognized by both consumers and the media.

Dimo Gear was a first-time exhibitor in 2003, with one customer to its name. Today, the company has doubled the size of its exhibit space and its customer base includes national television, catalogues, specialty retailers, and international customers.

Break Room Concepts credits The Travel Goods Show with helping OneDerWear disposal underwear become an established product and grow its business over time. Following the product's launch at The 2004 Show, the company has been able to close sales much easier year after year because of increased name recognition.

1st Class Sleeper's first year at The Show brought them just a few accounts, but one of those accounts has sold over 8,000 sleepers for this start-up company. In year two, it landed 10 long-term accounts, and by year three, after doubling the size of its booth, brought in more new accounts than the first two years combined. Of course, winning the very first TGA Product Innovation Award provided an additional boost, and the company has sustained growth of over 30% in sales for each of the last four years.

These companies enjoyed parallel paths to success: they started with a good idea, found an audience, and became success stories. They're small companies that made the transition to becoming market forces in our industry. But here's the difference. While Timbuk2 initially relied on word-of-mouth to build momentum, Zip It Gear, for one, came to the Show, reached buyers and quickly found an audience. The Show was their fast track to success.

This is what makes the Show so magical to me. It's that possibility of discovery, of finding the next great idea. So, as you read this year's Show Wrap-up Issue, keep that in mind. You could be looking at the Next Big Thing. And, remember, you saw it here first!

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