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## More consumers pack lighter, smarter to save when flying

By ROGER YU

Frequent traveler Rich Truesdell has experienced firsthand how serious airlines are about collecting their bag-check fees. On a recent flight from San Francisco International, an agent affiliated with United Airlines stopped him at a security checkpoint and sent him back to the ticket counter. His duffel roll-aboard, which he'd used as a carry-on for years, was slightly larger than the limit of 45 inches in combined width, length and height. He paid the required \$25 fee to check it. "She was there to monitor carry-on luggage," says Truesdell, editorial director of AutomotiveTraveler.com. "I still made the flight, but not by much."

Vowing to avoid such embarrassing encounters, Truesdell promptly bought a smaller carry-on — a 21-inch-tall bag he could roll aboard. He also travels now with a copy of luggage instructions from the Transportation Security Administration and a tape measure so that "some wise person wouldn't try to stop me from taking it on the plane."

Forced by an airline industry determined to squeeze every ounce of efficiency and every dollar in fees, Americans are capitulating to the new realities of travel. Like Truesdell, they're packing lighter and smarter to cope with the realities of the domestic flying experience. Shipping heavy bags in advance is

becoming more popular. So, too, are vacuum packing clothes, storing personal items at hotels, and forgoing laptops and power cords.

Luggage manufacturers, hotels and airlines also are responding. They're introducing products and services that cater to the collective pressure and a desire to get in and out of airports and planes with minimal fuss.

Some pressure is entrenched at airports: long lines at ticket counters and stringent security checkpoints imposed after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. But others have emerged more recently as airlines sought new sources of revenue and cut costs to survive: extra fees that escalate every few months to check bags, cramped regional jets and reduced staffing at ticket counters.

It all often translates into passengers carrying on all they need. "I call it the battle of the overhead bin," says Scott Applebee, vice president of marketing at Travelpro, a luggage manufacturer.

### Word is spreading

The oft-repeated mantra of the hardened road warrior is, "Never check luggage." But the lesson is sinking in on less jaded travelers, too.

Bob Burns, an aviation industry executive in Orlando, says he switched from the "ranks of the occasional checked bag to the never check bag, regardless of the location and duration of the trip."



By H. Darr Beiser, USA TODAY

Although the Scottievest has 22 pockets, this one is a little full.

After learning that a flight home from New York's JFK was canceled, Burns hopped on another to Rome on a whim, and discovered he can last 10 days with a carry-on. He's never looked back.

A dreaded fear of losing luggage motivates Bill Worth to keep his bag with him at all times. "I've had long weekend trips to Europe and (had) my luggage go to some other place, only to show up the day I'm departing," says the education industry executive from Atlanta. Bag-check fees don't apply to premium status fliers, including Steve Milby. But the Sears executive in Marietta, Ga., has seen more regional jets on his routes and has had to downsize to two pairs of slacks to avoid checking a bag at a gate. When he knows he'll be on regional jets, he replaces his carry-on with a

duffel bag that fits in the smaller overhead bin. "I miss having the wheels, but it gets me out of the jet bridge waiting line," he says. The battle for the overhead bin has been a boon for luggage makers such as Travelpro, which has seen a 30% increase in demand for carry-ons since airlines introduced fees for checking bags two years ago. "Now, we (deliver) more carry-ons as a percentage. Consumers have adapted quickly to them," Applebee says.

The focus is on weight. By simplifying design frame, removing unused straps or using lighter fabric, manufacturers have lowered the weight of a 22-inch carry-on to between 6 and 10 pounds from the 10 to 15 pounds commonly found a few years ago, Applebee says.

This month, Travelpro will introduce a line that will be its lightest yet: the Atlantic UltraL-

(over please)

ite bag that weighs 6.5 pounds. "I don't know if we can take it much below that," Applebee says.

Briggs & Riley, another bagmaker, in May started shipping its lightest carry-on yet, the 7-pound BRX line. Another of its popular line, Baseline carry-ons, shed its weight last summer to 10 pounds from the 11 pounds of the previous version. With space in overhead bins tighter than ever, 20-inch carry-ons that roll aboard — 2 inches shorter but wider than the more typical model — are the "single biggest craze" among luggage shoppers, says Jim Lahren, vice president of marketing at Briggs & Riley. They also meet the luggage height requirement of many international airlines, which cap it at 21.6 inches (55 centimeters), vs. 22 for domestic travel.

Frequent traveler Jeannie Mullen, chief marketing officer of digital book distributor Zinio, prefers a duffel roll-aboard that's more flexible for packing and storing. "In overhead bins, you sometimes have to scrunch it," she says, claiming she can live up to 16 days with the contents of a carry-on.

The industry has also introduced "spinners," particularly aimed at women. They're four-wheel bags that can move in any direction and provide sliding navigation for travelers who find two-wheel bags too heavy.

For customers who flirt daily with the airline's bag weight limit, Delsey Luggage introduced carry-ons in January that are equipped with a weight indicator. A red spot

on the handle will light when the bag exceeds 50 pounds, an industry limit for checked luggage.

Introduced several years ago, "TSA-friendly" briefcases remain popular among the laptop-toting segment of frequent travelers. The bag splits open like a butterfly, with the laptop sleeve side directly exposed to the X-ray machine, eliminating the need for the computer to be taken out at checkpoints. "It's the most important piece of luggage I have," says Richard Bradbury, director of product management in Atlanta. "It's so worth it."

To keep from having to check bags, travelers are shedding items as they go. Their options have grown in recent years, as airlines and hotels partner with shipping companies to give customers the option of sending their bags separately.

United Airlines can deliver customers' bags door-to-door overnight via FedEx. The price starts at \$79 for a bag up to 50 pounds. Disney World resort hotels, W Hotels and Marriott Vacation Club offer similar luggage delivery options for customers.

#### Shipping an option

Zinio's Mullen used to check bags full of books and marketing literature for conferences, but now

ships them ahead. "I'd often bring an empty bag for vacations," she says. "If I'm going to be in London, I'd be shopping. But now I look to ship."

Bob Schneider travels to the same locale weekly. Rather than bring clothes home to be laundered, the project executive from Medway, Mass., leaves them at a dry cleaner.

W Hotels keep loaner laptops for travelers who leave them at home, and store luggage for long-term guests who come and go regularly.

Michael Feeney, a commercial pilot in Honolulu, says it's easier to toss some things on long trips, though he acknowledges his practice of ditching undergarments is "wasteful." For a three-week trip to Europe and Africa, he once bought white T-shirts from Costco and left them in hotel rooms. "The (souvenirs) I buy fill (my luggage) back up," he says. "Maybe someone else will use them."

Some travelers are learning to shed weight by rethinking their tech gadgets.

Ralph Velasquez, an executive for a building supply company in Nashville, has switched from a laptop to a smaller netbook. "Combined with my BlackBerry and

flash drives, it is working just fine, so far."

Feeney no longer packs multiple charging cords. He recently got a surge protector that has USB ports that can charge his camera, iPod and iPad with just one cord. "It's the size of three golf balls and fits in my shoes," he says. "That thing is amazing for travel."

Some travelers are literally wearing their gadgets, Scottevest CEO Scott Jordan says. His company's vests provide 22 "layered" pockets for cellphones, keys, camera, passport and water bottle. It includes a transparent pocket for users who want to scroll through their iPhone without taking it out, and around-neck lining for earphone cords. It's just introduced a model with a pocket large enough for an iPad. "It enables you to have all your stuff with you at all times, not just as a second carry-on but also when you're out at the grocery store," Jordan says. "Unlike wearing a photographer's vest, you wouldn't look like a tourist."

The packing trend toward smaller and smaller is far from universal among frequent travelers, though. Ellen Tyler from Healdsburg, Calif., can't be bothered with the new rules and pursuit of lightness. "Heaven forbid that I don't have the proper shoes, handbag or different outfit for every occasion," the food industry executive says. "I'm just not willing to sacrifice. I'm stuck in a rut of inefficiency, but I'm well dressed when I arrive at my destination."



Apple's iPad