

From Bags To Tech, Hot Product Trends Revealed At The PPAI Expo



With more than 1,200 exhibiting companies showcasing more than a quarter million products in over 300,000 square feet on the show floor, The PPAI Expo at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center in Las Vegas this week is the place to preview the hottest products, trends and fashions in the promotional products industry.

In accessories, vegan leather is everywhere. Ron Eliakim, vice president of corporate sales for the Bugatti Group, says that their vegan collection has broad market appeal, including environmentalists, animal rights advocates and consumers who want more affordable leather-like options. Numo is also introducing vegan leather bags in two textures with edge-to-edge digital imprinting.

Alli Klein, corporate sales manager for Timbuk2, says they are seeing increased demand for roll-top bags, particularly from Millennials. The roll-top style also offers additional protection from the elements while still providing convenient access to bag contents with a hidden zipper.

Klein adds they are seeing an uptick in tote bags. "We normally scale to the male market, but we're seeing more companies request a backpack for men and a tote for women when shopping for employee gifts. This is an alternative to the one-size-fits-all approach that has been the norm. Now companies are trying to be more thoughtful about what products may be more attractive to women."

In drinkware, high-tech insulation that keeps drinks hot or cold on the go is ideal for modern, busy lifestyles. Bright color options are popular, as are new styles like the wine tumblers offered by Tempercraft.

Another new innovation that keeps canned beverages cold is the Beer Blizzard. This product was originally introduced on *Shark Tank* and is licensed exclusively through Best Promotions. Mike Robb, the inventor and owner of Beer Blizzard, says, "Every aluminum can in the world has the same dome-shaped bottom, so we designed a disk that fits perfectly within the dome. You freeze the gel disc and then you can use it as a coaster or slide it inside the bottom of a coolie, and it will keep your beer ice cold."

Space saving is a trend to watch in hard goods. Ariel Premium is introducing a collapsible cooler that folds completely flat for convenient storage when not in use. E-Z UP is also debuting a space-saving changing room or instant storage for trade shows, camping or other mobile events. "We needed to build something that has storage space for boxes, t-shirts and other products and looks nice inside the shelter," says E-Z UP Chairman Mark Carter, adding, "The Hang Space™ clips in, so it's easy to use and very versatile."

Look for nontraditional materials that add authenticity and exclusivity in all product categories. Jerry Kummins, national sales manager of Benjamin Martin Frames and Awards, says, "What we're about is taking unique materials like barn wood or carbon fiber and then putting a creative spin on it."

In apparel, it's no surprise that athleisure continues to dominate, with styles that can be worn from the gym to running errands to happy hour. Holly Bray, outside sales rep at S&S Activewear, says fashion fabrics such as combed ring-spun cotton with a softer wear are popular, as are lifestyle brands that are casual with an upscale fabrication.

Gina Barreca, marketing director for Vantage Apparel, says subtle tonal texture, which she describes as "a step up from a solid but not quite a heather," will be big in 2018. Decorating techniques that mimic the look of 3D are also in vogue, such as dimensional transfers or design-tech appliques that are raised to look "puffy."

Barreca also points out new collar styles for women, such as the tulip neck Greg Norman shirt that she was wearing. "The non-polo collar shirts are different and provide more versatility so they can be worn under a blazer or jacket," she says.

Other on-trend looks for women borrow from what's popular at retail, including a criss-cross neckline, center back seam, rounded shirt hemlines, "cold shoulder" sleeve styles and ultra-warm, ultra-soft Sherpa-like fabrics for winter. Boxercraft is displaying a 100-percent polyester vest that looks straight out of the Himalayas.

Tech products and the incorporation of high-tech functionality in traditional items are ubiquitous across the show floor. Seamlessly combining tech and fashion is Wraps, a business that is introducing a standout product of the same name—headphones that are worn on the wrist. Miran Yousif, global sales director, says that the product offers great sound and is available in 24 colors and several different styles, including beads, leather and in a houndstooth print. Worn as a fashion accessory, Wraps keep your headphones accessible and tangle-free.

For a full review of more product trends seen at Expo, check out *PPB* magazine's Best of Expo issue, coming soon.

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