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**The Changing World Of The Leather Briefcase**

**By Adam Justus**

The leather briefcase—the quintessential mark of the successful businessman. Made to exude quality and professionalism, the briefcase originally was just that—a case to carry legal briefs to court. In today's business world, however, the briefcase has had to evolve significantly.

No longer just a means to carry paper, the briefcase is often now required to carry cell phones, BlackBerries, business cards, laptops, computer disks, even lunch. As the essentials for doing business have morphed significantly, so has the briefcase.

Rather than simply being comprised of paper file shaped pockets and hard exteriors, briefcases have become more versatile in styling and features. Sometimes referred to as "saddlebags," "messenger bags," or "man-bags," the new styles include special compartments for gadgets and computer equipment, while still retaining space for paper (a significantly decreased item).

Yet successful businessmen can still make a statement of quality and panache by choosing a case made of supple and stylish leather. Most now come with handles and shoulder straps so you can carry it as you like, and many styles feature a large flap to conceal the gadget pouches for a more streamlined look.

Most briefcases are derived from a limp satchel used in the fourteenth century for carrying money and valuables. Godillot of Paris first used a hinged iron frame on a carpetbag in 1826. Then followed the Gladstone bag and the Rosebery, an oval-top bag. Eventually these became the more recent metal frame briefcase that opens like a laptop on the table in front of you.

Today, however, you're likely to see a briefcase that acts more as a college student's knapsack, meaning it sits on the floor and the files within can be accessed from the top. This style allows for the addition of outside pockets that remain oriented upward, so today's wheeler and dealer can bring along cell phones and laptops without worrying about them falling out of the case.

Soft leather, often with shoulder straps, has replaced traditional hard rectangular cases. The soft leather cases are more conducive to packing and expanding, plus they project a friendlier image.

## The Changing World Of The Leather Briefcase

In choosing the bag that is right for you, consider the following:

·Color. Black remains the most professional and brown somewhat more casual, but there are also briefcases cropping up in designer colors such as mustard or cranberry. Choose one that both fits your personality and your industry.

·Structure. Are you carrying around paper that needs to stay flat, computer equipment that might get banged around or irregularly shaped items such as snacks or personal grooming products? Some bags have less structure and will mold around your items comfortably, others will provide the overall protection your equipment needs. Perhaps make a list of all the items you'll want to carry to ensure your new briefcase will accommodate everything.

·Style. Does it have handles, straps or both? Do the straps resemble carry-on luggage straps, or are

they too reminiscent of women's handbag straps? Does the entire item look more like a backpack or messenger bag than a professional briefcase? Something that may look comfortable and casual might not look as well with a suit. Consider what you'll be wearing when you use the briefcase and choose accordingly.

·Compartments. Are there special compartments for laptops, cell phones, etc.? Will you use all the compartments provided? Take a hint from female shoppers: if the bag has too many specialized compartments, it might just be a waste of space and money. Only get as many compartments as you'll actually use. Sometimes larger, less defined pouches can be more versatile.

A briefcase is most successful when you find you don't have to carry another bag for or fill your pockets with the stuff that won't go in the case. But when you find the perfect briefcase—leather, classy, stylish—you won't go anywhere without it.

Adam Justus works for

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quality leather goods and accessories. CLC combines the best selection of products with unrivaled service and extremely competitive prices. View their complete line of

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### **Shopping for the perfect briefcase**

**By Maxine Greco**

## The Changing World Of The Leather Briefcase

There are many factors that figure into buying a briefcase. Let's take the features you're searching for one at a time. If this is your first briefcase you need to look for something you're comfortable with. If you're an accountant or lawyer then carrying multiple files and papers is the norm. You'll want something fairly large, with expandable capacity. Look for something that has a comfortable shoulder strap that you can manage easily. Accountants and lawyers tend to be pretty conservative so a black or brown case will surely work. Usually leather is the first choice, but there are many cases made of ballistic nylon with leather trim that are durable and have a professional look.

Today, there are many companies making cases so that every price range is covered. Try the case on in front of a mirror. Try it with the shoulder strap if that is the way you will usually be carrying it. There are many new ergonomically correct shoulder straps on the market. They fit your shoulder and are more comfortable than the old style thinner strap. Briefcases last a long time so you want the case you purchase to be something you'll enjoy for many years.

If you need a case that is smaller or larger than your old case be sure to bring the old case along to compare. Cases look different in a large store than they do at home. Some briefcases come with hidden expansion zippers to make the case larger or smaller.

If you are going to be carrying a laptop be sure you know the size. There are cases for 14" to 17" laptops. Many have removable padded inserts that are very useful if you travel. This way you can remove your laptop while going through security and keep it safe in the padded insert. Other laptop cases have a padded pocket inside where the laptop is protected. Many have very comfortable shoulder straps because these cases tend to get heavy. There are also molded briefcases called attaches designed to carry laptops. These do not usually have shoulder straps and are carried by one handle only. They generally have a combination lock so they are more secure. Some models are watertight.

If you are looking for a lighter weight case, there is a large variety available. You no longer have to rule out leather. There's also good quality nylon or ballistic nylon cases. Hold the cases side by side and lift them.

When you begin to develop shoulder problems or neck problems, or your doctor has advised you to stop lifting or carrying a briefcase, then the rolling case is for you. There are quite a variety of cases available now with wheels. They come in all sizes and models. Some have removable wheels. They are also available in leather or ballistic nylon. Purchase one with the good inline skate wheels, so they will roll smoothly over cement or walkways or down office halls.

Especially for woman, but also for men there are now a wide variety of styles and colors available. Woman can choose from petal pink to lipstick red to bright purple! For men there is every shade of brown imaginable as well as black. There are soft leathers, grained leathers, and combinations of leather and nylon. It's always a good idea to have your initials monogrammed on the case so no one accidentally walks away with it.

Maxine Greco has worked in the luggage and travel industry over 35 years. She is currently at

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