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HOW SHE DOES IT

CARRY-ON QUEEN

LOGGING 20 BUSINESS TRIPS

a year to places like Hong Kong and London, corporate lawyer Sonja Salmon became a master packer. But in all the time she spent circling the globe, she never found a bag that matched her style — fashionable without being too girly. And she needed more compartments to hold her things! In 2011, while stuffing her shoes into plastic bags for the umpteenth time, she decided that enough was enough: She would design her own luggage. “I wanted to make suitcases that would guide the packing process for women,” she says.

Her idea struck at the perfect moment — after 15 years of practicing law, the mom of two (Marcus, 10, and James, 6) was ready for a career switch. But before quitting her job, →



Sonja Salmon, founder of Ebby Rane luggage company, with one of her roller bags... and killer heels

she made sure to lay the groundwork for her new business, sketching out her dream packing system with labeled pouches and employing a freelance accessories designer, a design engineer and a graphic artist. Sonja also polled friends, culling ideas from their experiences to improve her design. Then, at a get-together with pals six months later, she presented a plywood prototype and received stellar feedback: “It gave me confidence,” Sonja says. Soon afterward, she launched her line, Ebby Rane: “My grandfathers were both entrepreneurs; I named the business after them.”

“I wasn’t the only one using plastic bags to keep things separate.”

Since Sonja showed off her wares at Fashion Week in 2013, Ebby Rane has exploded: Today, her stylish bags are sold online in the United States, Canada, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. Here, the travel maven reveals how she found the courage to shift career gears — and why, ironically, she loves working from home. — *Rachel Bowie*



Sonja's Pro Packing Tips

Roll and Fold

Roll thin fabrics (PJs, blouses) and fold thicker items (dress shirts, jeans) to save room.

Dress in Bulk

Wear hard-to-fit items, such as tall boots, blazers and sweaters, on the plane.

Limit Your Kicks

It's hard, we know, but pack only two pairs. Heels, stylish flats and boots are all safe bets.

Choose Neutrals

They go with anything and can be transformed with colorful, space-friendly jewelry.

BUILDING A SMARTER BAG “When I travel, I want to look as if I got dressed in my own closet. Getting everything to fit into my suitcase (scarves, jewelry, shoes) used to be frustrating. And separating items was hard — no woman wants her undergarments touching her shoes! After talking to women, I realized I wasn’t the only one using plastic bags to keep things separate. So I made sure to include accessory cases and shoe sleeves when I created a wish list for our design. Everything you pack should have its place.”

GETTING ROLLING “Early on, I asked a number of people I trusted to be a part of a volunteer advisory board. For example, I had a guy who was great at numbers and someone else who understood branding. When I didn’t know someone whose expertise I needed, I would tell my network. It helped me shape the business much faster than if I’d tried to do it all alone.”

LASER FOCUS “When you’re trying to bring a business to life, so many things come at you. You have to be clear on what makes you unique, so you don’t lose sight of it. At Ebby Rane, we haven’t strayed from our core ideal: elevating women’s travel experience. Along the way, people have said, ‘Why don’t you do this?’ and ‘Why don’t you do that?’ But we’ve stayed true to what we want to deliver. That’s what makes us different.”

LEAP OF FAITH “Leaving my job was risky, but when my husband, Greg, and I looked at the opportunity, we saw that what I was doing addressed a gap in the market. So we made a family decision that I should go for it. Before I left, I ramped up my savings and created a financial buffer so we could afford to go down to one income. Still, it was scary to walk away from a regular paycheck; I’d been working since my college graduation!”

WORKING FROM HOME — FINALLY! “It’s 2014, and our team operates in the virtual world. We Skype and have conference calls, and I steer the ship from my home office. I’m like any other owner of a new business: I switch on from the time I wake up. But one of the benefits of being your own boss is that you can jump in and out — I take my kids to soccer and then I get back on the computer to do more work. I often work late into the evening, but it doesn’t bother me; I’m controlling the agenda.”



SONJA SALMON

Age: 43

Current home: Toronto

Family: husband Greg, 48; sons Marcus, 10, and James, 6

First job: selling accessories in a department store. “It was the eighties, the Madonna era — people were really into hats and gloves!”

Busy lady role model: Spanx creator Sara Blakely. “I’d love to have her insights on growing a global empire while being a wife and mom.”

Secret superpower: “Cooking dinner in an hour or less, based on what’s in our pantry. My husband says I’m a closet *Chopped* champion!”