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No liquids in flight? No problem

Ban gives businesses fresh opportunities

BY MEREDITH COHN
SUN REPORTER

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When the U.S. government banned most liquids and gels on board airplanes three weeks ago, the Clearwater Lobster Shop feared that its live crustacean business might be cooked.

Three-quarters of the \$1 million in annual sales at the Halifax International Airport store come from the critters boxed with gel packs that keep them cool in flight. Staff biologists and retail workers brainstormed to come up with a solid alternative: frozen vegetables. A weekend of testing proved that peas, carrots and corn stay just as cold. Lobster sales clawed their way back in

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General Manager Rick Haley's new pitch: "Add salt and pepper and you've got your side dish."

The lobster shop isn't the only airport store finding creative ways to maintain business since the ban, which was enacted after authorities said they thwarted a plot to bring down airliners using liquid bombs whose components could be carried onto a plane. Some entrepreneurs have even turned the restrictions into fresh marketing opportunities.

Toiletry makers are linking with rental car companies and hotels to provide personal-care items that travelers might leave behind. Shipping companies are offering to deliver travelers' luggage or at least liquids such as perfume and liquor purchased in airport shops. And those who sell solid and powdered versions of personal care products such as toothpaste are advertising their products' new-found usefulness.

Experts say if the Aug. 10 ban on most liquids and gels in airplane cabins remains in place for long, companies might start to develop products specifically for air travel. For now, most items held up as cabin-ready already exist.

The cosmetics maker Lush kept sales from dropping at its Orlando airport store and slightly increased sales overall by promoting its solid forms of shampoos, conditioners, cleansers, lotions and perfumes. Lush also offers to ship liquid products, as do other airport stores, including all of those at Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport.

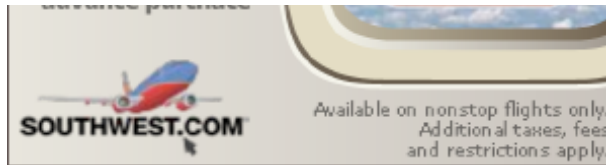
Luggage Forward Inc., which ships baggage to and from homes, offices and hotels, said that business has gone up even though the company chose not to advertise after the travel restrictions were imposed. It added a link to airline information on its Web site.

Zeke Adkins, the company's vice president of marketing, said Luggage Forward has gained a lot of first-time customers who do not want to wait in airport lines to check bags. To ship a medium-sized bag with Luggage Forward one way from Baltimore to Los Angeles costs \$100 to \$200, depending on how much notice is given.

"In light of recent events, people are looking for alternatives," he said. "But we're trying not to seem opportunistic at such a serious time."

Sensitivities aside, Mike Gatti, executive director of the Retail Advertising and Marketing Association, said he expects to see more businesses take advantage of traveler needs. But he doesn't expect many new services or products right away - they can take three months to a year.

"If the ban continues, we'll see some more repackaging of products that exist," he said.



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Already a lot of products are being hawked as carry-on ready: Drugstore.com has collected a Web page of personal care and beauty items that includes EO sanitizing hand wipes, Eye Scrub eye makeup remover, Listerine PocketPaks breath fresheners and Maybelline cream stick concealer.

A Drugstore.com spokeswoman said the company was sending some products directly to hotels for customers.

Some items for sale from small manufacturers seem less necessary to travelers, but their makers are hoping they will become must-haves because they can go aboard. There's a \$2.99 wristband that repels bugs from **BugBam** Products. And \$3.59 caffeinated mints from VoJo Energy come in a mirrored box so that travelers can check their smiles.

Already growing in popularity with travelers are ReadyBrushes, according to Lynn Schneider, a Belmont, Calif., mother who runs an online store for people who wear braces. It is a toothbrush treated with powdered toothpaste that sells for \$1.10. She credits a line on www.dentakit.com, which she added the day after the ban was announced: "Looking for pre-pasted toothbrushes for airplane travel?"

"I figured people would be searching the Internet for such a thing," said Schneider, who is scouting other good-tasting tooth powders. "I had a number in stock, and I had to place an order for a second-day air shipment for more."

Among the first to offer products to travelers after the carry-on ban began were Crest, made by Procter & Gamble, and Avis Rent-A-Car System. They partnered to give away 25,000 bags of Crest Pro-Health products to car renters. Valued at \$10 each, the bags included full-sized toothpaste, rinse and floss.

"It's two companies coming together to give people some things they need at a time when they need them," said Susan McGowan, an Avis spokeswoman. "People seem to really appreciate it."

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