

MANBAG v. BRIEFCASE

My wife and I are presently disputing whether male attorneys should carry briefcases or man bags (e.g. messenger bags.) My opinion is that while the man bag is probably trendier and more fashionable, the briefcase is still perfectly acceptable. My wife says otherwise. What say you all? All rulings on this matter are welcome.

Messenger bags are orthopedist's dreams. They really mess with your back because of the unbalanced way they hang on your body plus they're always slipping open. And, let's face it, if we want trendy, we go to Neiman's. If we want trust-reliability-establishment, we go to lawyers. One vote for the briefcase.

Ann Penners Bergen

Man bags are for metrosexuals, and other trendsetters. Men don't use man bags; unless they need someplace to keep their cosmetics.

Roger Traversa, Pennsylvania

I tend to prefer messenger-type bags. They hold a good amount of stuff, and are much easier to carry and maneuver than a traditional briefcase. If I have more stuff than I can carry in my shoulder bag, I'll generally put it all into a file box and use a cart.

My \$.02.

Scott I. Barer, California

A hard-sided briefcase is certainly acceptable, but it does seem a bit old-fashioned.

I personally carry my netbook and files in a soft-sided Samsonite mini-laptop bag. It's slim, lightweight, and carries just what I need.

Some day I'm going to get one of these Saddleback bags:

<http://www.saddlebackleather.com/categories/81-Messenger-Bags/products/1653-Leather-Messenger-Dark-Coffee-Brown>

Andrew Flusche, Virginia

When you say "briefcase" do you mean something with no shoulder strap that you carry with your hand? If so, those can get really heavy. I would find this to be quite a pain if I had to walk much with my stuff. I suppose you could have one on rollers, but that seems useful mainly for travelling. I have one of the larger Kenneth Cole black leather man bags, and I like it a lot. Very good look and quality, and quite functional. It has dozens of thoughtful pockets and sections, etc. It's like the Swiss Army Knife of man bags. It looks good and lasts forever. I'd go with that if I were you.

Mark Tanney, District of Columbia

If the briefcase accessorizes properly with your outfit, and has appropriate embellishments, then the I agree the briefcase is perfectly acceptable. But be careful thinking that you can get away with only one briefcase. While neutral colors help, it's very difficult to properly match every outfit with the same briefcase.

Pamela Parker, Texas

Indiana Jones carried a WWII British gas mask bag
<<http://www.indygear.com/igbag.html>> Indy the metrosexual?

Brian Elliott

Actually, messenger bags should have adjustable straps that allow you to bring the strap across your front, so that the weight is not only on one shoulder and should be less stressful on that one shoulder.

Yee Wah Chin, New York

The Saddleback bags do look like they are high quality. And you have to admire their commitment to their theme. It takes courage to display all your products on a pile of dirt. But seriously, they do look very good.

Mark Tanney

Yeah, they impressed me the first time I saw them. I'm a bit skeptical that they'll really last 100 years, but I want to find out. I'm definitely a good test case: I'm rough on all my stuff.

I'm hoping that my wife might splurge and get me one for a birthday or something. 😊

Andrew Flusche

I'm a bit old fashioned, so I'd never use a manbag. Plus, I'm pretty sure that if any of my family/friends saw me in public, they would kick my ass for using one. As well, the strappy thing would probably wrinkle/mess with my suit jacket. The only thing that overcomes my newbiness is that I can actually pull off looking like a lawyer; I don't want to ruin the one thing I've got going.

I use a soft, leather bag that has slots for my laptop, files, a few books, and pens/paper. If it does get too heavy after a while, I just carry it with my other hand.

Kristian K. Lindo, Arizona

Indy can do whatever the hell he wants. He's got a gun and a whip. I'm not gonna talk smack to him (unless it's about his last movie).

Kristian Lindo

I'm definitely in favor of the messengers. Overall, they are lighter and easier to carry than a brief case. Plus, if need be, you can manipulate it's shape to some extent. Comes in handy when on a plane ride with a bunch of files and your briefcase isn't big enough to also hold that 9x9 Rubik's cube (if they exist).

Matthew Murillo

If by man-bag you mean a soft bag with a shoulder strap, that's for me. A shoulder strap is more functional as it frees both hands, which I like, so I

can carry other stuff . . . like a brief case. I like a wheeled bag even more, except on stairs. And after working up a five flight sweat, it's such a reach for the metrosexual cosmetics. 😊 Call me befuddled.

Craig McLaughlin, California

There is not a such thing as a manbag.

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Jr., Georgia

Duh. That George Michael hat was a dead give away.

Craig McLaughlin

My preference:

Mountain Hardware Enterprise Laptop Pack

[image: Mountain Hardware Enterprise]

Winky Glover, Mississippi

Sorry but only the briefcase is acceptable. Haven't you seen the Progressive insurance ad making fun of manbags? I should admit that I am writing this without reading the many posts you have already gotten, so I recognize that I may be sticking my foot in it.

Shell Bleiweiss, Illinois

Manbags are unacceptable period.

Yolanda Favors

"disputing whether male attorneys should carry briefcases or man bags"

The term 'should' implies a one size fits all, right or wrong answer. I

don't believe that is the case (pun intended). I carry neither. I have a leather legal pad holder I use for routine hearings which I can insert motions or trial briefs to protect them from getting dog-eared. I have a very nice Swiss Army black briefcase that sits on the floor of my office which was a gift from my wife. Most of the guys I've seen carrying 'manbags' seem half a bubble off plumb; but Nebraska isn't known for setting fashion trends either.

I'm not certain if it is confidence or ignorance, but I always do what I like regardless of what others are doing. I suppose the fact that you are soliciting a poll belies a desire to fit in with the majority. Since you practice in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, I would suggest you 'clock' the majority of practitioners in that area and not allow opinions from New York, California, and Nebraska to cloud your vision.

D.A. "Duke" Drouillard, Nebraska

I second the motion for the saddleback briefcase. In the near term, its a handled briefcase or notebook case.

But when I get 600 bones I have absolutely no other use for, I'm getting me a bag fit for crocodile lunch.

Duane M. Dawson, Washington

Thanks for all the opinions. In fact I am seeking cover against my wife's argument that a young-ish attorney such as my self should only dare carry a more fashionable bag. In fact I quite like the idea of going with the old-school briefcase. But I can be kind of a dork about dress and fashion in general, and am hesitant to dismiss her advice without the backing of reputable colleagues.

One can't call it a manbag, anyway, not in the current PC environment. It must be called a personbag.

But no, on second thought, the use of "son" is age-ism, so if I may suggest: peroffspringbag. There, perfect!

Very truly yours,

Richard Kuslan, Connecticut

I thought it was a man purse as coined, though not necessarily originated, by Seinfeld.

I admit that my fiancée and I frequently make fun of them. They are VERY popular here in Europe.

Bob Bell, France

I have had a bag like this for many years --- as freelance photojournalist I loved the backpack aspects when I traveled out of the country --- and it certainly made travel easier as I had my hands free to drag my duffel bag behind me (before everything had wheels). I bought it in the early 70's and it's still going strong. It's survived all kinds of weather, travel and abuse and still looks great. It's more expandable than hard-sided cases. I use foam inside when I need to protect something. If I'm carrying very little it still looks good. I've even traveled overnight using only this bag --- it too has a ton of internal pockets for things.

Would it last 100 years? Who knows --- but sure would be a fun thing to pass down to kids/grandkids. Kind of like my great-grandfather's medical bag!

Karalyn Eckerle
(Not an attorney; just work with 'em.)

I'm a fan of Timbuk2 bags, especially given the fact that you can design your own in any color you like. They're well made, very customizable, and comfortable to carry.

They also come in very large sizes. If you want your messenger bag or backpack to hold a laptop (in a sleeve), a mobile printer, a Scansnap, and some client files, all at the same time, then a Timbuk2 is the way to go.

Unfortunately, my old one is orange and yellow, which isn't quite the business look that I want these days. I've considered getting a new black bag, but even that seems a bit informal for carrying into court. I hate the idea of buying a bag for looks instead of function, but I may be stuck doing so.

What's the board's opinion on the professionalism of a black,

ballistic-fabric, messenger bag as a legal briefcase?

Erik Hammarlund. Massachusetts

Due to the seriousness of this topic area, it's critically important that all define the key terms the same way. My soft-sided Kenneth Cole black leather shoulder bag could hardly be called a "purse." In fact, I've heard it's made from "rich, Corinthian leather." (You youngsters can Google that.) I bet I could fit the entire Obama Health Care Bill inside. Yes, it's that big. So don't be calling it no "purse."

Mark Tanney

A large bag made of high quality leather made by a name designer - sounds like a purse to me. If it's too big to really qualify as a purse, maybe a handbag would be a better name? I'm not really well versed on the proper terminology of ladies purses (using the term generically), so maybe the terminology is not quite correct. I used to work with a man who drove what was then one of the top superbikes (I don't recall the model). It was super fast and he insisted that it was "fuchsia" but it sure did look pink to me. For some reason he couldn't accept the idea that he drove a pink motorcycle.

Jim Mills

I'm with Mark on this one!! I love my soft-sided KC bag!! It was a Christmas gift and one that I proudly use whenever I'm meeting with a client or heading to the Courthouse!

(btw, I'm certifiable "hick" and proud of it!! I just enjoy the finer things in life when it comes to my practice!)

-David "spit...ca ching" Crosson, Pennsylvania

I thought a messenger bag was something that messengers use - like this: <http://www.rei.com/product/768570> And no, I wouldn't wear this to court.

Rebecca K. Wiess, Washington

Maybe I do carry a handbag. Oh, well. That's OK 'cause, doggonit,

people like me. I guess that just leaves one unanswered question:
What if mother won't let me drive?

Mark Tanney

At a trade show once I received a zipper document portfolio -- just a rectangular case with a zipper at the top and no handles, straps, geegaws, or frabjangles. It became my favorite bag to go to court with small files - big enough for 1/2" of documents in folders or so, legal pads, pens, parking meter change, etc. When the zipper broke I was bereft. Most of the so-called portfolios either have handles or notebooks, which defeat the point of a bag for your files. Took some searching, but they're for sale as "contractor portfolios"

<http://www.amazon.com/Klein-Tools-Leather-Portfolio-Zipper/dp/B0002RI63O/>

I got the black nylon one and removed the logo:

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000MKDV6S/>

This is all I need for 90% of my meetings and court appearances. I wouldn't want to do without my wheeled trial bag when I'm hauling inches of paper, but I'd rather travel light, and this is portfolio is as light as it gets. When local courthouses got wifi, I started throwing a netbook in the bag along with files, and can work during calendar calls.

Wendell Finner, Florida

The correct term is Man Purse, courtesy of Jerry Seinfeld. Although according to my friends they are also now being called a murse in Canada. (If the plural of moose is moose, is the plural of murse also murse? Enquiring minds want to know.)

Any woman who has ever been asked by a man "could you please put this in your purse and carry it" can only be happy at this development.

Carol Shepherd, Michigan

It's a murse, commonly sold with a manssiere, or a bro.

<http://remotecontrol.mtv.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/seinfeldbro.jpg>

Ryan Phillips, South Carolina

It was my understanding the man purse can only be carried while wearing a mansiere or the Bro. Is that incorrect?

Frank Falk

GQ used to have a regular article, "Style Guy" Don't know if it still exists, but there was one useful nugget from a ways back that can be adapted to fit your concern:

1. Briefcase = business;
2. Messenger bag = courier
3. Backpack = tourist
4. Fanny pack = German tourist.

As I say in my threatening letters "Guide your actions accordingly."

Andrew Winghart, California

Okay, but is a woman going to be offended if he asks her to hold his man purse?

Bert Krages, Oregon

Does anyone care?

Ralph Lohmann, Maryland

I have been reading this thread and I think you are missing the larger point. "My wife and I are presently disputing."

After 23 plus years of marriage, my advice is that you should tell your wife she was right all along and would she like to help you pick one out.

In the long run this is the far better course of action, regardless of whether you ever use the thing or not.

Mark J. Olberding, Iowa

<http://www.rei.com/product/768570> Sure, if your office is a whitewater raft...which, by the way, would be a heck of a lot more fun than mine...

Eric C. Davis, Alabama

It takes a "real man" to tell his wife that she is wrong.

Personally - although I have thought mine might be in error on a few occasions and have even rehearsed telling her that- I have yet to tell her that to her face- which is no doubt why we will be celebrating our 39th anniversary next month

Lew Wiener, California

I concur in the foregoing.

Ralph (41 years)

Ralph Lohmann

Sounds like you're contemplating salsa made in "NEW YORK CITY!"

In Texas?? Where they still drive around with loaded rifles in their gun rack???

Surely you jest.....

Mike Winkelman

Dudes:

I am always proud to carry my "man bag," even if at times it is clothed in a "brief" case. Don't let anybody tell you anything different !

Ciao, Mikey V.

Mike Vacchio, California

'In Texas?? Where they still drive around with loaded rifles in their gun rack???'

You say that like you don't keep a loaded rifle in your gun rack. Hint: unloaded rifles aren't much good in a hurry. Unlike New York, Los Angeles,

Detroit, and Chicago; you don't see many drive-by shootings by gang bangers in Odessa, TX. Coincidence or are the presence of loaded rifles an effective deterrent?

D.A. "Duke" Drouillard

As Robert Heinlein famously observed, "an armed society is a polite society."

Morris E. Albers II, Texas

What are the per capita incidences of drive by shootings in the cities you mention?

Wendell Finner

A messenger bag is not a man bag. A man bag is intended to serve the same function as a purse (except of course men shouldn't be swinging it at would-be aggressors). It would be about the same size, not nearly large enough to hold a legal pad.

I don't think messenger bags are nearly as practical as brief cases because papers tend to get messed up and folded, and it is harder to keep the content organized.

F. A. Lichauco

Don't be getting' all wonky, Wendell, on Duke's flippant answers.

But, I am confused, Alexander. Are you saying that you want a briefcase and your wife thinks you need to go with a messenger bag? Besides the obvious question, what kind of briefcase are you talking about?

Hard-sided Samsonite like my dad and the other rocket scientists used in the sixties to carry their baloney sandwiches and slide rules to work?

Shiny aluminum Halliburton that Sonny Crockett would put his Bolivian marching dust buy money in and that took three episodes of "Lost" to open?

A leather satchel like Jimmy Verner carries down the halls of the Texas Appellate building while whistling the theme to "Rumpole of the Bailey" and looking down his nose at opposing counsel?

Just saying "briefcase" is like saying "Do you want some bbq?" but not specifying whether it is chicken, pork, beef, tofu, etc.

Elaborate, Alexander, and the Firm will solve your dilemma.
TYG, NYK,
Jimmy Mac

James M. McMullan, Alabama

" Just saying "briefcase" is like saying "Do you want some bbq?" but not specifying whether it is chicken, pork, beef, tofu, etc."

Does not compute.

Ryan Phillips

Dog gone it, people like me

Great line from AL Franken in SNL skit.

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Jr.

I have a soft sided leather document bag made by Littleton that I will carry when the stack of documents is less than 3" thick and I will not be needing my laptop, but it ain't no manbag!

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Jr.

It may well be a "person with testicles-bag", but it is not a man-bag!

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Jr.

Probably because you spend too much time at Bessinger's with your chopped pork, vinegar-based sauce, and, I'm guessing, a big side of hash&rice. Perhaps, you would be willing to buy me a big ol' plate if I make it there on Oct 9, 2010?

Jimmy Mac

James M. McMullan

Haha! Well played. Actually, I'm partial to a mustard-based sauce. I was

born in North Carolina, lived for 10 years in Nashville, but South Carolina has always been my home. So, my tastes in barbecue are admittedly less than pure.

Ryan Phillips

Yes, that's the issue: my wife thinks the briefcase (of whatever variety) is old-fashioned. I like old-fashioned, but don't want to be the only attorney under 50 carrying a leather briefcase.

Alexander Wolfe, Texas

Why not? Then you would stand out! Use what you like!

My vote is for anything that you can set down on the floor or chair and it stands up by itself so you can take things in and out.

-- Amy Kleinpeter, California

I think a briefcase bag is a fine and acceptable choice and way different from a man bag/purse. If what you get is basically a briefcase's size or slightly smaller but has flaps or an opening, you'll be fine. You may find it much more practical than a briefcase and can still look classy and professional. When you start getting into the messenger bag and smaller territory you're starting to cross the line into too informal, trendy, or effete.

Things to think about to avoid the wrong choice when picking a particular briefcase or bag -

Briefcase - do I look like a dork with this?

Briefcase bag - do I still look like a professional?

Advice applicable to either choice - Don't get something too cheap (\$50) or you'll look like an unsuccessful attorney. Don't get something too expensive (\$600+) or designerish unless your clients are Prada wearing NBA stars. Don't get something too hoity toitty or you'll turn away the working class. Don't get something too trendy looking or you'll turn away the professional class.

Hope this helps,

Jeff Parker, District of Columbia

My 2 cents: Not that looking hip and young and modern isn't a good thing, but do people hire lawyers for being hip and young and modern, or for being seasoned professionals? Do you want to be mistaken for a well dressed messenger, or inspire amusement for your old school style? I'd rather appear to be imitating Atticus Finch over Ally McBeal any day. But, Jimmy Mac is onto something - if you were considering a hard-sided case looking to hold the Benjamins, step away!

Cheers,

Manuella W. Hancock

The problem that I always had with briefcases is that they are heavier than the damn files they are supposed to help you carry, and by the time you're done stuffing 20 pounds of paper in a 15 pound leather box....

i've got an unassuming little LL Bean tote
it weighs nothing
it goes from 1/2 inch diameter to 1 1/2 feet diameter with relative ease,
it stores anywhere
also very quiet, which can be a very good thing.

the only box i might one day upgrade to is something with wheels

anyway, sorry if my practical thoughts are distracting you from your ego

Christopher Brown

I've got a soft-side leather briefcase that I use when I need to take my laptop or a mess of papers somewhere. Often I just want something smaller. My iPhone has eliminated the voice recorder, address book, calendar and a few other things I used to carry. Now, I'm thinking that like for things like meeting clients, all I might need is essentially a big pocket where I can put my phone, maybe a steno pad/pen, some business cards, a pack of gum, etc. Plus, if I did buy a messenger bag, I could stash my wallet and keys in it, freeing me to wear skin tight pants and really highlight my moneymaker.

Steve O'Donnell, Pennsylvania

My 2 cents: Not that looking hip and young and modern isn't a good thing, but do people hire lawyers for being hip and young and modern, or for being seasoned professionals? Do you want to be mistaken for a well dressed messenger, or inspire amusement for your old school style? I'd rather appear to be imitating Atticus Finch over Ally McBeal any day.

Look, it depends on what image you are trying to project and who your clients are.

I usually wear what is described as an "ivy league" haircut. Granted, it's old fashioned, and I've been wearing it since about 1987 or so when I got real and cut my hair. I go to hair stylists and tell them I want a "business cut" "business short" and they usually understand what I want. It's easy to maintain, when it gets long it starts getting curly and I get a haircut. A bit of gel and mousse and I'm usually fine; if it's windy or rainy I can run a comb thru it and fix it easy. Low maintenance, not too unflattering, it's old fashioned but it suits me.

Several years ago I was in the mall, I had some time to kill waiting for something, and needed a haircut, so I go into local salon. I tell the stylist what I want, and she starts cutting my hair. At first, fine, then she starts doing all this "stuff" with it, and I asked what she thought she was doing. She said, well, you've probably been wearing the same style for years it's really old fashioned, and I'm giving you a new style, something "hip". And I don't get mad real often but I was furious. I told her, I'm a probate lawyer. No one wants a "hip" probate lawyer. I want to look a little old fashioned and stodgy.

If I was entertainment lawyer or something, maybe; but bear in mind what your clients expect. And I'd rather err on the side of old fashioned; particularly since you are not just dealing with clients but with judges and other lawyers. Old fashioned is necessarily bad in a legal context.

Ronald Jones, Florida

I am innately hip, young and modern so I carry a beat-to-hell man bag to even it out. Remember Robert Duvall's bag in *A Civil Action*? Mine is like that, but black. Half the zippers are broken and it is scuffed up, but all my stuff fits and I can carry it over a shoulder when it gets heavy. Plus, it's my lucky purse...man.

Jake C. Eisenstein

It's not the loaded rifle.....but he might look good in the specially designed Target manbag with the Target logo on it.....<grin>
Or to put it another way.....Are loaded rifles a deterrent to use of manbags in Texas as opposed to elsewhere?

Mike Winkelman

Are you THE Steve O'Donnell?!

Wendell Finner

Messenger bags may be bad for the back, but briefcases (if you mean the real deal, with handle and all), is the absolute worse as it puts constant lateral pressure on your lower back and messes up your gait. The only back safe alternative is a backpack, using both straps. Um, this comes from some 20 years of really bad back experience.

Michael A. Gort, Florida

One in a million, man; one in a million

Steve O'Donnell

You know that means there are 1300 Chinese people just like you. 🤪

Disclaimer: I'm not even a lawyer in China.

Ben M. Schorr, Hawaii

That comes in very hand when I order take out

Steve O'Donnell

In an interesting confluence of the Interwebz, Sam Glover, one of the lawyers who contributes to the Lawyerist blog, just posted on Twitter that he needs a new "man bag" and asked for recommendations. Matt Homann recommended Booq bags. (Sam and Matt are both former 'sezzers.)

Lisa Solomon, New York
