

Duffelbags.com CEO, Grapeson Wilson discusses Their High Quality, Personalized and Customized Duffel Bags and Using AI Powered Manufacturing



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CEOCFO: *Mr. Wilson, would you tell us about Duffelbags.com?*

Mr. Wilson: Duffelbags.com started back in 1990. The founder of Duffelbags.com is Larry Williams. In the days before Amazon and eBay, he started and nurtured this eCommerce business with the rise of the internet. Then I bought the business from him in February 2020, just days before Covid became a worldwide pandemic. Duffelbags.com manufactures and supplies quality duffel bags. Today, as I carry this business, I uphold our founder's legacy to bring quality products to the marketplace.

Our specialty comes in the form of personalization and customization. If they prefer to imprint or embroider their logo or wording onto their chosen bag, we have multiple in-house options for them. If a customer gives us the dimensions and features that they need for a bag, we can make the sample and we can mass-produce the bag according to what they have given us. Any customer can buy one piece or if they want ten thousand pieces, we can make it for them, either domestically or overseas.

CEOCFO: *Would you give us some idea of the market for duffel bags?*

Mr. Wilson: The market is companies needing personalized bags. For example, for a company that produces a hitch product, we put the company's logo on the bags, so that the bags carry the brand of the company. In addition, for a company that makes medical equipment, their name goes on the bag.

In fact, for a company that transports specimens from another state, we make cooler bags so that the company can put the specimen in the cooler bag. Whether it is hot or cold, it can hold the temperature while transporting to a laboratory across state lines.

Individual customers get the plain bags with no names on them if that is what they choose, or if they want to have their name printed on it, we will do that in-house. For example, my daughter's name is Brionna, but it is hard to find her spelling correctly, so for those types of situations, we can personalize the individual customer's name on the bag and send that to them.

Some order personalization in bulk. For example, a high school band gave us the name of all their students, and we embroidered their names in addition to the high school's logo on the sides to give the bag a completely customized look.

CEOCFO: *Do companies turn to you because they know you have a high-quality product or is it something they may be surprised to find out when they look at the sample or have it in their hands?*

Mr. Wilson: The way that we work is that companies reach out to us and buy a sample from us. They look at the quality of the sample, because this sample bag is going to carry their brand. We send out the sample first and then the order is bought from us.

Our new customers, delighted with the samples they receive, are always eager for more products. In addition, in terms of customer retention, many customers have continued to buy from us year after year due to the credibility we have built up.

CEOCFO: *What led you to want this particular company?*

Mr. Wilson: By profession, I am a certified public accountant. I was filing the taxes for Duffelbags.com and the owner told me that he was planning to sell the company. At that point, I told him I was interested in his company, and he said he was more than happy to put the legacy in my hands because he knew I would take care of his baby and his employees. I knew the numbers of the business from 2012 to 2020, but I learned the operation after that. It was the numbers that made me interested in buying the business.

**"Duffelbags.com is looking forward to bringing in investors to test AI-powered Manufacturing"
Grapeson Wilson**

CEOCFO: *What surprised you when you took over?*

Mr. Wilson: I took over the business in February of 2020, right before COVID, so I went through a lot of surprises. However, we were able to navigate through COVID and came out of it 2023.

CEOCFO: *What are some of the newer ideas for duffel bags?*

Mr. Wilson: Right now, we are figuring out how I can use an AI-powered robot to make duffel bags on a mass scale here in Houston. It is still in the early stage of discussion to find out the way we can bring back manufacturing to the US. What made the US strong after the 2nd World War was manufacturing, so as manufacturers we are trying to bring manufacturing back to the US.

CEOCFO: *Duffelbags.com has manufacturing facilities worldwide. What are some of the challenges in bringing manufacturing back to the US?*

Mr. Wilson: One of the main challenges is the cost of manufacturing. For example, when we make bags here in Houston it is US labor. We buy the materials from US companies and make those bags, but those bags are expensive.

When corporations want ten thousand pieces, they want the price to come down. However, it is hard for us to compete with the products that are coming from overseas, so we are forced to also go overseas and get them manufactured.

Pricing is one of the main challenges we are facing, next is the skilled labor that we need for mass production.

CEOCFO: *Please tell us about the facilities you have now in Houston?*

Mr. Wilson: We were able to own an 8600 square ft. facility warehouse including offices. We do small-scale manufacturing here in the facility and also have thousands of bags along with various machines that are described on our website that we keep at our warehouse, so if a customer needs twenty bags or even one piece right away, we can ship it if they are available in stock.

CEOCFO: *Is it easy to find people when so many companies are having trouble filling their open positions?*
Mr. Wilson: We interviewed several people last year to find the right fit for our culture and company. It was hard to find skilled labor with a good work ethic. That is why we are trying to find a solution by using AI powered robots to automate the routine task.

CEOCFO: *What is the competitive landscape for you?*
Mr. Wilson: Prices are competitive when the companies use low quality materials. The way we differentiate ourselves is by using high-quality materials. We have a description that other manufacturers should follow the thread that we need, the zippers that we need. We have 1,200 denier polyester, and 600 denier polyester; those are two types of material that we use. All those are high-quality materials that show the durability of our bags. That is the only reason we lasted in the market for more than 33 years.

CEOCFO: *Are you primarily in the US or do you have customers in other areas?*
Mr. Wilson: We sell to the US and Canada.

CEOCFO: *What makes Duffelbags.com a special company?*
Mr. Wilson: Duffelbags.com should be able to bring US-made products into the hands of US customers at a reasonable price. Duffelbags.com is looking forward to bringing in investors to test AI-powered Manufacturing and expand the board of directors so that eventually if there is a path forward, I can take this to a public company.

