



## WaterField Designs Company Backgrounder

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**San Francisco, CA**—Founded in 1998 by former bicycle messenger Gary Waterfield, WaterField Designs uses personal experience and customer feedback to create a distinctive line of fitted laptop SleeveCases, bags, and cases for today’s digital gear. The company’s first product, the Cargo bag, was based on Mr. Waterfield’s experience as a bike messenger on the streets of Boston.

“As a bike messenger, I lived out of my bag—it held everything I needed— the packages I was delivering, a change of clothes, food, my walkie-talkie. Sure it looked beat after constant use, but I grew comfortable with it, “ recalls Mr. Waterfield fondly, “When I started working for a corporation, I needed a bag with more organization, but I didn’t find one that I could identify with. So, I modified my bike bag to make it more useful and reflect my new ‘life’. I added an airline buckle on the Cargo bag because it looked cool and also useful-- with one hand, I could reach for anything in the bag, a habit from my old messenger days. ”

The company’s products have since evolved to specializing in protective cases for mobile professionals. The signature product is the WaterField SleeveCase, a sleek portfolio for laptops which comes in over 80 sizes to accommodate most manufacturers’ brands from Apple to Voodoo Computers. Customers choose a horizontal or vertical orientation and add a flap, straps, or a Piggyback for holding accessories. The

SleeveCase can be inserted into backpacks, briefcases, or messenger bags, or, they can be used by themselves as a minimalist laptop tote.

“If your laptop is storing precious data, music, and pictures, you’ll want something to protect it from daily wear & tear,” explained Mr. Waterfield, “I’ve designed our SleeveCases to hug your laptop so it doesn’t rattle back & forth. From our customers’ experience, size does matter, and if the case is too big, it defeats the whole purpose of protection.”

Mr. Waterfield’s design philosophy reflects his experience as a long-time cyclist. Knowing that quality components and materials can transform an ordinary bike ride into a memorable one, he has carefully chosen the materials that go into all WaterField products. Black ballistic nylon is used as the basis for his products for its durability and long-lasting luster. Against this monochrome background, vibrant colors and high-grade components are added to round out the look.

Functionality also plays an important role. Industrial-strength hardware is used for the buckles, zippers, and D-rings to hold heavy loads. Gear Pouches use locking zippers to prevent contents from accidentally spilling out. The shoulder pads use comfortable non-sliding material to prevent bags from slipping off the shoulder and wrinkling clothes.

To keep his products fresh, Mr. WaterField incorporates items from other industries. For a more comfortable hold, an actual mountain bike grip is the handle on the RacerX cases. A paragliding buckle or an airline seatbelt buckle is used on the Cargo bags for easier access. Upholstery material adds the colorful accents on the black ballistic.

The creative process at WaterField Designs is a collaborative effort, always incorporating feedback from customers. The VertiGo, a travel tote, was designed with

customers looking to lighten their load. The snug-fitting SleeveCase was first critiqued by university students. Users of Apple's Titanium G4 helped bring about the RacerX.

"I like to keep things simple. I appreciate that customers actually take the time to tell me how to make our products more useful," clarified Mr. Waterfield. "Why complicate the design process when customers are telling you exactly what they want?"

To accommodate input from multiple sources, the products are designed and made locally in San Francisco. Having design and production in one area makes it easier to make adjustments quickly and to control quality every step of the way. The company can tweak a pattern, choose alternative materials, or change a process so that the final product eventually acquires the personality which sets it apart.

"We all make trade-offs in business, and for us, having our factory close by lets us serve our customers better," claimed Mr. Waterfield. "For example, we can offer multiple SleeveCase sizes because we make it right here. We want our customers to find that perfect fit for their special laptop."

Customers seem to appreciate the thoughtful effort that go into all WaterField products, and have helped the business grow through word of mouth. The company's approach of simple-yet-functional design, its quality products, and attentive customer service has earned it a following among creative types, mobile professionals, and travel enthusiasts throughout the world. Products can be purchased at [www.sfbags.com](http://www.sfbags.com).

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**Media Contact:**  
Russell Standing  
[Russell@sfbags.com](mailto:Russell@sfbags.com), +1 415-546-1040