
Gordon Oakley celebrates Malton Inflight's 30th year

By **Rachel Debling** on March, 26 2019 | People



This year marks [Malton Inflight's](#) 30th year in business. Ahead of the 2019 [World Travel Catering & Onboard Services Expo](#), PAX spoke with the company's CEO and founder, Gordon Oakley, and took a stroll down memory lane.



Gordon Oakley

PAX International: You recently posted a [three-part blog](#) on the Malton Inflight website that described how the company was founded. Aside from the hustle-and-bustle pace of the airline industry, what else was a factor in you deciding to stay within the inflight services industry following your time at British Caledonian?

Gordon Oakley: In 1986, I was seconded as a consultant for the newly formed Virgin Atlantic Airways, assisting the Virgin inflight service team to source many of the cabin service items for the new airline. This highly successful experience was later a factor in my deciding to stay within the inflight service industry.

PAX: It was heartwarming to see one of the first children's packs that you worked on in the online post (part 2). Though I know that Malton Inflight has received much attention in recent years for its flask and tableware products, amenities are still a part of your product line. How have amenities changed since you started the business, both for adults and children?

Oakley: Among the most notable changes, from my perspective, has been in the increased level of style and creativity. A lot more thought now goes into the design of the bags, to give the amenities a useful "after-flight" purpose. For example, a bathroom bag can be adapted to become laptop protector, or an attractive pouch for a mobile phone. Previously the amenities were plastered with the airline's own branding, but this trend has long since been replaced by a subtle and more understated look. Luxury brands are also attractive as partners, providing high-quality products to go inside the kits.

PAX: Over the years you have received awards and attention for your onboard innovations. Do you go into each project treating it as though it could potentially change the landscape of the industry?

Oakley: We have never knowingly gone into a project purely to win an award. As wonderful as it is to win (and I believe we have won more innovation awards than any other onboard product supply company), entering a product for an award is only considered afterwards a bonus, once we are satisfied and, more importantly, our client is too. We hope that any product we've created will become a game-changer for the industry.

PAX: I know that members of your family work with you as well. How did this come to be, and did you originally set out to make this a "family business"?

Oakley: Actually, this was never the intention, but when it became evident that all three of my kids were much smarter than me, it seemed like a sensible idea to try to entice them all into the business. It was never my master plan to make this a family business and indeed, although all three young Oakleys have worked for the company, only one of them currently does; the other two somehow got away. We're still trying to find the escape tunnel they used!

PAX: How big has Malton Inflight grown since it was founded?

Oakley: Despite supplying to most of the world's largest airlines, the company is still comparatively agile and flexible in size. Although we have dedicated offices and experienced employees in the United Kingdom, the Middle East and in Shanghai, China, we don't use this as a way of measuring or comparing our size and the reach of scale of our business. Much of our success has been built on partnerships with designers, distributors and trusted manufacturers. We use both direct and indirect workforce according to the specific project, depending on what the client's needs are. Very often we are the virtual front sales office for the factory. The square footage of our office space expands and contracts according to our needs too. In fact, we will shortly be announcing an exciting new partnership with one of the world's largest and most modern handbag factories, which will make us directly responsible for the employment of more than 400 workers in the factory. This partnership will also encompass over 1,000 retail shops throughout China. It's a big challenge but one we are looking forward to with great enthusiasm.

PAX: When you travel yourself, what sort of things do you look for when selecting an airline?

Oakley: Like anyone who travels frequently by air, I certainly have my favorites; that those airlines often happen to be our clients could be purely coincidental. However, having worked in the industry for as long as I have and knowing how complex and difficult it is to get everything right, I would hope that I am never overly critical. I do also try to travel on other less-familiar airlines, especially if I have

heard good things about them. No matter how often one flies, there is always something new to inspire, to learn from and perhaps to try to improve upon.



The award-winning Ministro serving flask

PAX: Do you ever see your own products in use in flight? What does it feel like to witness your work in action?

Oakley: Yes, numerous times. Particularly our [Ministro serving flask](#). Whenever a colleague or I flies, we are naturally always on the lookout for our products, especially when we know we are flying with one of our airline partners.

Once on a trip to France a serving flask was leaking (not a Ministro, of course). The flight attendant was really struggling to avoid passengers as she poured. I just felt the need to pass over a business card.

PAX: Does Malton Inflight have any celebrations lined up for WTCE Hamburg this year?

Oakley: The company is turning 30 this year and we couldn't not shout about it. We may have a few surprises up our sleeve for Hamburg; I hear there may be cake involved.

PAX: Where do you see Malton Inflight going over the next 10 years? Do you have ambitions to take on different kinds of projects?

Oakley: We are always looking to extend our product ranges, particularly in the eco and environmentally friendly sector. We have developed a bamboo range in response to the harmful effects of single-use plastic in the industry as well as biodegradable tableware, which has garnered a lot of interest with airlines.

As a company, we are constantly looking for ways to improve our carbon footprint. Unfortunately, as an industry we need to make a stance and take responsibility for our part in harming the environment. Airlines want to make that change too. That's why we are continuously developing and innovating products in order to help achieve these goals.



Some of Malton Inflight's biodegradable products