

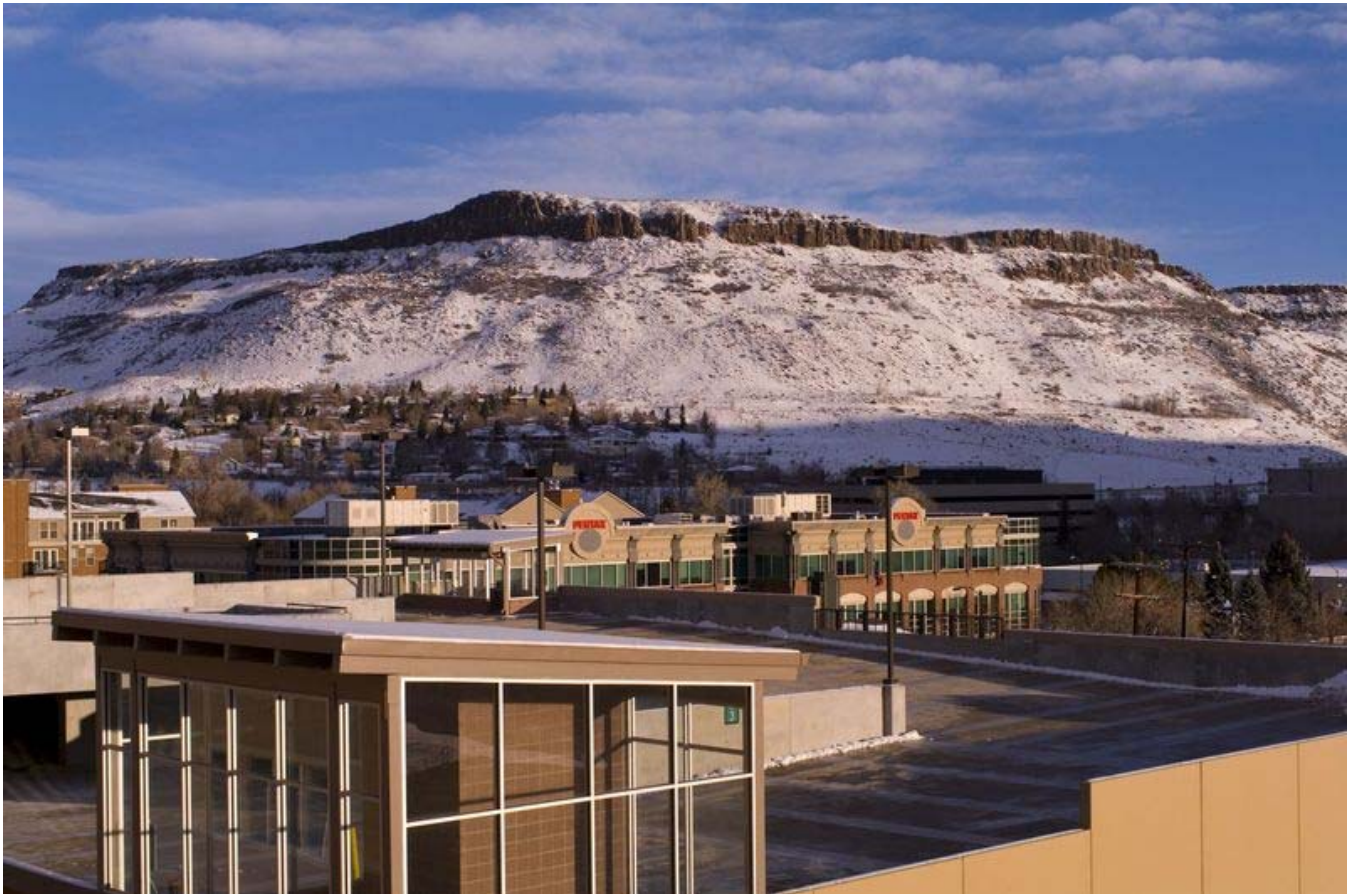
The Online Photographer

Monday, 16 February 2009

Teapot Tempests

Leica has a customer

There would ordinarily be nothing unusual about this—photographers are often proud and happy when they acquire a nice new piece of gear. But when a certain **Ned Bunnell** mentioned on his blog that he'd acquired a new Leica D-Lux 4 to keep his 42-year-old M4 company, it was indeed a little unusual...because Ned is the president of Pentax Imaging, the U.S. arm of Hoya Corporation's Pentax Imaging Systems Division.



Pentax Imaging's HQ in downtown Golden, CO. Photo by NB.

Personally, I completely get Ned's explanation—Pentax doesn't make a directly competing product, and who better to head a camera company than someone who's a photographer and photography enthusiast first and foremost? He mentioned that when the Honda Accord first graced these shores, GM forbade its employees to show up at their parking lots driving one (a story I haven't been able to confirm so far), but that, in retrospect, they probably ought to have done the opposite and issued one each to all their executives. Isn't it best to know what your competition's doing?

Nikonians for pay

I'm really not up on this one, so maybe readers in the know can fill me in on the current status of **Nikonians**, a leading Nikon enthusiast site. From what I hear, the site's PTB decided a short while ago to switch over to being a pay site by limiting the participation options for non-paying members. (That was the original plan for this site, but friends convinced me that it wasn't "Web 2.0." Being still Web 0.5 myself, I don't know what Web 2.0 means, but I'm getting off track.) Anyway, there have apparently been a lot of, er, feelings expressed about the switch at Nikonians and the reasons behind it, and I've been wondering how that's going....

fakechuckwestfall asked to cease and desist

And about this (if it's still there!), perhaps the less said the better. Real **Chuck Westfall** (right) is someone who's been friendly and generous to me over the years; few people so highly placed in any company I've ever had to deal with have been as unfailingly generous with their time and knowledge. Many times Real Chuck went out of his way to provide good, solid information for me when needed.

He's deeply knowledgeable about the products—*all* the products—he represents, and I've known him to personally help photographers of every description, seemingly tirelessly. Chuck didn't personally make Canon the World's #1 camera maker, but he's done his part to help make that happen—and Canon's lucky; there aren't a whole lot of guys like him out there. Say what you want to about any camera—I certainly do—but don't make good folks (and their families) into straw dogs in the process, I say.

Mike

(Thanks to a variety of tipsters)

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Posted at 08:15 AM | [Permalink](#)

Comments

Yep. Nikonians switched to paying members about a month ago, At least according to an e-mail I received from them giving me 20 days to pay up or get out. I got out that day.

It is a good site when one has specific equipment or Nikon software related questions, but it was not worth paying for to me. (I had once been a paying member.)

I got really tired of the "WooHoo!!!I just got my new D999X today and it blew me out of the water!!!" type of stuff. Picture that.

Posted by: [David](#) | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 08:51 AM](#)

I used to read the Nikonians forums occasionally (maybe once or twice a month). Like many other forums, there's some good stuff there, and people willing to answer questions. When they announced their forums would be closed to non-members, I was surprised since it's so similar to *many other forums*, which are free. It just didn't seem like there was twenty five bucks worth of content there that couldn't be had somewhere else.

I'm faulting them for charging for the site, it sounds like they put a lot into maintaining the site. I am surprised at the pricing: \$25 seems like a lot just to access the forums. If it had been five bucks for basic membership, I wonder if they would have gotten five times the takers? Maybe? Maybe not?

On the other hand, if TOP needed to start charging membership fees, I'd sign up - because TOP provides information that can't be had elsewhere.

Posted by: [Aaron](#) | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 08:51 AM](#)

I was a heavy user of the Nikonians fora for the first 2-3 years of my "serious" interest in photography, and even became a paying member when they started offering personal galleries. During that learning period, it was extremely valuable. But I left it behind once I realised that I was more interested in photography than Nikons. The recent reminders that my account was being terminated only served to highlight that I wasn't going to miss it. (I believe basic membership is still free, but time-limited to 25 day periods.) If you're a beginning Nikon user, a year's subscription would probably pay for itself (Nikon ought to bundle one with their cameras), but there are plenty of other (free!) sites with less restricted horizons once you're past that stage. (Like this one.)

The question is whether the fee will discourage the old-time forum regulars who freely share their knowledge and skills - and diplomacy - to keep inspiring the newbies.

Posted by: [Ade](#) | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 09:12 AM](#)

Surely someone else at Pentax likes Leicas , how else to explain the 43/1.9 SMC-Pentax-L Special?

<http://photo.net/pentax-camera-forum/00IdGs>

Posted by: [hugh crawford](#) | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 10:40 AM](#)

Mostly OT: I can't confirm the GM story, but I know that in the 80's Chrysler had a tiered parking system at their Highland Park headquarters. If I remember correctly, employees with Chryslers could park in the front lots, employees with domestic cars which weren't Chrysler products could park in the middle lots, and employees with foreign cars had to park in the back. I'm simplifying things a bit (execs had assigned spots, per diem/contract employees had to park in the back), but that's the basic scheme. I worked summers in security, with the caveat that I primarily worked the graveyard shift when parking was not so much an issue.

Posted by: [mwg](#) | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 10:58 AM](#)

Your GM comment reminds me of an old assignment in the late seventies that sent me to GM'S plant in Oshawa Canada to photograph a new computer "JIT" system.

I called for instructions on best route to plant and was given them with the caveat that I would have to be driving a GM car to park in their lot. I rented a caddy and added it to the bill. Glenn Brown

Posted by: glenn Brown | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 10:58 AM](#)

Nikonians.org has an atrocious site design, both visually and functionally -- that alone stopped me from paying to join the site.

Posted by: Cameron | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 11:56 AM](#)

I worked at a GM plant in the 70's, and as I remember, it was fellow employees and the union that said to park your foreign car at the back of the lot.

Posted by: Bron Janulis | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 12:05 PM](#)

As a fan of "The Secret Diary of Steve Jobs" (aka "Fake Steve"), I can only hope "Fake Chuck" lives up to the standard. Fake Steve's well targeted barbs weren't limited to Steve Jobs and Apple, but extended to the rest of the computer industry, and beyond.

Having only discovered "Fake Chuck" a few minutes before reading about him here, I can't tell, and many similar blogs fall short.

But one of my biggest regrets when Rob Galbraith's forums closed was losing Chuck Westfall's informative postings and replies to readers' questions.

Posted by: Tim Medley | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 12:27 PM](#)

At one time I learned a lot from Nikonians. However I could have learned just as much elsewhere. I doubt they will experience much growth once the loyal Nikonians have all signed up. Except for their classified ads, the site has no cash value to me. They will do fine without me and I wish them well.

Posted by: Bill | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 01:12 PM](#)

Unfortunately Real Chuck and Canon appear to suffer from a bad case of head up their a*s pomposity. Plus it appears they lost at their attempt at censorship.

Posted by: Dave Kee | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 03:04 PM](#)

Re Nikonians: like Ade, although I was paying, the whole to-do made me look again for the same reasons. A strong air of safeness, too much concern with the studium and how to get there, and something of a rigid attitude. Nothing wrong with any of those, but made me realise how much I valued the less structured, more spontaneous approach, and a greater interest in creative thinking. I've divvied up my \$25 between some blogs who will probably make better use of it.

Posted by: hughlook | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 03:13 PM](#)

I was a member of Nikonians when I purchased my first Nikon DSLR about 3 years ago. If you need technical info, help, what have you on a Nikon DSLR, film camera, lens, etc. You'll not find a better place. I really disliked their gallery interface. The site and group is oriented toward technical ideas, art and images take a second place in my opinion. I dropped my membership over a year ago when I realized I just wasn't visiting the site anymore. So I won't miss it too much. I enjoy reading the posts on this blog. When you start charging I'm gone from here too! hehehe

Posted by: Walt | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 04:22 PM](#)

I hear you on the fake Chuck Westfall site. Chuck has been most generous in personal correspondence with me, so I went to that site and saw some weak attempts at humor and numerous postings by "longtime Cannon [sic] users" who have an axe to grind. The herd mentality there makes it not even worth posting criticism of the lame "satire."

But I suppose that comes with being #1. After all, how many photographers can name a current employee, in any position, at any other camera company (except Herr Kaufman at Leica)? A lot of companies can only wish they were high enough on the hill to have to fend off pebbles thrown from below.

Posted by: Robert Noble | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 05:41 PM](#)

I remember the Rob Galbraith forums that were very popular & highly regarded until he sold them & the new owners turned it into a pay site. They also had a poor attitude to existing members. As far as I'm aware those forums no longer exist. Bye bye, Nikonians is my prediction.

Posted by: Michael W | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 07:42 PM](#)

Living in the Antipodes, Chuck Westfall hasn't crossed my viewfinder but what a fascinating mess Canon Inc and their lawyers have managed to make of this.

I think it's a bit rich to take a stick to (real) Chuck - it's all gotten a bit personal methinks - but Canon is fair game if it's doing even half of what people are saying.

Posted by: Leigh Youdale | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 09:16 PM](#)

Re: Ned Bunnell. Wonder why he spent the extra \$400 for a Leica instead of the Panasonic Lumix LX3? It's not just that the camera he bought doesn't have an analogue in Pentax's line, but that the brand Leica doesn't have an analogue in Pentax's line, Meanwhile Panasonic competes with Pentax up and down the spectrum with the exception of the Lumix LX3 and the K20D. Well worth the extra money for him to pay for the Leica brand name, but for who else?

Posted by: James Liu | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 10:05 PM](#)

Re Nikonians: Others have mentioned the baroque site organization and navigation, the hard-to-read background and layout, and the emphasis on equipment rather than photographs. What I noted was that the folks who ran Nikonians seemed to be completely impervious to constructive feedback or problem reports from their user community. As a former paying user I wish them well, but conversion to a pay site is another sign of a "we're right and you're not" attitude.

Posted by: Randy Cole | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 10:47 PM](#)

Re GM

Well I guess we have the answer now anyway...

Posted by: [Peter in Bangkok](#) | [Monday, 16 February 2009 at 11:15 PM](#)

Oh, do give fake Chuck a bit of the same latitude you extend to the real one. Real Chuck does have a hard job, especially because big megacorporations make many compromises where their end users are concerned, and less with their shareholders.

Fake Chuck does a commendable job airing the flaws and stupid corporate practices that legitimately peeve real users.

I think it is disingenuous to characterize Fake Chuck as making the real one into a straw man. These kind of informal fallacies are rhetorical rather than evidential – ironic because fake chuck is livid about the evidential failings of Canon products.

Keep the laughs coming fake chuck. :-)

Posted by: matt | [Tuesday, 17 February 2009 at 12:10 AM](#)

Big thumbs up for the Fake Chuck, from me too!

I guess one could say that any satire is lame, but that doesn't stop people to enjoy the *SA posts here. And while the real Chuck does a wonderful job of communicating with customers, his hands are tied when it comes to real problems that aren't (and won't be) acknowledged by his employers.

Seems like Nikon and Canon forgot the meaning of an apology.

It's only the idea of "mine works" that allows big companies to ignore faults in their products; and when the general media doesn't say a thing about the problems... Just think what would have happened if Rob Galbraith didn't pursue publicly his findings in the 1DmkIII focus problems.

Posted by: [Barbu](#) | [Wednesday, 18 February 2009 at 10:17 AM](#)

The fake Chuck site is one of the STUPIDEST things I've ever seen on the Internet. It is in incredibly poor taste to abuse this man's good name (and his photo). For years now, Chuck has been very helpful to photographers. I love good satire, but this isn't good satire. This is just ugly, tasteless garbage.

Posted by: Ernest | [Wednesday, 18 February 2009 at 11:07 AM](#)

Fake Chuck Westfall is a prince among men-- an individual who has the guts to tell the truth in service to photographers everywhere. I consider his blog a must-read.

-Fake Mike Johnson

Posted by: Fake Mike Johnson | [Friday, 20 February 2009 at 12:59 AM](#)

Fake Chuck Westfall isn't about Chuck Westfall. It's a satire about the inept management at Canon and portrays the real Chuck in a very positive light. You guys really need to read the site before commenting on it.

Posted by: [John Mikes](#) | [Sunday, 22 February 2009 at 08:39 PM](#)

I have been an active Nikonians participant from the beginning. I believe I have contributed at least as much as I have taken. I spent at least \$500 over the past three years with Nikonians supporters and in a few cases, initiated the web purchase via Nikonians. I purchased a few items from the Nikonians store as well.

But the greed they are demonstrating by demanding my \$25 per year has driven me away. If they were intelligent, honest, unselfish they would have kindly asked for donations from the members. Perhaps a display of donations-to-need on the main page would have gotten them there. Or if they were reasonable and requested \$5 a year or \$25 for 5 years, but, unfortunately for them, they failed.

Good by Nikonians. You really screwed up.

Posted by: Dave | [Thursday, 26 February 2009 at 12:28 PM](#)

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