



Ten Years of NPN

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It was the fall of 1999 that my dissatisfaction with Internet photography forums really began to irk me. While there was no shortage of photography-related sites and photo critique forums to choose from, there was most certainly a shortage of sites that were managed as a serious resource for those serious about their photography. Unresponsive site administrators and outdated editorial content prevailed, and rude behavior reigned supreme in many photo forums. It struck me that while the Internet represented a powerful medium for those serious about their photography, few webmasters took advantage of the opportunity. So it was under those circumstances that the vision for a better photography website began to form and the determination to bring such a site to fruition.

The Vision

First and foremost, the new site had to set a tone of respect. The flaming and verbal brawls found on other sites would not be acceptable and everyone participating on the site would be held to a higher standard. The key to success in achieving this goal would be quite simple - new members would be greeted with respect and an understanding that we all started out with a lack of photographic skills and experience. Everyone would be free to advance their skills to any level and at any pace without the fear of ridicule or being made to feel inadequate.

An important part of maintaining the tone over the long haul would be maintaining the focus of the site - the art and technique of nature photography. Limiting the scope of the site would provide maximum benefit for those who enjoy photographing the natural world and also serve as a refuge from all of the contentious issues that divide us on a daily basis. For this reason the discussion of politics, religion or any other topic that has no relevance to nature photography would not be welcome on the site.

Additionally, the new site would serve as nature photography resource with monthly articles. Just like a printed magazine, each new monthly online issue would feature a selection of articles contributed by members and professional photographers. While there were sites at the time that included photography articles, few if any were updated on a monthly basis with new material. In keeping with the online magazine theme, the new site would feature a monthly cover photo that would greet surfers when they visited the site. Ahead of its time, without the costly and wasteful infrastructure of printed magazine production and distribution, the new publication would also be "green" (long before it became popular to be so).

The final aspect of the original vision would be a site devoid of blatant commercialism. Much like public television, the site would be financially maintained by paid membership, not by paid advertising that would clutter the pages with unsightly (and highly annoying) banner ads. This would also help maintain the focus of the site and keep it an enjoyable place to visit.

The Launch

With a clear vision in mind and some rather rudimentary web page building skills, the first issue of Nature Photographers Online Magazine appeared on the Internet in April, 2000. Along with a group of local nature photography enthusiasts and a group of people I knew through my participation on other photography websites, NPN began its online journey from a small group of people who shared in the passion for nature photography to the Internet's top-ranked nature photography resource with over 100,000 unique monthly visitors generating over 2 million monthly page views. To this day, NPN still fully embraces the original vision and serves as the model for other nature photography sites.

NPN Today

NPN members have regularly thanked me for my time and effort in maintaining this site, and it has been my pleasure! The truth of the matter is that I derive tremendous satisfaction witnessing people grow in photographic skill and freely pass their expertise on to new members. Without a doubt, this has been the greatest reward for me personally over the last 10 years.

However, the real story of NPN is not about me or the site, it is about the people who participate and share their time and expertise for the simple joy of doing so. Without the passion and dedication of those who participate, there would be no NPN story to tell. Anyone can acquire a domain name and build a website, but without quality participation it would be just another URL on the Internet. So to all NPN members - past and present - my sincere thanks for making NPN the success it has been. It has truly been an honor to provide a place for you to share your passion for the art and technique of nature photography.

Special Thanks

This story would not be complete without the mention of one very special person - my loving wife Donna. Without her support over the years, I no doubt would have buckled under the weight of managing NPN and a professional career at the same time. Today, Donna works behind the scenes every day maintaining a high level of customer service while I'm away with the "real job."

Thank you Donna, I could not do it without you!

Member Stories

Has NPN influenced your nature photography? Do you have a NPN story to share? Please feel free to post it below in the comments section!