

ASPECTS

// Social Media Boils Over



Photo Greg Von Doersten

Last week in quick succession, the U.S. Surgeon General argued that social media sites should come with warning labels to protect adolescents, and then a few days later, the Los Angeles school board voted in favor of banning cell phones in classrooms by January 2025. L.A.’s move is in line with the state of California. This past February, a bill that would prohibit or at least aggressively limit cell phone use across all public schools in California by 2026 gained broad support. With tech regulations, it’s a widely held tenet that as goes California, so goes the nation.

The moves are not political posturing or evidence of a nanny state. This is a battle for the mental health and attention spans of future generations of Americans. The only question this uptick in mitigating social media addictions evokes is: What took so long?

The psychology journals are packed with 15- to 20-year-old studies that unequivocally prove the deleterious effects of social media and phones on young people. The researchers even invented terminology for the fallout. Remember Popcorn Brain and the ill effects of Media Multitasking? The idea is that social acceleration—evermore content getting thrown at us—essentially crowds our attention, making it hard to keep up, so we spend less time on any given topic. More recently, a 2019 German study showed that more content leads to higher content turnover and ultimately less time spent on each story. An earlier study by Microsoft using EEGs to study the brain attempted to put a number on it. From 2000 to 2015, the study found, attention spans in the study group dropped from an average of 12 seconds to 8 seconds.

In the years since, marketing analysts/bloggers have locked onto that stat. You probably see where this is going. Instead of asking what they and the larger society could do to improve attention, many marketers just went along. If you have eight seconds to get a brand affinity or conversion message across, the thinking goes, don’t use text (too long; didn’t read) or a video with any semblance of narrative. Instead we’re told to “embrace bite-sized content” to keep the storytelling “snackable.”

Sorry, no. That’s not working. With the snack approach, we’re just going to further shorten attention—and continue to filter audiences into smaller subsections. The solution here is to break the cycle to grow audiences not shrink them. We will do that with authentic and original storytelling, which is inherently unique. And unique content—meaning stories that aren’t redundant or derivative or obvious—is sticky. If you want more people to spend more time with your story, keep them gripped with rising action and compelling characters. Tell a story.

It’s the slow food approach. But don’t assume we’re suggesting that every story needs to be a seven course meal. Shorter content is effective, but requires even more economy of thought, careful editing, and originality to both stand out—and restore our collective attention deficit.

// How They Got The Shot



PHOTOGRAPHER GREG VON DOERSTEN CAPTURED THE FIRST DESCENT OF THE WORLD’S LARGEST RAPID. HERE’S HOW.

Great adventure photography is about far more than pressing a button. It’s about hard-fought access, risk, and life-and-death logistics. Here’s the photographer and Hence member Greg Von Doersten in his own words. “Until we bribed our way out of the country, our lives were at risk every minute of every day.” Read more [here](#).

// Meet a Creative

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Ming Poon applied a trial by fire approach to his start in photography. “Failure is just part of the process,” says Ming. “It’s remarkable how much unpaid work you have to do to get to the work where you do get paid.”

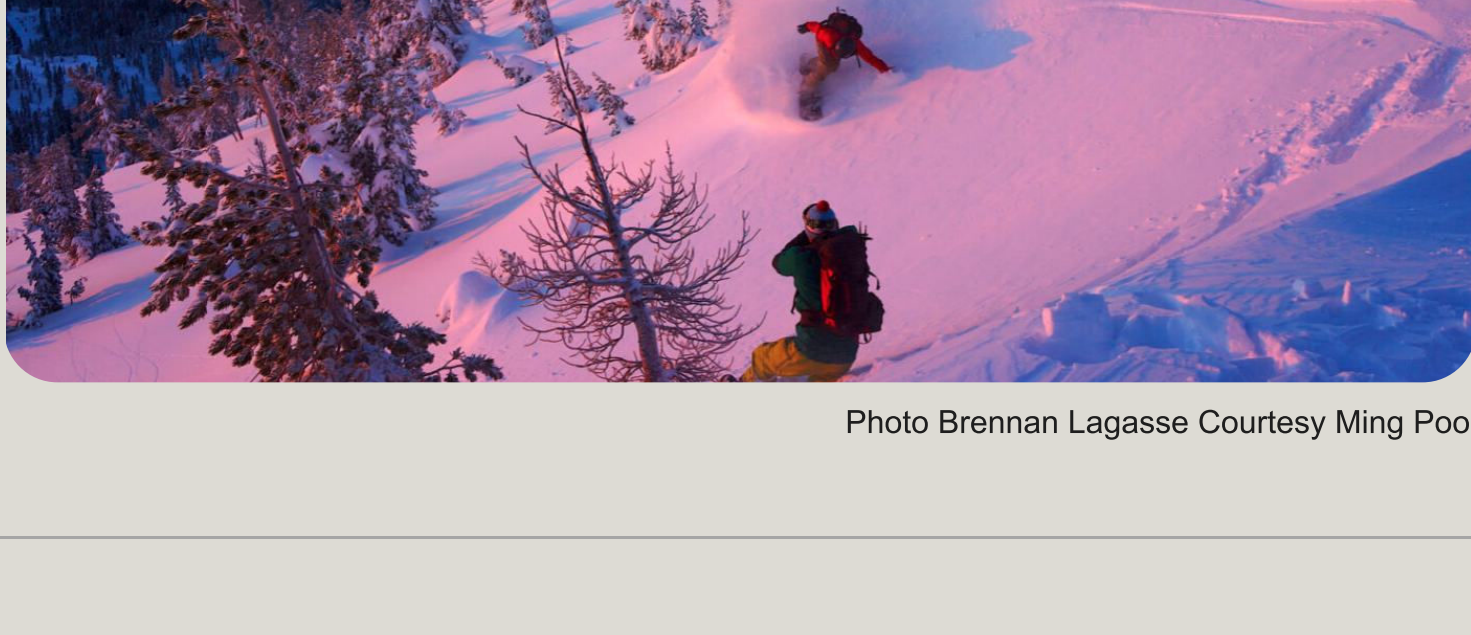


Photo Brennan Lagasse Courtesy Ming Poon

// Meet a Creative

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“I was bartending, mountain biking, skiing, backpacking, and reading Edward Abbey,” says *Hence Journal* writer **Dan Oko**. “I found I could combine my passions in the pages of irreverent weeklies and magazines.”

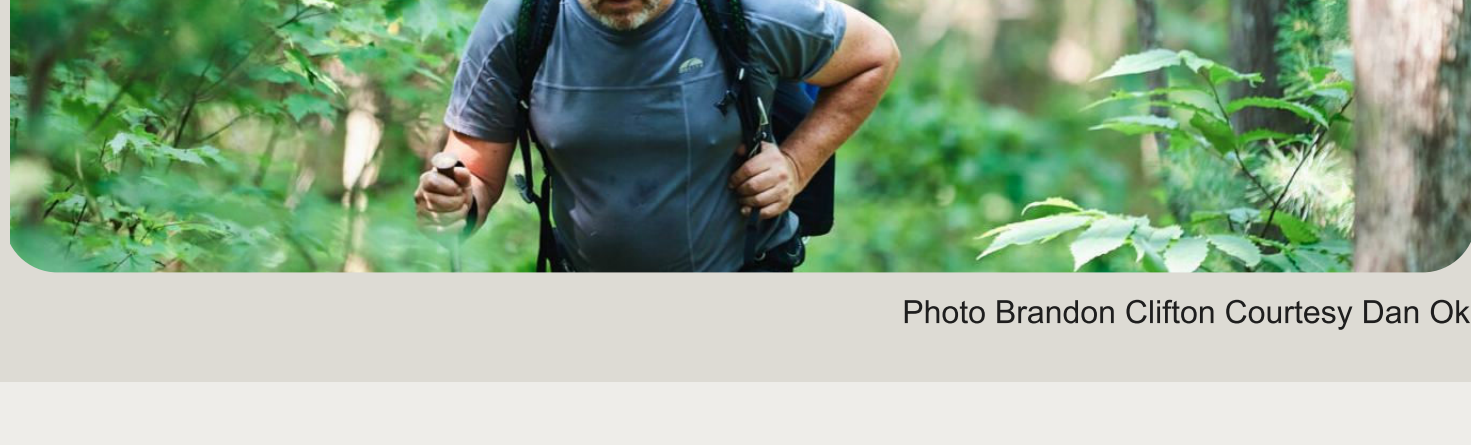


Photo Brandon Clifton Courtesy Dan Oko

// New in Hence Journal

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Trade Secrets: Get the First Shot Off. Then Breathe.

“Getting the first shot off creates momentum for the day and I feel like I don’t get frozen trying to decide what the first shot should be,” says the cinematographer Mike Call. “I prefer to not sit around deciding what the shot should be and waste the light.” [Read more](#).



Trade Secrets: Apply Original Thought

Filmmaker David Holbrooke has opinions: “I hope that people are thoughtful as to why a movie has to exist. What is that deep and far-reaching meaning? It takes time to find those stories. And you will face doubt and rejection. But when it hits, it’s magic.” [Read more](#).

MORE FROM THE BROADER CREATIVE WORLD

What We’re Reading Now

- Will AI SEO Kill Your Favorite Outdoor Sites?** The *Mountain Gazette’s* Kyle Frost breaks down how AI is upsetting the SEO appcart, which could be an extinction event for web publishers. “Based on some data sources, many of these sites receive over 50% of their traffic from search engines.” ([Mountain Gazette](#))
- But Niche Print Ain’t Dead!** John Branch, who works for *The New York Times* but gets the outdoors, is bullish on titles like *Adventure Journal*, *Mountain Gazette*, *Summit Journal*, and *Ori* aimed at “people who just don’t want to be on their phones anymore.” ([NYT](#))
- Let’s Save Found Beauty.** Ted Gioia of *The Honest Broker* on “what happens when a slapdash and uncaring aesthetic permeates everything. Not long ago, these small acts of beauty and care were pervasive in daily life. You could see them in luggage tags, stationery, clocks, lamp posts, even sewer covers.” ([Honest Broker](#))
- AI Is Coming For Music, Too.** Mitch Glazier, Chairman and CEO of the Recording Industry Association of America on what unrestrained generative AI could do to his industry. “AI platforms should not mistake the music community’s embrace of AI as a willingness to accept continuing mass infringement.” ([Billboard](#))
- And a Jump Scare For Your Weekend.** Take this test. It will make you barf. ([NYT](#))