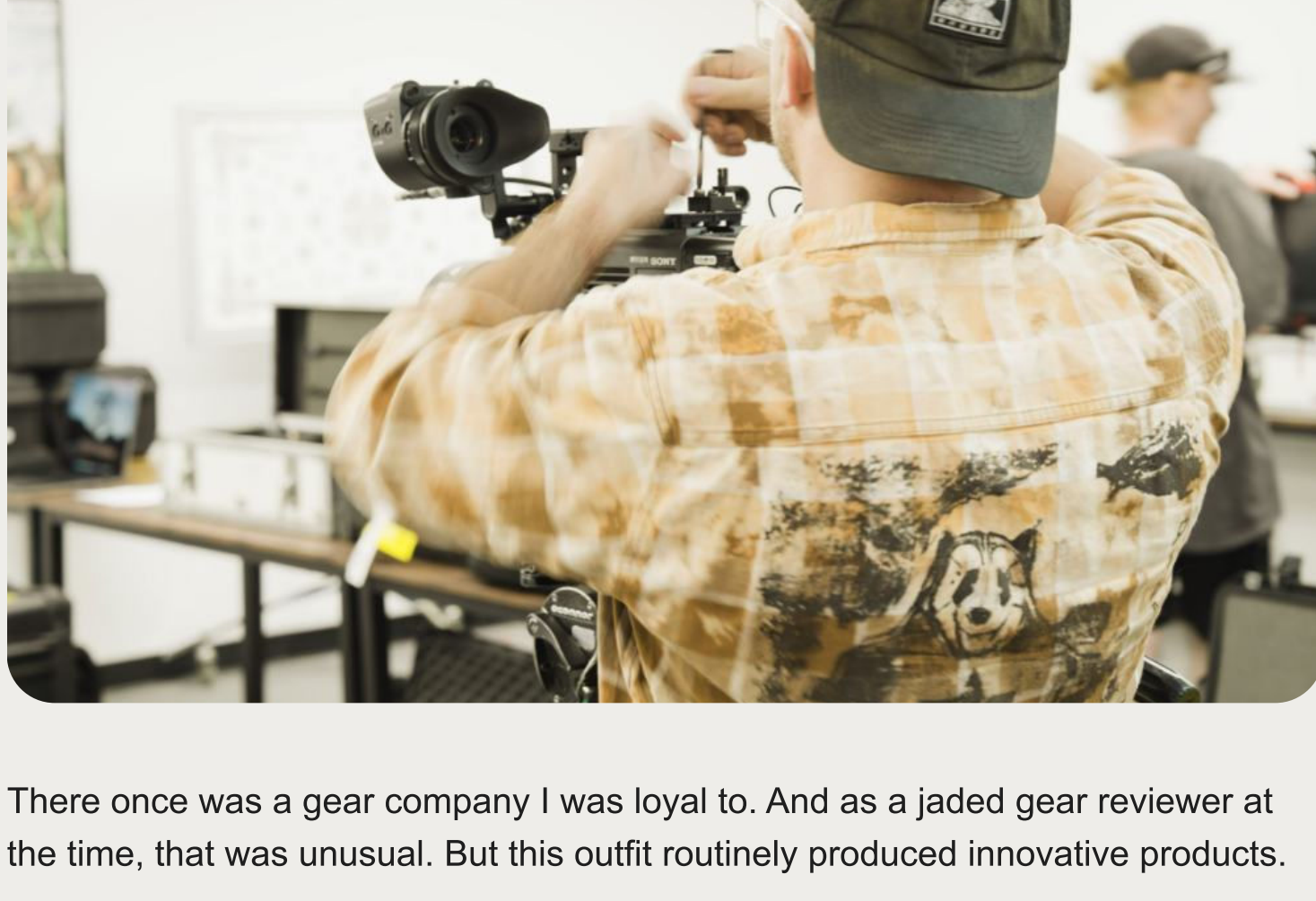


ASPECTS

// Brand Stories Start Here



There once was a gear company I was loyal to. And as a jaded gear reviewer at the time, that was unusual. But this outfit routinely produced innovative products.

I thought that was in part because they were located in the mountains—where their customers beat up the gear the company developed. It was a closed loop. The timeline of testing to prototyping to marketing to sales was tight. The product folks, operations teams, and marketers were in alignment because they were connected to each other and the sport. They were winning because they were together.

And then the parent company moved the business to the coast and everything fell apart. The product suffered. Instead of working in concert, the marketers piloted the ship. They quickly lost relevance.

I knew this couldn't all have been attributed to the move. The new headquarters was adjacent to coastal mountains. When I asked a former employee what happened, he was succinct: "The new leadership forgot that we were a company and tried to turn us into a brand."

He touched the nose with that analysis. It's a subtle distinction, but a brand is only an extension of a company, which is nothing more than a group of people with a shared vision for a business. Brand positioning and product positioning are the left and right hands of one entity. Some executives get that. Most do not.

It's not that hard. For a few years prior to Covid, I worked as a consultant for a new type of conglomerate in the ski resort business. My role was to sit with the board of directors, resort leadership teams, and local key partners to help drive four-day envisioning seminars at each resort. The goal was to come up with 5-, 10-, and 20-year plans for each unique resort that would cover operations and development, and therefore inform marketing. Then I went home and wrote what would become hardcover envisioning bibles for each individual resort—the parent company knew better than to take ownership away from the ski areas.

Using this process, operations (lifts, grooming), development (lodging and restaurants), and marketing (PR, advertising, storytelling, and, yes, branding) all emerged as one holistic company—the resort—within a company—the conglomerate. In a sea of ski areas that have since lost their identities to their corporate overlords, maintaining individual companies has been a winning approach.

Other folks call such envisioning the critical path, and it is, because branding is only determined by the company you keep—that and having the vision to put company before brand. —Marc Peruzzi | Photo Mike Call

// Letting The Steam Out of A.I.

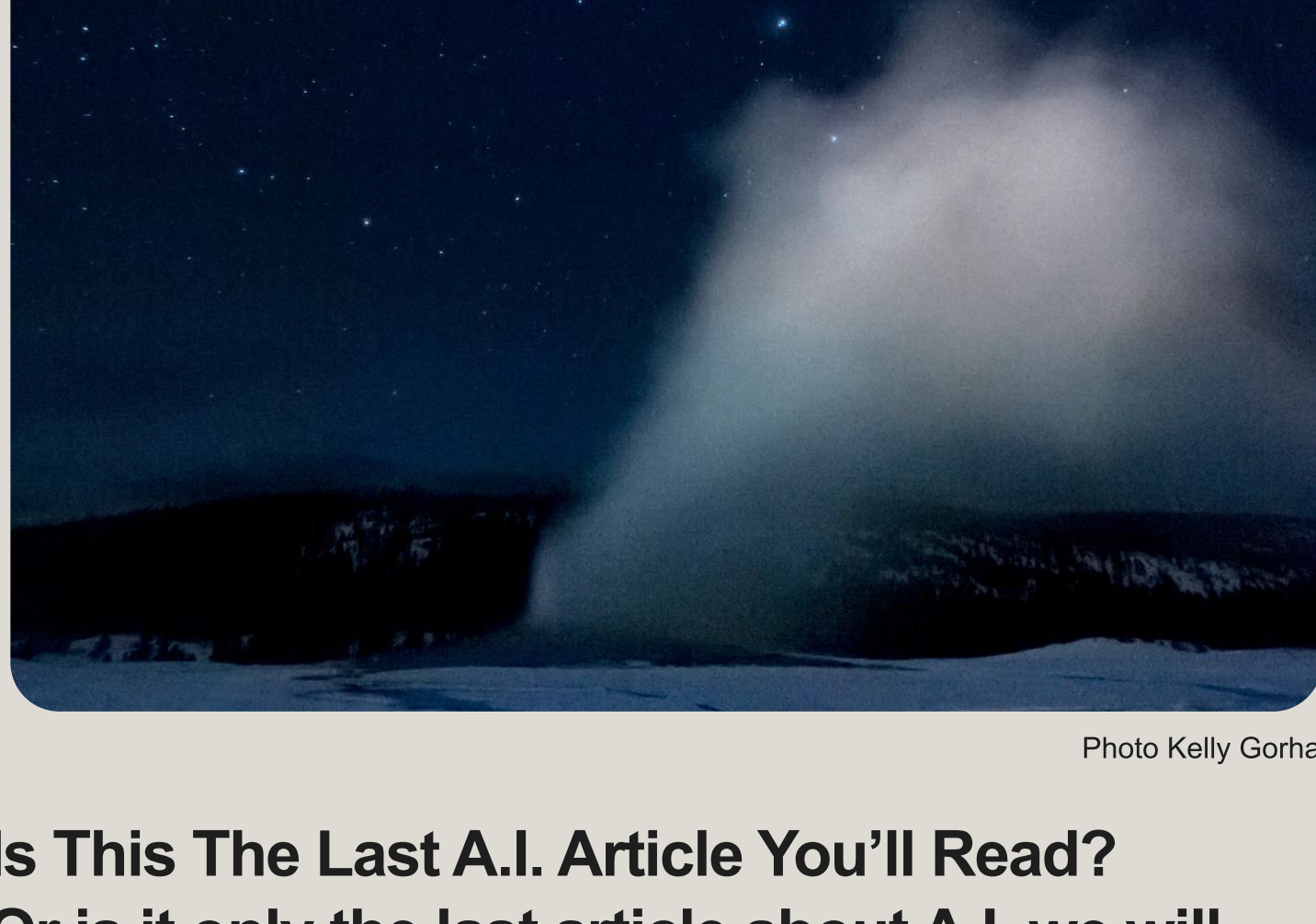


Photo Kelly Gorham

Is This The Last A.I. Article You'll Read? Or is it only the last article about A.I. we will write before the bubble bursts?

From Marc Peruzzi's *Only Solutions* column: "The phone companies make a big deal about using A.I. photo software to make it look like you can jump higher than you can, but that seems like it's only a benefit for a few people with puny minds or Orwellian bureaucrats rewriting history in The Ministry of Truth." [Read more.](#)



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// Meet a Creative

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When he was 15, **Simon "Shagga" Saffigna** took time off from surfing to earn some cash picking fruit. He used the earnings to go in on thirds on a Sony Handycam with a couple friends. The rest is surfing history.



Photo Courtesy Simon Saffigna

// Meet an Athlete

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Gray Dadali has held onto that dream that we all have of wanting to be a pro skier. He's also incorporated his engineering degree into not only starting up his own company, but being in demand across the industry for



Photo Hennie van Jaarsveld

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Trade Secrets: Learn to Collaborate.

"There are always problems to be surmounted," says producer, director, and photographer Dirk Collins. "The weather, the timing, somebody doesn't show up. Roadblocks force you to find creative ways to collaborate with people to reach the goal." [Read more.](#)



Trade Secrets: Keep Chipping Away at the Shoot.

"One of the beauties about having a portable system instead of old-school large format gear," says photographer Lee Cohen, "is being able to keep moving and chipping away. Not every shot is going to be a winner, but the method leads to success." [Read more.](#)

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT



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Story Julie Brown Davis | Photo Irvin Washington



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Story Julie Brown Davis | Photo Courtesy 5Point Film Festival