What's New?
You May Ask

PMA 2008 was yet another year of more evolutionary products than revolutionary. With the advent of the internet, there is now very little surprise of what products the big companies will release – news of upcoming products is "leaked" / released days, sometimes weeks in advance. There were some surprising items from smaller vendors though!

Casio had an interesting new camera that showcased a lot of new technologies – the EX-F1. This "bridge" style camera will allow you to shoot HD movie quality at 60 fps, and lower quality video at 1200 fps. At first, it sounds gimmicky, but a birder could use it to slow down hummingbirds, a golfer could use it to analyze his swing… there are many possibilities!

We found a number of new frame and album vendors, so keep your eyes out for new styles in our stores over the next few weeks.

Olympus showed some new point and shoots. The Stylus 1020 looks like a real winner – compact size, 7 x optical zoom, 4 colors, xD or Micro SD media, and a 3-picture panorama that must be seen to be believed. It will be available EXCLUSIVELY at better photo specialty stores ONLY! Olympus also had a very interesting display for their underwater / droppable SW series, as seen above (yes, that was a real, slowly melting, block of ice!)

Many of you have looked at and purchased Crumpler bags from our stores. This company also seems to march to a different drummer. If there was an award for "most unique PMA booth", they would be a finalist every year, and this year was no exception...

Canon and Nikon really didn't have any "wow!" items this year, one new SLR each, a few new lenses, and some new point and shoots of the "same as last year, but with one more megapixel!" variety. Pentax's 2 new SLRS, the K200D and K20D, are refined versions of the K100D and K10D, respectively. As the previous versions were already excellent models, these new ones look even better! Olympus is sticking with their current hot-selling line of SLRs for the time being.

As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, digital frames are an interesting lot. It seemed like every other booth was showing frames that would "wirelessly from your camera / to your PC / to the internet / from the internet". Some of the systems worked well enough for a demo on the floor, a number were "coming soon". How well these will work in the average home, on an average home network, remains to be seen.

And finally, as a sign of the times, I snapped the following pictures in the Kodak booth. Oddly enough, the Kodak staffers were not dressed in snappy Kodak yellow shirts – we're still scratching our heads over that one. However, as you can see, they do still show some film. A few pieces on slat wall, and some imprisoned in a glass showcase…almost like a museum…

The Just Because They <u>Can</u> Make It, Doesn't Mean They Should Department

Published February 7, 2008 in *the New York Times*, David Pogue wrote:

You might think that digital picture frames would not be especially hard to review. After all, what's so difficult? You plug it in, you turn it on. (And that's if it has an on/off switch at all, which most of them don't.)

But creating my roundup in The Times today was brutal, truly brutal. For one thing, there were seven frames to test. Second, there were a million features to test on each one (pictures from memory card, pictures from U.S.B. flash drive, pictures from the PC, pictures by e-mail, pictures from the Web, text messages from the Web, videos, MP3 file playback, and so on). And third, nothing is more nightmarish to set up than wireless home networking equipment, and that's just what most of these frames were.

One of the frames, the eStarling, is now in a second version. The first, which debuted last year, was so unreliable that the company sent every single customer a free 2.0 frame when it came out. As I was researching this frame, I came across an interview online with the eStarling's chastened head honcho, Andrew Caffey.

"We learned deeply a few hard lessons," he said. "Consumer electronics is a very difficult business. It's difficult to get it right."

I can't get that quote out of my head. I've never heard anything so absurd. It is not hard to get technology right!

Maybe this particular guy is rightness challenged. Or maybe he meant that getting things right takes time, money and effort, which is true.

But it sounds like he's saying that it's hard to know what's right in product design, and he'll never convince me of that. A ten-year old could have identified the design flaws in the frames I tested this week.

And so, I'll bet, can you. Using this one small example — digital picture frames — let's see how you do playing Designing What's Right.

Question 1: Which is right: to build in a power switch (as on the frames from Kodak and iMate), so you can turn the frame off at night? Or to omit the power switch, so that your customers have to crawl on the floor to unplug the whole thing (as on the eStarling and others)?

Question 2: Which is the right design for a Wi-Fi frame: to display the names of available wireless networks screen for your selection (Kodak and iMate Momento)? Or to require you to connect the frame to a computer with a U.S.B. cord, download a piece of network-sniffing software from a Web site, and use that to display the names of available networks (like the eStarling)?

Question 3: Which is right on a Bluetooth frame: to include instructions for pairing your phone right in the instruction booklet (Parrot)? Or to omit it from the user guide, and instead print it on a separate photocopied sheet in the box, like an afterthought, explaining that feature (eMotion)?

Question 4: Which is right: To integrate Bluetooth right into the frame (Parrot, eMotion), or to require an external Bluetooth dongle that hangs off the frame (PanDigital)?

Question 5: Which is right: To print your tech-support phone number right in the user manual (Parrot)? Or to offer no phone support at all (Momento)?

Question 6: Which is the right font size for the user guide: 10-point (Kodak) or 7-point (Parrot)?

Question 7: Which is right way to design the frame's leg (which holds it up on the desk): so that it folds away into the back when not required (Kodak)? Or as a separate plastic piece that has to be hand-snapped onto the back — and, when the frame is hung, has to be stored and tracked (most others)?

Question 8: Which is right: To build a little pocket for the remote control in the back of the frame, so you won't lose it (Kodak, Momento)? Or not to bother, forcing you to leave it on the desk amid the clutter for the rest of the frame's life (the others)?

Question 9: Which is the right operating-system compatibility for a Wi-Fi frame that can access the pictures on your computer: Windows only (Kodak, Momento)? Or both Mac and Windows (none)?

Question 10: Which is the right way to label the jacks and buttons: White lettering on black (or vice versa), white on white (Momento), or with no text labels at all (eStarling)?

I'm pretty sure you scored 10 out of 10 on this little exercise. So I think we've established that it's easy to know what's right.

The only question, then, is why manufacturers don't actually bother doing what's right. I'm sure they have all kinds of excuses for compromise: "That would cost money," "That would set us back a month," "That would limit sales in Eastern Europe," whatever.

But you don't have to have an M.B.A. to understand that refusing to compromise on design, for any reason, can lead to fantastic commercial success. Look at Apple, Google, Sonos, R.I.M. (makers of the BlackBerry), or (in its glory days) Palm.

So what goes through the minds of executives who don't sweat the small stuff? Don't they realize that critics and bloggers will find and publicize the limitations? Don't they realize that customers nowadays can compare notes, can warn each other away? And in a crowded field like digital frames, why on earth can't they see that the only way to differentiate is to be better than the other guys?

We are attaching the Winter schedule of B.I.P.S. classes. There are still openings for several eveniings.

That's it for another newsletter. We hope to see you all very soon, and enjoy the snow.

Please, Do NOT Stock UP

Polaroid Corp. has announced that it has discontinued production of instant cameras. They also announced that they will cease manufacturing instant film no later than the end of 2008. Now don't get all misty, you know you'll never miss the lack of sharpness, inaccurate and fading color. But, if you think you might miss it one day, remember that the film and the batteries have very limited life spans, so don't stock up.

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