



PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Mr. Hidehiko Tanaka**, President of Nikon UK, talks to **Simon Stafford** about his aims and aspirations for Nikon....and why he photographs seagulls.

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**Mr Hidehiko Tanaka, who was born in 1959, the same year Nikon launched its first 35mm SLR the Nikon F, started working at Nikon Japan in 1982 after graduating from Seikei University.**

After three years he moved to Nikon (Germany), where he worked in the marketing department. He returned to Nikon Japan during 1991, where for the next five years he was involved in sales, principally for the Middle East region and product development.

In 1996 he was sent to Hong Kong to establish Nikon within China. One of his first tasks was to visit over sixty different cities throughout the country, as each had its own news agency and all of them were using Nikon camera equipment.

He was also responsible for developing the infrastructure that enabled Nikon to establish their first factory in China.

He returned to Nikon Japan in 2003, where he spent three years working in the worldwide marketing of the Nikon brand.

In 2006 he moved to Singapore from where he was tasked with establishing Nikon in India. The project required him to form Nikon (India), an entirely new company within 12 months, something of which he had no previous experience. The work was complicated by the secrecy it required and the fact he had never visited the country before. He commuted weekly from his base in Singapore to various cities throughout India and by June 2007 everything was in place. The day after he returned to Mumbai to finalise matters he contracted typhoid. Despite being very ill he continued to work and signed the contracts to complete the project from his hospital bed. Once Nikon (India) was formed, he spent the next three years helping to develop the company, while also

overseeing Nikon's interests in their Middle East markets.

He moved back to Japan in 2010 to work in the area of technical support, in particular, Nikon Professional Services (NPS). The Beijing Olympic Games, held in 2008, had been far from a success for Nikon in terms of their representation among the ranks of professional photographers, so in his role as worldwide head of NPS, the pressure to reverse the situation at the 2012 Games was enormous.

It is a period he describes as one of the most challenging of his career, but one that was ultimately successful; when he attended the opening ceremony of London 2012 more than 55% of the accredited professional photographers at the Games were using Nikon equipment. The following day he returned to Japan completely unaware that just a month later he would be back in the U.K. as the new President of Nikon (U.K.).

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At Nikon we are very proud of our long history in camera innovation. Due to the wide application of Nikon products, we have developed expertise in areas that often extend to technologies beyond those normally associated with camera and lens manufacture.

**SS: How long have you been interested in photography?**

**HT:** My interest in photography goes back to my time at high school, when I was a keen member of the cycling club. I would always take my Nikkormat FTN with me when we went on tours to the mountains and then produce my own black and white prints, which I would exhibit at school. I have been passionate about photography ever since and I still go cycling as often as I can!

**SS: Over the years you must have used many different Nikon cameras and lenses. Do you have any particular favourites?**

**HT:** My absolute favourite is the Nikon F-801, which I bought in 1988, the same year my daughter was born. I preferred it to the F4, as it is much smaller and lighter. I would often use my F-801 with the SB-24 Speedlight, as it was the first really sophisticated flash that brought us into the modern era of TTL flash photography. Later I added the Nikkor 28-200mm f/3.5-5.6D IF lens to my equipment. In its day it was one of the best lenses of its type and I recall that many of the lens designers working at Nikon bought it as well!

**SS: What Nikon equipment do you use currently?**

**HT:** For my own personal photography I always carry my Coolpix P330, but I always try to test and use any camera product that Nikon make. One aspect of any camera that I like to test is the autofocus system. My current benchmark for this is photographing the seagulls that fly over the River Thames near my home in Richmond, Surrey. If the autofocus can keep up with them and achieve sharp images as they dive and swoop, I consider it has passed my test!

**SS: Turning to your work at Nikon, what were your aims and expectations when you first arrived in the U.K.?**

**HT:** Based on my experience in other parts of the world my aim was to first make sure that Nikon UK maintained its number one position in the UK camera market. Beyond this I saw my role as being one of encouraging people to take up photography.

Thanks to the mobile telephone, more and more people are taking pictures; these are people we never had before, but the 'phone camera has presented us with a new issue, as some sectors of the camera market are shrinking drastically.

My challenge now is to motivate people who are taking pictures like this [he holds out his hands in front of him as though using a 'phone camera] to taking pictures like this [he places his hands close to his face, as though holding a DSLR].

What I had not expected was that almost as soon as I arrived, a couple of large UK camera retail companies would no longer be in the market, so now there is far less opportunity for people to go and see our products. Consequently, my first assignment was to protect our business rather than expand it; however, the mobile 'phone has created an opportunity for us, so I tell my staff it is now our turn to encourage more people to become involved in the world of real photography.



**SS:** Now that you have been with Nikon UK for well over a year, how do you see the state of the camera market currently?

**HT:** Our expectations and predictions of the market for 2014 is even tougher than it was for the previous year, but luckily Nikon is well-known as a high-quality, prestige product and, if you look at the SLR market, we are still dominant. It is a tough time, but by keeping the number one position we will be in the best place to expand our business when the opportunity comes.

**SS:** You have a well-established background within Nikon in both sales and customer support. How do you plan to use that experience in your work at Nikon UK?

**HT:** As I have this sort of background, I believe I have a better understanding of the needs of photographers and of course I have very good connections to our headquarters, which enables

me to pass on information to the relevant people. Luckily I have a very strong NPS team here in the UK and as I speak English I am able to communicate with both them and the professional photographers we support, so I receive direct feedback. When I was head of NPS in Japan we had regular meetings with professionals to discuss our products and seek ways of improving them. This is how features such as Ethernet connections and wireless transmission came about and, if you think of the size of the WT-4 Wireless Transmitter and then the much smaller size of its successor, the WT-5, this is one example of the progress such collaboration can deliver.

**SS:** Do you have any specific plans to enhance customer support, including the NPS/NPU schemes, within the U.K.?

**HT:** Our Centre of Excellence located in central London, which consists of

two important elements, the Nikon School and NPS, opened in April 2013. It is part of our programme to support our customers and invite more people to become involved in photography and to enjoy their photography. We will also continue to develop our scheme of road-shows to take our products and expertise to photographers in other regions of the U.K..

I am of the opinion that there should be only one Centre of Excellence for people to visit; otherwise it dilutes the concept and, because it is in central London, it works best for us and we will maintain a permanent staff there to support our NPS members.

NPS is a worldwide programme, so if any NPS member experiences problems with their equipment or requires the loan of a special item, they can drop into an NPS centre wherever they are in the world and know we will assist them.



We learned from other Nikon companies in Hong Kong, France, Spain and the USA while we were setting up the Centre of Excellence, so now I have told my staff to develop the facility even further, so we become the number one among the entire Nikon group and all the others copy our business plan. I heard that when we first launched the website for the Nikon Centre of Excellence, without even announcing it, the first customer had logged in within 2 minutes – I have no idea how they knew about it! The school is fully pre-booked at the moment and has proved to be very popular. I decided it should open between Tuesday and Saturday, because if I were a customer I may not be in a position to go there between Monday and Friday.

**SS:** How is Nikon embracing new technologies outside of the mainstream of producing cameras and lenses?

**HT:** At Nikon we are very proud of our long history in camera innovation. Due to the wide application of Nikon products, we have developed expertise in areas that often extend to technologies beyond those normally associated with camera and lens manufacture. For instance, at the London Olympic Games in 2012, and again last year at the All England Lawn Tennis Club Championships at Wimbledon, we were the only manufacturer to work with photographers in the use of remote, robotic cameras. These systems enabled photographers to control the camera in real time as if they were holding it in their hands.

It enabled images to be captured from angles and positions that would otherwise be impossible to achieve. It is an example of how photographers are changing the ways in which they work and why it is so important to us to maintain close links with

professional photographers around the world. The feedback we receive is valued highly, as it enables Nikon to continue improving existing cameras and implement new technologies into future products, which will benefit all photographers, professionals and enthusiasts alike.

**SS:** Turning attention to Nikon products, obviously 2012 was a very exciting year for the Nikon photographer, with the launch of the D4, D800, D800E and D600; you have added the D610, Df and D4s since. Is this an indication that development of FX-format is now the primary focus of Nikon?

**HT:** I would say no. Both the FX and DX formats have their advantages so we will continue to develop both formats. Our priority is not the format of a camera but the image quality our cameras produce and, thanks to the D800 the development of new lens technology, is also now increasingly significant.

For Nikon it is important that we offer a range of products so the photographer has the ability to choose the best model for their purposes, for example the D4/D4s has one role, while the D610, Df or D300 has another.

However, we are aware that many photographers are moving from DX to FX, so the FX-format sensor is incredibly important for Nikon; being the same size as the 35mm film format, which has been around for a long time, it is large enough to permit a very high-image quality, but small enough to allow cameras to remain compact. Our DX-format cameras also have a strong reputation and are highly popular. For certain types of photography the narrow angle of view produced by the 1.5x crop factor is advantageous for many people, so I believe that the two formats can co-exist to meet the needs of different groups of photographers.

**SS:** The D800 and D800E remain the cameras with the highest pixel count in their class. How difficult were they to develop?

**HT:** It was a tremendous challenge for us to develop both cameras and the project took several years to complete. We started by taking medium-format sensor technology as our benchmark with the aim of at least equalling it and, if possible, exceeding it. We encountered a variety of difficult technical problems, but our development teams worked very hard to overcome them, so Nikon is very proud of its achievements and the image quality that can be attained with these cameras.

In my opinion the resolution of these cameras means that the greatest challenge for photographers using them is no longer the technical challenge of selecting shutter speed and lens aperture, but the challenge of ensuring their technique is sufficiently good. I know a lot of people were concerned about the potential for Moiré effects, particularly with the D800E and of course these can be forced to occur. However, I recall that during the development of the cameras we would make 2m x 3m sized prints from both the D800 and D800E and examine them very closely, but we would hardly ever encounter Moiré.

**SS:** The launch of the Nikon 1 system introduced a third sensor format. What were the reasons behind the choice of the CX-format for Nikon 1?

**HT:** When we developed the Nikon 1, naturally a large part of the discussions centred about the sensor size and whether we should use DX or CX. The conclusion we reached was that we wanted to be different. The high-speed processing that can be performed by the Nikon 1 is simply not possible currently with the DX-format size sensors. For example, the Nikon 1 cameras allow you to shoot a very rapid sequence of pictures and then choose the best frame(s) out of 10, 20 or even 30 images. The small sensor not only permits high-speed operation, but it also generates far less heat, which helps to improve image quality, so there are a number of factors that were considered when the Nikon 1 was being developed.

**SS: Is there a single factor of the Nikon system that you consider to be most important?**

**HT:** Whenever I am asked about Nikon, I say that since 1959 this is the essence of Nikon (he holds up a Nikon F mount bayonet ring).

There have been so many new technologies introduced since that time, such as through-the-lens metering, automated exposure, autofocus, digital imaging, FX and DX formats, yet we are the only camera manufacturer to keep with the same lens mount specification throughout all these changes.

This to me is the commitment of Nikon, because people outside of Nikon would not appreciate how difficult it has been for us to keep the F mount.

To be honest at times it has been a hazard for us and we have invested huge sums of money to overcome the problems it has presented, but even today you can take a Nikkor lens from 1959 and use it on a Nikon 1 camera!

**SS: Looking to the future what do you believe will help Nikon to succeed?**

**HT:** I believe that while the Nikon F mount is a key factor, the overall success of the Nikon system must also be attributed to the quality of the products and its versatility. Ultimately it is the quality of the images that our cameras produce that is most important and in this respect there are three key factors: lens, sensor and processor.

Many people will appreciate the quality of Nikkor lenses and understand the key role of the sensors used in our cameras, but they may not be aware of how important the EXPEED processors, which form the core of our digital cameras, are to the final image quality as well.

I also believe that another of Nikon's great strengths is the continuity between cameras of the past, present and future. I am not referring here to just the F mount, but matters such as the overall design, layout of controls and the method of operation.

For me, it is vital we provide Nikon's customers with the best possible products, supported by the best possible service. By doing this, people will enjoy taking pictures with their Nikon cameras not just today, but for the rest of their lives. ■

