



The whiskey wild west

Whiskey groups on social media are proving to be the new frontier

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Recently I decided to conduct an unscientific social media experiment by joining three whiskey and Bourbon Facebook groups. I'm not going to mention the names out of respect to the members. My reasons in joining the groups were threefold.

The first fold was to put my finger on the pulse of the average whiskey imbiber. The previous sentence might sound a bit snobbish but hear me out. My inner circle of whiskey friends rarely ventures away from their palate's reservation. That is fine – but it doesn't help me grow and keep an open mind.

Fold two is to flex my personal knowledge base, thinking I would answer a few questions and dispel any rumors about whiskey with hard facts and links to stories written by industry professionals.

The sage advice from Sother Teague, New York City bar owner, cocktail book author, podcast host, and friend, fueled fold number three. "If you think you're the smartest person in the room, then you are in the wrong room." That is to say, I should be willing to learn from others who may know more about whiskey than I do.

After eight months of reading posts, laughing at whiskey memes, and answering questions I notice two themes that stuck out.

Many of the posts in these whiskey groups were queries about how much the average consumer should pay for a good bottle of Bourbon. There was a particular post that stood out. A newbie whiskey buyer from New Jersey asked if US\$150 was too much to pay

for a bottle of Blanton's. Since these groups let whiskey fans (over the age of 21) join from anywhere in the US, you can imagine the rainbow of amounts and types of responses this person received.

Roughly five responses out of 20 offered some random out-of-State pricing information. Some responses were encouraging, "Buy two and text me the store's address." As well as, "You should have filled the trunk of your car." One post contained a litany of swearwords followed by NO!

It struck me as odd that very few

month later I left that group.

My focus was drawn to a group of whiskey enthusiasts who loved posting pictures of their collections. And by 'pictures' I mean well-lit detailed photos of staggering amounts of whiskies stacked with care and thoughtfully secured in ornate cabinets. Each bottle was like an MVP trophy.

Some had rooms devoted to bottles that will never be opened. The sheer volume of a few of these collections wrapped me up in conflicting emotions. Scrolling down the posts while viewing the pictures added a

layer of slight jealousy on top of a smattering of fascination all sandwiched between actual concern.

Posts from one whiskey group had me wondering how Mark from Dallas could afford

“ ... be willing to learn from others who may know more about whiskey... ”

considered the real-world factors that go into pricing products. There was no mention of competitive costs analysis or what a store's profit margin might be. In fact, most of the posts that were for or against Blanton's had zero pricing info. They were based in pure emotion, as if they purposely chose to bring their feelings to a fact fight.

In looking back at the post, the newbie from New Jersey didn't have the chance to respond or absorb any real info before the tsunami of memes and quick-witted quips drowned out anyone who could help, including myself. I doubt she or he bought that bottle and will ever ask that particular FB group for pricing advice ever again. And that is a shame. Groups like this should be fun, informative, and engaging. About a

to dedicate three bedrooms to almost every bottle Brown-Forman produced. Did he sell a kidney to finance it?

The comments were nice, full of compliments and praise. And when one person did make a rude comment there were five other comments shutting them down.

I collect comic books and cocktail books and I have a decent collection of both. That said, if I decided to turn our home office into a shrine to Whistle Pig my partner would ask me to leave and never to return. And she's a fan of their 10 Years Old Straight Rye.

If you're wondering what my unscientific social media experiment taught me, I can happily say it was this.

Spend less time on Facebook, and more time with the whiskies and people I love. ■