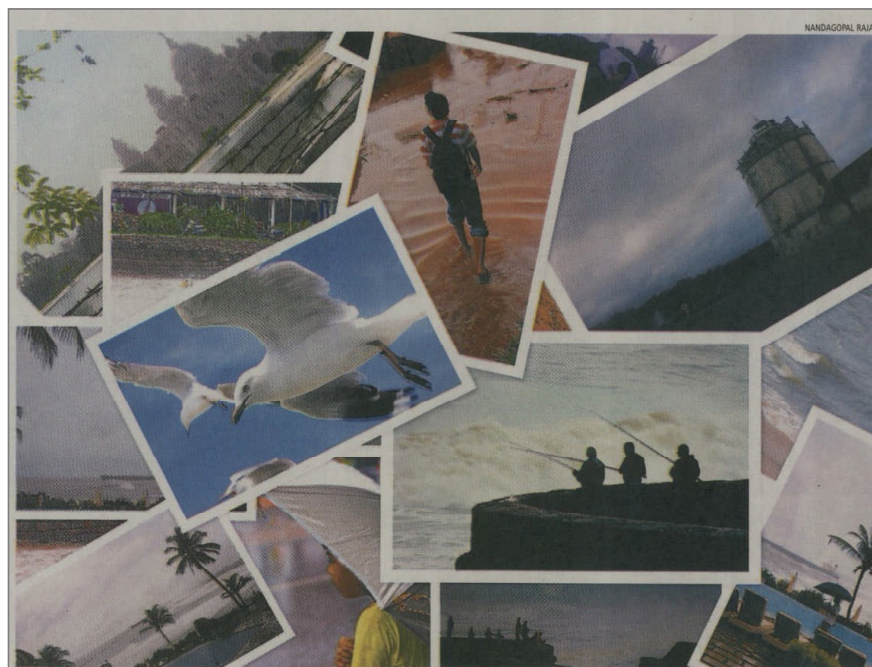


# eye

The Sunday EXPRESS



## Memories in print

India is rediscovering the printed photograph through online printing shops ■ SHAMBHU SAHU

**M**ANY of us believe digital cameras killed the photo print and the photo album, till recently an integral part of our lives. But the digital age is also witnessing a silent revival of the printed photograph. Thanks to the many online photo printing shops where you can simply upload digital pictures and order prints, all without leaving your home.

"There really can be no replacement for the emotion, real feel and colour depth that professionally developed photo prints or photobooks deliver," explains Ajay Menon, VP (Corporate & Business Development) of zoomin.com, one of the websites offering online photo printing and allied gifting services. His website, along with others like *snafish.in* and *pic-square.com* are bringing people back to the good-old tradition of preserving their fond memories. And that is perhaps because these websites also make the process of ordering prints much easier, convenient and cheaper.

"Yes, these websites are making people print their pictures once again. Lot of them use the online services to send pictures to their parents back home... it's like new culture, especially since the number of nuclear families is going up," says Kartik Jain, founder-CEO of *pic-square.com*.

"Nowadays, people take a large number of pictures but they print only selected ones," explains Bala Parthasarathy, Man-

aging Director-APAC, Snapfish, Hewlett-Packard.

But that doesn't mean business has been bad. "Although we introduced our services only in September 2007, we are seeing very encouraging traction," adds Menon. He offers an explanation too: "India is a visually driven culture and photography has moved beyond a weekend-only activity of the affluent to practically anyone with a camera-enabled device."

Parthasarathy says on an average, about 5 mn photos are uploaded in a quarter. "In 2008, Snapfish had about 12-13 mn users. Today, it has nearly 80 mn users while the Facebook has about 350 mn users. In 2008, Amazon.com did some 100 mn transactions while Snapfish did about 40 mn transactions in the same year," he gives some perspective. He adds that these websites are not just for printing and many people use them as platforms to share pictures with their friends and family thanks to the free online storage.

"Our customer base has doubled over the last two years. We upload almost a million photos every month. In December alone, over two million photos were uploaded to Zoomin.com," adds Menon.

So what sort of people are logging in? "It is the family which wants to commemorate their grandparents' legacy in the form of a book on their life; it is the mom who wants to gift her husband a stunning canvas prints of their daughter's magical mo-

### WHAT IT COSTS

- Photo prints starts at Rs 2.95 for 4"x6"
- Mugs start at Rs 250
- Posters start at Rs 109 (10"x15" size)
- Flipbook range begins at Rs 199
- Photobook range starts at Rs 499
- Desk calendars start at Rs 295
- Personalised T-shirts range begins at Rs 395

(Shipping charges vary with service providers)

ment at the park; and so on," says Menon. Parthasarathy explains that a large number Snapfish users are youths and young families. "In the US, 60 per cent of our customers are women and children, while in India almost the same percentage is of women or men with children."

### How is it done

It is simple. Just create an account on one of the websites and upload pictures from your camera or mobile phone. You can then use the site to just share your pictures or print them in any size from postcard to poster and in glossy or matte finish. You can even create your own photobook filled with great moments captured from a recent family holiday or other special events or show off your favourite picture in life-size poster on your drawing room wall.

Explains Menon, "Think of us as your

personal publishing company, to custom design a photobook filled with your great moments or convert your masterpiece into a canvas print; a 24-hour gift shop for gift ideas with a personal touch."

These websites even provide you an option of editing your pictures online. "An average Indian consumer may not know much about Photoshop, so we have provided editing tools for them to improve their pictures online," says Parthasarathy. Moreover, you can also order prints directly from various picture sharing websites like Flickr or Picasa and even social networking sites like Facebook.

Along with regular prints and photobooks, you can also order personalised cups, t-shirts and table or wall calendars. Want to do more? Then go in for bagtags, mouse pad, tote bags, flip books, canvas prints, key chains, teddy bears, pillows, magnets, shoulder bags, greetings, collage posters all with your personal touch.

It's not just that variety that makes this concept a winner, it is also cheaper than going to the nearby studio and more convenient as the prints are couriered home. "People value convenience. In metros, you don't get much time to visit a photo lab, and problems like traffic jams are a deterrent. Moreover, people want everything home delivered," says Jain. "Any obstacle will put off the customer," says Parthasarathy, adding that in the Indian market affordability is also a major factor. ♦