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Print your own cards, calendars

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It's time again to ring in the New Year with cards and wall calendars. The idea behind exchanging cards has always been about conveying your wishes to friends and family. Unfortunately, we normally restrict ourselves to conveying the wishes of card companies instead of our own.

This year, however, you can add your personal touch by making your own cards and calendars. Thanks to technology, taking good pictures and even printing them as cards is no longer a complex process. Here are a few tips:

Shoot the right pictures: Using family pictures, portraits and snaps of festivities is a good idea. If the festivities are to be held at night, then it's important that the camera is held rock-steady. A tripod can be used, but in an absence of one, try using a tree, a wall or a bench as a makeshift stand for the camera.

Compensate for ISO: Another way to compensate for low light is to increase the ISO setting on your camera. But there's a downside too — increasing the ISO will add to the graininess of the photographs. So keep the ISO setting slightly below 400 if you can. The small digital camera screen might not show it, but the graininess will stand out in prints, especially if you are attempting to get large ones.

Keep it tight: Try and get tight shots and emphasize the subject. Wide-angle photos — in which the subject gets lost in the background clutter — normally end up being terrible pictures for cards. So try and zoom in tight for pictures of people.

Look for subtle details to capture up close even

when you are taking still-life shots, like the decorations.

Pick large pictures: Once you are done shooting pictures, pick only the ones with good quality for printing. A good print requires as many pixels as possible. That means your cell phone pictures (no matter how perfect they look on the small screen) are a complete no-no for a wall calendar. Stick to digicam photos which are capable of capturing 3 megapixels or more.

Since most calendars have pictures measuring 8x10 inches, the photos need to have at least 1600 x 2000 pixels. 'The bigger the better' is the rule.

Print them: Once done with selecting the pictures for cards or wall calendars, you need to decide where to print these. Besides going to the neighbourhood photo shop, certain sites like Zoomin (www.zoomin.com) and Snapfish (www4.snapfish.in) allow you to do it at home. Simply organize your photos, upload them and use the site's tools to lay out your calendars and cards. There are simple steps to do here, like sizing the picture and laying it out in the right place.

Another good idea is to customize the calendar with important dates (birthdays, anniversaries and such). This will make the wall calendar extra special for friends and family. There are also options to add text and personalize them with special phrases or wishes for every single recipient.

The last step is to order just enough copies for everyone on your list and the sites will have them professionally printed and mailed to you. Alternatively, you can arrange to send them directly to your recipients. And... you are done! Isn't this much better than spending endless hours in the card shop and settling for a card that might not even come close to saying what you really want to?

