





Picture PERFECT

Online photo printing stores, pushing people to print their digital pictures, are gaining momentum

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YOU could call it Print 2.0. As most of us were getting used to digital pictures by simply and inexpensively duplicating them on DVD burners and sharing them with friends and relatives at portals like Flickr and Picasa, printing is back in action.

A series of online stores, pushing people to print pictures once again, seem to be gaining momentum. Portals like Snapfish and Zoomin allow users to order prints online after uploading pictures from digital cameras and mobile phones. To begin with, these printing services seem to be gaining favour with families and young mothers. "The concept is slowly catching up in the Indian market. It is still a nascent market but the price points and the ease of

use we have brought to the market is now getting a phenomenal response," says Bala Parthasarthy, one of the founders of Snapfish and managing director, Asia Pacific and Latin America.

For starters, online photo print services allow users to first upload their pictures to their website (via Web browser or email), pay using credit card and photo prints (or gifts) are delivered. And these sites promise to grow the habit of printing once again, even for pictures taken through digital cameras and cameraphones.

Indian amateur photography market was estimated to be about 400 million prints in 2006 and growing at 35% annually. According to Gartner, the market for digital cameras was \$110 million in 2006 and is seen growing at 20-22% annually through 2011. And as digital pictures

grow in popularity, photo print portals and printing majors are working hard to ensure that they do not blow a death knell to the habit of printing. Take Hewlett-Packard, for instance. The company which earns more than a quarter of its revenue from printing, launched a \$300 million global marketing campaign last year to push its digital printing platforms and is enhancing its printing technology to help print web pages better.

The photo printing portals are also showing early signs of popularity. HP-owned company, Snapfish claims over 5 million photos have been uploaded on its website in the last one year in India and the number of prints is increasing rapidly. The service, Parthasarthy claims, is popular

among young families, especially for pictures of kids. He seems to be right. Baby-care brand like Huggies has partnered with Snapfish to "enable an enhanced parenting experience for Gen X moms".

And snapfish is not alone. Several others like iTasveer, Zoomin, Printo, eYaadein and Photomast print photos in regular studio-style sizes. Most of them also offer personalised items like calendars, key-chains, t-shirts, caps and canvases and thus also compete with personalised merchandising firms like Myntra. Encouraged by response from India, they are modifying these offerings to suit Indian tastes and needs like smaller calendars.

The nascent market is flooded with venture-funded players and is seeing a round of consolidation. Snapfish, bought

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over by HP in 2005 entered India in 2007 and acquired Merasnap, one of the earliest players in India. With Merasnap, Snapfish got about a lakh users. More recently, online retail firm Infibeam has bought Bangalore-based photo printing portal Picsquare. One of the oldest photo portals is Zoomin, which is backed by Kleiner

Perkins Caufield Byers and Sherpa-lo Ventures. Printo is another one to receive funding from Sequoia Capital and Seed Fund. Bangalore-based Canvera raised Series A funding in May this year from Footprint Ventures, DFJ and others.

Most of their retail plans still revolve around increasing visibility online. Snapfish, for one, has tied up with Indiaplaza to launch a co-branded store and Picsquare has been acquired by Infibeam. Many, however, are eyeing an offline retail model too. The plan is to set up kiosks from where you can pick prints or even upload pictures.

As these portals work hard to revive printing, they could redefine the shoot, save and share culture promoted by digital cameras and virtually unlimited online storage.