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Frameless wonders

Web-based photo finishing, storing and sharing make photography a memorable past time

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A picture is worth a thousand words'—so goes the adage. The 'shaadi-ka-album'—dusted and brought out for decades after the happy event—was proof that generations of ordinary Indians had intuitively embraced the power of the pictorial image.

Such memories were priceless—and could never be measured in anything so mundane as word counts. But were they timeless? Sadly, that lovingly compiled wedding album, handled year after year for decades, was crafted from paper and board—and those sepia-tinted prints tended to fade slowly with the years, always threatened by that unexpected disaster: a fire, a flood or just moisture seeping through the cracks in the battered suitcase or steel trunk, to which the families' photographic memories were entrusted. And that carefully dusted, glass-framed photo, of loved ones, long gone, often fared no better.

If all this sounds as dated as scenes from a television rerun of a 50-year-old 'family social' Hindi film, we have to blame technology for that—two path breaking technologies to be precise.

The first was the wave of digital tech-

that used a matrix of light sensitive charge coupled devices or CCDs to capture the image, more had changed, than the mere mechanics of photography

With the rest of digital electronics, cameras followed a path of sharply improving technology coupled with an equally sharp drop in the cost to the consumer of such technology. When digital cameras began to sport the 'megapixel' tag— a million pixels or visual elements that go to make the picture—it unfettered creativity in the rest of us amateurs. When camera technology advanced to automate most of the tasks of picture composition, exposure and shutter speed settings, it allowed millions of amateurs and lay users to capture in photos, anything and everything that interested them— without having to worry about the cost of every frame in a roll of 24 or 36 shots. Creativity was limited—only by the size of your storage... a 1 GB memory card could hold over one thousand photos, and cards of 8 GB and 16 GB can be bought for most cameras today

And as the cameras that came bundled with mobile phones improved, we have been able to take pictures of every moment, as good as the ones shot with the average amateur digital camera.

The neighbourhood photo processing shop remains a great value service in most towns and

That is where the second path-breaking technology of our time kicks in: the Internet. Online photo finishing, storing and sharing sites and services have emerged as two of the most popular services that lay users of the Internet have discovered.

That old steel trunk with the family albums now has an Internet Age equivalent, one that is age and weather-proof: your own storage on the Web. Many Web-based services offer anything from 10 to 25 gigabytes of free storage for individual users— which means almost unlimited space for storing one's entire collection of digital photos. Having uploaded the entire contents of one's camera after a holiday or assignment of any kind, one then has the option to view them photo by photo to decide which ones need to be printed.

Online services have opened up a whole new gamut of creative possibilities for one's photos by holding out exciting possibilities limited only by the owner's imagination. Thanks to the rapid strides in communications—one in 20 Indians has access to Internet; one in three owns a phone, many of them with the ability to surf the Net—harnessing online photo finishing services is easier than dealing with the 'bricks' alternative—and no costlier.

Online photo services have also changed the old order of things

nology that engulfed the art and craft of photography that had remained largely unchanged in almost two centuries, since Louis Daguerre invented its first practical process. When film-based cameras gave way to digital versions

cities in India, but what do you do when you return from a holiday with your camera memory card packed with 500 or more pictures?

when it comes to sharing one's photographic memories: it used to be click-print-

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