

THE HINDU
METROPLUS

Shoot and share

TECHNOLOGY Women, the preservers of memories in most homes, drive photo-sharing website snapfish.com

Seventy-five million users, five billion photos uploaded in 22 countries worldwide.

Hewlett Packard's snapfish.com, one of the leading digital photo-sharing websites internationally, has a very simple formula for its success — reaching out to women. "Worldwide, 85 per cent of our users are women, and the pattern holds true in India as well," says Bala Parthasarathy, Managing Director-Asia Pacific and Latin America, and co-founder of the website.

When he and three other friends first founded the website in Silicon Valley in 1999 (at the peak of the dotcom bubble), the online picture-sharing field was already crowded, with over 130 players. But there was one fundamental difference in the way snapfish.com approached the business, says Bangalore-based Parthasarathy.

Different model

While others considered digital photography the domain of men (read techies and geeks), snapfish.com focussed on women users. "What we realised was that women are the primary photo-takers, especially in young families," he comments. "They are the preservers of memories, the ones who create and save family albums."

Even as most of those 130 competitors fell by the wayside, snapfish.com continued to grow, and was acquired by IT giant Hewlett Packard in 2005. The website entered Indian waters in 2007, and has already racked up about three

lakh users in India since then. "Usage patterns in India are slightly more skewed towards men, but our research shows that women are still driving the process. They're the ones saying, 'Have you uploaded the pictures?'," says Parthasarathy. The other difference in digital picture-sharing trends in India is the relative number of people using their cell phones to take and upload their pictures.

Dramatic changes

Uploading pictures online to snapfish.com or its more recent competitors such as flickr.com from your cell phone is already pretty straightforward with any mobile with a data connection. With 3G — the next generation of mobile communication services — coming to India soon, Parthasarathy expects more dramatic changes in the world of digital photo-sharing. The recently launched Sony Ericsson C903 Cyber-shot, which comes pre-loaded with a snapfish.com application for a richer photo-sharing experience, is an attempt to tap in on that trend. But, some things remain unchanged. "What people want to do with their pictures is exactly the same worldwide, and is mirrored in India too," says Parthasarathy.

"People want to save the pictures, print and share them, or customise their mugs or children's tiffin boxes with them. Websites such as ours just help make the process easier and more economical."

DIVYA KUMAR