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## Passage into publishing

### Brand Line

*Web sites such as Picasquare, Canvera and Snapfish now enable people to publish coffee table-like books within a matter of days, without waiting for the approval of a publisher..*

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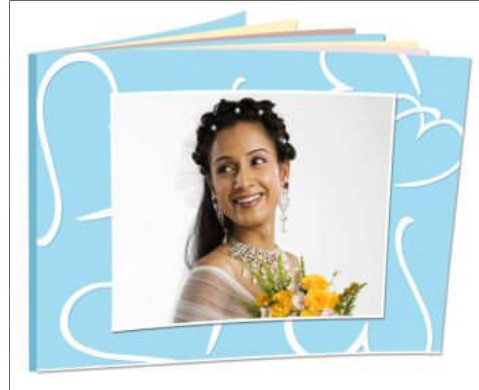
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Think coffee table books, and you picture a bulky hardcover filled with interesting photos and some text. They're meant to entertain, and the fact that they're heavy means they're not meant to be portable. David R. Brower, first Executive Director of the Sierra Club, the US-based environmental organisation, is credited with saying that a coffee table book must have "a page size big enough to carry a given image's dynamic." That sums up quite clearly what its aim used to be. Brower's This is the American Earth, published in 1960, was the first coffee table book and was a huge success, leading to the publication of 20 titles in the series. However, with the passage of time, its novelty has worn off. Given today's hectic lifestyle, the coffee table book has undergone a dramatic change. Not only has its very nature evolved, but it is also being used by the average person as a means of getting their work noticed.



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With Web sites such as Picasquare, Canvera and Snapfish, anyone can publish a coffee table-like book within a matter of days, without waiting for the approval of a publisher. These sites let one design and print their own coffee table book, using a special online service. The users get the flexibility to upload their own photos and text, and pick the cover and layout using the various themes the sites provide. It's all entirely customisable, apart from being affordable and quick. Canvera suggests using these books as a means to preserve memories, make a dedication to that special someone, make a presentation to clients, create a portfolio, design a product brochure or even write a bedtime story book for children.

Coffee table books are now being called 'photo books', and are the latest phenomenon to hit today's tech-savvy world. Photo books have made their biggest impact in the wedding industry, where photo albums were replaced by wedding books. The industry accounts for about 70-80 per cent of the market for photo books. The concept of the coffee table book as hard-bound and bulky is changing now, with companies such as Canvera marketing their products as 'compact' and 'lightweight'. This, of course, implies increased portability and therefore, greater outreach. Photo books are taking off as an independent form of publishing that is a growing market in India.

Photo books can take anything from a few hours to a few days to print. For example, Picasquare takes about 1-3 days to process and 2-4 days to deliver. That brings it to under a week. Picasquare photo books are priced in the range of Rs 499-699, depending on their size. The number of pages remains constant, at 24, but the price increase depends on dimensions. Currently, Picasquare offers only two sizes. Snapfish, on the other hand, has a wider range of photo books, with prices ranging from Rs 199-1,499. Prices differ based on the size, material used, kind of cover and so on. Glo Colour Labs, a Chennai-based company, prices its products per page, with the largest size of 12"x18" being Rs 70. It recommends that the total number of pages not exceed 50, so that the book is light. Depending on the number of orders, it takes between 24 and 48 hours to deliver the product.

[Getting published](#)

Canvera has a photo editing software that one can download and use to design their book. They also give users the option of using their own software. Companies such as Picasquare lets users directly access photos from Flickr or Picasa, and then use them for the photo books. Usually, a range of paper options will be offered, although in some cases you only get matte and glossy options. Glo Colour Labs, which use HP Printers Indigo printers for its photo books (which prints up to 2,000 sheets per hour), has one of the largest paper options by far, stocking as many as 25 varieties at any given time. Many companies include colour correction as part of the package, for superior results.

Although photo books do not require certification by a publisher before they are printed, that does not mean that the customer's intellectual property rights are sacrificed. Most companies may not even have access to the photos uploaded on their Web site as it is done through a separate user account.

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So you can rest assured that your publication will be as private as you want it to be.

#### Eliminating geography

The fact that anyone in India can go online and create their personal photo books in a jiffy has effectively eliminated borders, and therefore made it more accessible. According to Kartik Jain from Picsquare, "Our offices are based in Bangalore but all the work is conducted online. For customers who do not want to upload photos on the Web site, they have an option of sending a CD to us, and we will then make the photo book according to the customer's specifications." Glo Colour Labs is an exception, being a non-Web based company. Edward Fernando, Glo Colour Labs, states, "Our success comes from the personal interaction we offer the customer." Depending on the kind of service one wants from their printer, the options are readily available.

#### Undermining publishers?

Given the apparent easiness of printing a photo book, the question of competition with publishers does arise. Himanshu Chakrawarti, COO, Landmark, says, "Self-publishing is a niche segment in the industry. Some booksellers abroad do display titles by self-published authors." When asked whether Landmark would undertake selling of self-published photo books, Chakrawarti says, "We haven't taken a call on the issue, and need to decide whether it makes business sense."

While photo books are easy to print, they may not be as accessible as published titles because of lack of circulation. Gautam Padmanabhan, CEO, Westland Books, says, "The biggest drawback of self-publishing is the lack of an organised distribution channel."

Despite some downside, it is apparent that photo books are becoming increasingly popular in India. It's interesting to note how photo books are brewing something of a mini-revolution in publishing.

The need for approval being entirely eliminated, it's no holds barred for people who want to make an effective presentation of their work, whether for business or pleasure. Granted that creating your own photo book may not have the same impact as a traditional coffee table book, but it does give you the freedom to completely design your own publication.

Do send in your queries, suggestions and feedback to [brandline@thehindu.co.in](mailto:brandline@thehindu.co.in)

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