

Printing Digital Photos

It's a snap! Or is it? With all the choices in cameras—conventional, digital, and camera phones—people are taking countless pictures, but what is the best way to print them? There are a growing number of options for storing and printing pictures. They can be stored on CDs and digitally online, as well as on the computer, but what happens when it's time to print them? Downloading pictures directly from a digital camera to the computer and then printing them is certainly convenient. Taking digital images to the store or sending them via computer to a local store or an online gallery are other alternatives. Let's look at some options.

Printing Photos at Home

Many people choose the option of printing at home because of its convenience. This can be a good choice when printing just a few pictures, when time is short, or if larger photos are desired. A 5×7 or 8×10 at home can cost from 60 cents to \$1. Home printing is convenient and fast, but is it always economical? Some things to consider when printing at home would be the cost of special paper, replacing ink cartridges, which can drive up the cost of each print from 25 to 60 cents a photo, and the color quality. Printing large quantities at home may be expensive as well as time consuming. According to *The New York Times*, the cost of ink for a home color printer is about the cost of a bottle of Joy perfume, or roughly \$128 for 2.5 ounces. The color quality of photos printed at home can differ from the quality available from commercially available printers. At home, when a cartridge is low on ink, the colors may be off, and not all printers deliver good

quality. For home printers, quality goes up when the price increases. Some printers may be inexpensive to purchase, but the cost of ink may exceed the cost of the printer over time. For special occasions such as weddings, graduations, and other such events, better quality processing may be desired. Large quantities are much less expensive at a retailer or online service.

In-Store or Mail-in Printing

Let's take a look at in-store or mail-in options for processing film and digital photos. All photo labs use either Fuji or Kodak processing. Digital photos can be uploaded and sent online to a local store such as Target, Wal-Mart, Walgreen's, CVS, Costco, or other local stores for pick up in a day or two, or you can choose one-hour processing. Digital photos can also be dropped off directly at the store. The option then is how quickly they need to be processed. The cost difference is in the time factor; the price can vary up to 15 cents a photo depending on the type of service requested. A general rule of thumb is: the quicker the service, the more expensive the photo. The three in-store services are:

- immediate printing – where the customer orders photos at a kiosk located in the store, and they are immediately printed from there;
- the use of the in-store lab – where the customer has the option of editing the photos, then having them processed in the on-site lab; and
- two-day service – where they are dropped off and picked up in two days.

Advantages of in-store or mail-in printing include:

- good quality prints,
- less expensive per photo,
- photos can be placed on a CD for use on the computer,
- lower prices for large quantities,
- reprints or money back are generally offered if the consumer is not satisfied with the color or quality of the photo, and
- sending photos electronically to the store for printing saves a trip.

Disadvantages of in-store or mail-in printing include:

- Larger prints such as 5×7s or 8×10s are more expensive when ordered in-store vs. printing from a computer at home (excluding the cost of the printer and ink, of course).
- The digital camera computer chip must be dropped off and later picked up.
- A wait at the counter can be time consuming if the line is long.
- It takes a few days to send and receive photos when using a mail-in company to process film. This could be a drawback if time is a factor.
- Depending on the company, postage must frequently be paid, which adds to the final cost.

With in-store processing, a terminal or kiosk is used to order or edit prints stored on a memory card; or you can merely hand the memory card to a clerk, just as you do with film canisters if the technology seems a bit overwhelming.

Online Printing

There are numerous photo galleries online with a variety of services. Some features of online galleries are:

- Large orders are more economical, with a savings of 10–20 cents per print.
- There is often an option to pre-pay for photos in bulk, which may offer an even better price.
- Prints can be ordered from home and picked at a local store at a convenient time; if two-day service is requested, the prints are more economical.
- There is the option of sending photos to a local store or to an online gallery.
- To research online printing features, the following are some of the better known photo galleries:
www.kodakgallery.com,
www.dotphoto.com,
www.shutterfly.com,
www.apple.com/ilife/iphoto/,
www.snapfish.com,
www.photoworks.com, and
www.MysticColorLab.com.
- Sharing photos with friends and family is easy. They can easily go to a website to view and order prints

Disadvantages of online photo finishing include:

- The consumer is generally expected to pay postage when using an online photo shop, which raises the cost of prints for small orders.
- Some photo galleries charge yearly subscriptions to store photos in their gallery.
- There are often charges to keep photos longer than 30–90 days.
- Color quality varies from lab to lab, as well as the same lab delivering different color qualities on the same order.

Cropping

There is also the cropping issue with digital photos. Because most digital pictures use the aspect that matches a computer monitor, which is 1.33:1 width to height as opposed to a 35mm film, which uses a 1.5:1 ratio, prints

measuring 4×6 inches are wider and shorter than digital images. Photos that are 8×10 inches or larger are narrower and taller than their digital counterparts. When cropping pictures, some online photo finishers offer prints that take this into consideration, but others may not. A good solution would be to use the photo service cropping feature, which is generally a safer bet. Also, when cropping, keep in mind that you reduce the number of pixels, so ordering larger photos can create a less crisp image.

Mac or PC?

The type of computer you have also determines the quality outcome of your photos. Apple computers are set to a gamma of 1.8, while PCs are set to a gamma of 2.2. Therefore, an owner of a Mac computer will do well to order prints from an Apple photo printing service.

Other Drawbacks with Online Printing

- Color correction is inferior to other options and could also be more costly to correct. Do not assume that receiving poorly colored photos is because of a lack of experience on the part of the

References

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Prepared by Vita Roth, Student Intern for Texas Cooperative Extension from Sam Houston State University and reviewed by Nancy Granovsky, Texas Cooperative Extension, July 2006. Family & Consumer Sciences website: <http://fcs.tamu.edu>

consumer; it could very well be the fault of the printing lab.

- Uploading could be time consuming if you are not using a broadband internet service. Dial up service is slow and time consuming.
- Subscribing to an online gallery may include annual, as well as long-term, storage fees
- It is best to check around for prices when ordering large prints such as 5×7s or 8×10s because there is a wide price difference among the various photo labs.

Summary

With rapid technological advancements, the options for printing photos have become numerous. As technology grows, the various features will also grow. Each of the options has its advantages and drawbacks. Knowing the best choice for each situation is the main challenge in selecting the best way to print digital photos. Keep in mind that time is money; the faster you want your photos, the more expensive they will be. The quantity and quality of your prints, as well as the sizes you want, should also be taken into account when choosing where to print your pictures.