

Get snap happy

We paced up and down the high street and surfed the internet to find the best digital processing services

Using a good high-street or online photo processing service can give better results than if you print pictures yourself, and it's cheaper. The cost of doing it yourself varies, but printing one 7x5-inch photo on a typical home inkjet costs about 40p in ink and another 10p in paper.

Digital printing services have improved since we tested them in 2004. But don't assume that any service will do, because we found big differences between them.

To test our seven high-street services, we took the same set of 24 pictures to four branches of each, and asked for 24 7x5-inch glossy prints and one 12x8-inch enlargement. We also tested seven online processors by asking them for the same prints four times over a month.

If you're in doubt about the quality of a print you receive, do what we did and

look for colour bias. Simply check the colour of a part of the photo you're familiar with, such as a cloudy white sky. If you see unnatural colour, such as a heavy tint of yellow, red, blue or green, reject the photo.

Other common faults include under-printing (too dark), over-printing (too bright), and badly cropped edges or unsightly white borders. If you are unhappy with any of your photos, ask for them to be done again without charge.

Printing services have improved since we tested them in 2004

Contacts

Asda 0500 100 055
www.asda.co.uk

Bonusprint 020 8236 7352
www.bonusprint.co.uk

Boots 08450 70 80 90
www.bootsdigitalphoto
centre.com

Club35 020 8840 4850
www.club35.co.uk

Colorama 0845 270 0470
www.colorama.co.uk

Directfoto 01481 239 729
www.directfoto.co.uk

Fotango 020 7251 7010

www.photos.fotango.com
Jessops 0845 4587080

www.jessops.com
Klick 0870 750 5625

www.klick.co.uk
Kodak
www.kodakgallery.co.uk

Photobox 0870 428 1071
www.photobox.co.uk

Snapfish 0870 720 0387
www.snapfish.co.uk

Snappy Snaps 020 8741
7474 www.snappysnaps.com
Tesco 0800 505 555



1 IN-STORE

75% Snappy Snaps £9.60

Print quality is very good, especially those from pictures taken in bright conditions. The different branches offer consistently good prints. At one branch staff didn't get the order right. We were given the wrong-sized enlargement and our set of 24 photos wasn't ready. But when we complained, the order was completed quickly and we received a discount.

WORTH KNOWING Snappy Snaps offers an internet service. You email your photos to your preferred branch and it prints them for collection.

Matt finish available Yes Photo gifts available Yes



How to get your digital pictures printed

You have the choice of high-street shops, kiosks and online services

■ CHOOSE YOUR PRINTS

All our Best Buy cameras (p38), except the Kodak Easyshare P880, have Digital Print Order Format (DPOF). It lets you scroll through pictures on the memory card and mark those you want printed.

■ OVER THE COUNTER

If you're using an over-the-counter service, hand over the memory card. Alternatively, you can crop your photos at home on your PC, copy them back on to the memory card or burn them to CD, and hand either over in the shop.

■ DO IT YOURSELF

Photo machines are now common on the high street. First load your photos by inserting the memory card or CD. You're given the option to carry out basic image editing before choosing which photos to print. The prints are delivered by the machine but you usually pay at the counter.

■ 24-HOUR SERVICE

Jessops is testing a 24-hour photo machine, resembling a cash machine, outside its Kingston-upon-Thames store. You insert a memory card

or CD, make your choices and pay by credit or debit card.

■ **ONLINE** Another option is to upload pictures to an online service. You can download software from the site to let you do this quicker. Once your photos are up, you can edit, order and pay online; your prints are sent by post. Friends can also view your photos online.

■ ASPECT RATIO

The dimensions of a digital picture often aren't proportional to a standard-sized 6x4-inch or 7x5-inch print. Most digital cameras have an aspect ratio of

4:3, meaning that the width to height ratio of the digital image is four to three. If you print a 4:3 image on 6x4-inch or 7x5-inch paper, either a small part of the picture will be cropped, or the photo will be shrunk leaving white borders down the sides.

■ YOUR CHOICE

Online processors usually give you the choice of whether to crop or shrink the whole photo. If you use a shop, it will usually crop the photos automatically, but you can request them to be shrunk to fit if you wish.

USING THE TABLE

We tested market-leading high-street and online digital processing services.

Specification

Service tested For online services, the time shown includes delivery by post.

Price A guide price for 24 7x5-inch prints, including postage where appropriate. Prices on the high street can vary by branch. **Matt option/Photo gifts** These aren't always available at every branch. You may need to allow extra time if you order these.

Test performance

Print quality The quality of prints from

pictures taken in bright and dim conditions, and with flash. **Consistency** Each service was tested four times to see whether quality was consistent. **Convenience** A rating for speed, accuracy of the order, and, in the case of online processors, for the time taken to upload photos and ease of use. **Enlargements** We rated the print quality of a 12x8-inch enlargement or the nearest size to that.

Score

Ignores price and is based on:

50% Print quality
20% Consistency
20% Convenience
10% Enlargements



2 IN-STORE

72% Colorama £7.50

Colorama operates from about 2,500 chemists and camera shops and has around 35 of its own stores. If you use its chemist service as we did, it will send the pictures away and your prints will arrive four to five days later – slower than most high-street services, which offer a one-hour service. Print quality is very good and consistently so, being equal to that of Snapfish, our online Best Buy. But with two orders, the enlargements didn't turn up, so we had to reorder them.

WHICH?
BEST BUY

WORTH KNOWING Colorama has an online service that uses the same central processing lab.

Matt finish available Yes
Photo gifts available Yes



3 IN-STORE

71% Asda £5.28

Asda is the only store to offer excellent prints from pictures taken in both bright and dim conditions. But it's worth pointing out that all four of the stores we tested had only a do-it-yourself machine. In one, the machine was set up so that we had to load our pictures and leave it unattended while we paid at the counter. The machine tray that caught the printed photos was dusty, too, so it's worth checking it before you use it.

WHICH?
BEST BUY

WORTH KNOWING Not all Asda stores offer processing. Its website lists those that do. Some have an over-the-counter service instead.

Matt finish available Lustre only
Photo gifts available Yes



8 ONLINE

79% Snapfish £5.79

The only online Best Buy in our test is Snapfish, owned by computer giant Hewlett-Packard. Print quality is consistently good and it's one of the few services to receive top marks for printing photos from digital pictures taken in dim light. Your photos arrive by post in a day or two – reasonable for an online service. It doesn't offer the classic 12x8-inch enlargement size, offering instead 10x8-inch prints.

WHICH?
BEST BUY

WE LIKE Our 24 photos took about seven minutes to upload, the second fastest on test. Downloading the software needed to upload pictures was quick and easy.

Matt finish available Yes
Photo gifts available Yes

Jessops is testing a 24-hour photo machine outside its Kingston-upon-Thames store

DIGITAL PROCESSOR	SPECIFICATION				WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE							SCORE %
	SERVICE TESTED	PRICE (£)	MATT OPTION	PHOTO GIFTS	PRINT QUALITY (BRIGHT)	PRINT QUALITY (DIM)	PRINT QUALITY (FLASH)	PRINT QUALITY OVERALL	CONSISTENCY	CONVENIENCE	ENLARGEMENTS	
IN-STORE												
1 SNAPPY SNAPS	1 hour	9.60	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	75
2 COLORAMA	4-5 days	7.50	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	72
3 ASDA	1 hour	5.28	see ^a	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	71
4 KLICK^b	1 hour	7.92	✓	✓	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	60
5 JESSOPS	1 hour	7.20	see ^a	✓	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	56
6 BOOTS	1 hour	6.49	✓	✓	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	55
7 TESCO	1 hour	4.80	✓	✓	★★★	★★	★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	48
ONLINE												
8 SNAPFISH	1-2 days	5.79	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	79
9 BONUSPRINT	1-2 days	5.58	✓	✓	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	66
10 KODAK	2-3 days	8.35	✓	see ^c	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	66
11 DIRECTFOTO	3-7 days	6.10		✓	★★	★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★	48
12 CLUB35	1-2 days	6.78	see ^a		★★	★★★	★	★★	★★★★★	★★	★★	46
13 PHOTOBOX	1 day	6.30	✓	✓	★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	46
14 FOTANGO	2-3 days	19.50		✓	★★★	★★	★★	★★	★★★★★	★	★★	30

^a Lustre option ^b Also owns Supasnaps and Max Spielmann, which offer a similar service ^c Greetings cards only