## How we test



#### Our thorough tests ensure you'll make the right choices

We get 20 different images printed four times in one month to check the consistency of the printing process. For highstreet stores, we also visit different branches to see how they compare.

We use various images to test the processors. Some are taken with a flash, while others are dimly lit or taken in bright sunshine. One of the images is deliberately and severely underexposed, so we can see how well the processors correct it.

#### **Snap happy**

A viewing panel of experts assesses print quality. The panellists take account of colour, contrast, sharpness, cropping and exposure. After all the photos have been assessed, our statistician weighs up the results and works out the overall printquality rating.

#### What about film?

Our test is conducted using digital images, but you can expect similar results from 35mm film. This is because most high-street stores we tested scan film negatives and turn them into digital files before printing.

# **Picture perfect**

# Digital cameras have revolutionised the way we take pictures – but where's the best place to get them printed?

A recent survey of Which? members found that only 37 per cent have ever had digital photos printed on the high street and a mere 21 per cent have tried using an online photo processor. Most of you (67 per cent) store images on your camera's memory card or computer hard drive most of the time.

So, why aren't you getting your photos professionally printed? You told us it's simply a matter of convenience; it takes time and effort to upload photos to online sites or to take them to a shop. However, the reality is quite the opposite.

Our two Best Buys, high-street giant Asda (1) and website Snapfish (8), are both really easy to use. Asda offers a one-hour service that will allow you to go shopping while your photos are being printed.

And Snapfish had the quickest photo upload times of the online services we tested. It took an average of just four minutes and 58 seconds to upload our images. As well as being convenient, our Best Buys also

#### JOIN THE PHOTOBOOK CLUB

#### Pam Muir 57, admin assistant

Pam generally keeps her digital photos on her computer, rather than having them printed, but after attending a wedding she decided to try making a photobook for the happy couple (for more on these, see 'Photobooks', p53).

'I wanted a special wedding present,' she said. 'A photobook seemed to be just the thing because I knew if I just sent my friend the photos she'd never get round to putting them in an album.'

It took her two mornings to make her first photobook because she had to start from scratch loading photos.

'I tried out all the options,' she said. 'I had never even seen a photobook before. The second one was quicker – just two hours.'

Pam uses computers regularly and, though she wouldn't class herself as an expert, she found it really easy to upload the photographs and compile the album.

'I would definitely do it again,' she said. 'It's a lovely memento of a special occasion as you can tell the story of the event in pictures, adding your own captions if you wish. It also makes a lovely present.' produce consistently high-quality images, often at prices well below the cost of printing at home.

If saving money is your main priority, it might be worth heading to Aldi's website (9). Although upload times were slow – on average it took 34 minutes and 14 seconds – the discount retailer is cheap and the quality of photos is good.

#### **OUR RESEARCH**

When choosing processors to test, we consult service providers, market intelligence reports and industry experts. We include top sellers and new services from big brands. In January 2008, we asked 2,498 Which? online panel members about printing digital photos. Photobox has changed the look of its

photos. Photobox has changed the look of its site since we tested but the changes haven't affected our score.







#### 69% Asda £7.50 for 50 6x4-inch prints

Our testers found Asda staff helpful and well trained. Printing was consistent across all four stores visited and enlargements looked good. However, some of the stores we tested didn't offer enlargements within an hour.

The files that we send are in Jpeg format. As it's easy to delete the file type (.jpg, in

this case), we send one photo without the file type marked on it. Asda was the only processor that consistently printed photos that lacked a .jpg marker. WORTH KNOWING There are 170

instore Asda photo labs.

# ONLINE

#### 73% Snapfish £5.99 for 50 6x4-inch prints

Photo quality from Snapfish was impressive: prints were consistently well balanced and had good colour, contrast and brightness.

The website is easy to use and the average upload time for the 20 images we processed was four minutes and 58 seconds - the fastest of



all the online companies we tested. However, enlargements weren't the

best we tested - they were a little too red and dark. WORTH KNOWING Prepay credits

reduce the price for a 6x4-inch print from 10p down to as little as 8p.

#### USING THE TABLE

We tested the most popular 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 6x4-inch prints or, if unavailable, the nearest size to that, including postage where appropriate. Price per print varies, depending on the number of prints ordered. Prices on the high street can vary. Matt option Matt photos don't reflect the light as much as a glossy print. Lustre photos have a slight sheen - they are not completely matt but are not as shiny as a glossy print. They are more resistant to fingerprints than matt prints.

#### Test performance

Print quality An overall mark for the quality of prints from pictures taken in bright and dim conditions, and with flash. Consistency Each service was tested four times to check the consistency of the printing. Convenience A rating for speed, accuracy of the order, and, in the case of online processors, the time taken to upload photos and ease of use. Enlargements Based on the print quality of a 12x8-inch enlargement or, if unavailable, the nearest size to that.

#### **Score**

Ignores price and is	
based on:	
Print quality	<b>50</b> %
Consistency	<b>20</b> %
Convenience	<b>20</b> %
Enlargements	10%

SERVICE		SPECIFICATION				WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE				SCORE %	
	SERVICE TESTED	PRICE OF TEN PRINTS(£)	PRICE OF 50 PRINTS(£)	PRICE OF 100 PRINTS(£)	MATT OPTION	PHOTOBOOKS	PRINT GUALITY	CONSISTENCY	CONVENIENCE	ENLARGEMENTS	
INSTORE											
1 ASDA	1 hour	1.50	7.50	10.00	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	***	*****	****	****	69
2 BOOTS	1 hour	3.00	15.00	20.00	🗸 a	$\checkmark$	****	**	***	n/a	54
3 KODAK KIOSK	Instant	4.20	19.50	25.00			****	**	***	n/a	54
4 SNAPPY SNAPS	1 hour	5.00	15.00	22.00	✓	$\checkmark$	***	***	****	***	53
5 TESCO	1 hour	1.50	7.50	10.00		1	**	***	****	***	47
6 JESSOPS	1 hour	2.50	12.50	20.00	✓b	$\checkmark$	***	***	***	***	46
7 KLICK	1 hour	3.90	11.00	17.00		1	***	***	**	***	45
ONLINE											
8 SNAPFISH	3-5 days	1.99	5.99	11.49	✓	$\checkmark$	****	***	****	**	73
9 ALDI	1-4 days	1.83	3.83	6.33		$\checkmark$	****	***	***	**	55
10 BONUSPRINT	2 days	3.19	7.99	10.99	$\checkmark$	$\checkmark$	***	***	***	****	53
11 BOOTS	2-4 days	4.50	7.50	9.50	<b>√</b> b	✓	***	***	****	**	52
12 WH SMITH	1-4 days	3.49	7.99	11.99	<b>√</b> b	$\checkmark$	***	***	***	**	45
13 KODAK GALLERY	1-3 days	2.89	7.49	10.99	<b>√</b> c	$\checkmark$	***	**	***	**	44
14 COLORAMA	1-3 days	8.99	21.99	41.99	1	$\checkmark$	***	***	***	**	41
15 РНОТОВОХ	1-2 days	2.50	6.50	11.50	1	$\checkmark$	**	**	***	**	35

a Not available for one-hour service b Lustre only c All prints up to 10x8in are glossy finish; 24x16in and 30x20in prints are matt finish

PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL THOMAS, JOHN TRENHOLM

# Which should you choose?



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#### **Best for round-the-world trip**

For a big bundle of photos, you could save money by taking advantage of the prepay credits offered by **Snapfish (8)**. Prepay credits reduce the cost per print, and can be used over time so you don't have to upload and order images all at once. **Photobox (15)** provided the cheapest bulk deal on test but it was bottom of our table and therefore we can't recommend it.

### Best for an important photo

If you want one special photo, it may be worth printing it at home on an inkjet printer, although this can be expensive. You'll have total control over how the image is cropped and will be able to edit it quickly and easily if you don't like the look of it. One of our current Best Buy printers is the the Canon MP830 – but it's only available online. Visit www.which.co.uk/printers for more.

#### **Best for budget**

If you're counting the pennies, then visit the **Aldi (9)** website. It costs just £3.83 for 50 photos including postage and packaging, which is cheaper than any other processors we tested. However, if you want only a handful of images, delivery charges bump up the cost, so consider **Asda (1)** instead. Those without broadband can send their pictures on a CD directly to Aldi.

#### YOUR ONLINE SAFETY

26.6

ASDA

You can feel confident storing and shopping for your photos online once you're armed with this advice from our experts

Do I need to keep a copy of my images on my own computer, or can I just store them on one of the sites you've tested?

You should always keep your images on your computer hard drive if you have space and back them up on disc or external hard drive. See www.which.co.uk/

#### external\_hard\_drives for

Best Buy external hard drives. Check the terms and

Check the terms and conditions of the site you choose to use, or send an email to its customer service desk, as many will delete images if you haven't bought anything for a given period – for example, this is a year with Kodak online.

O the websites you've tested store the images at the same

### resolution at which I've uploaded them?

Some of the sites, such as Snapfish, will keep only low-resolution versions of your images after a certain time (in this case, three months), unless you buy a print of the image shortly after uploading it.

So, with Snapfish, if you order photos four months after you've uploaded them they will be low-resolution images, not the high-resolution ones you were expecting.

This highlights the importance of keeping a copy of your images on your home computer.

Is there a danger of strangers being able to view my photographs? The websites we tested that have online photo albums for storing images all operated with user accounts and passwords. This means that your images should be viewable only by you.

However, if you want to share your images with friends and family, it is possible to do so. Typically, you email a link to a specific album of images. Then friends and family can register an account, access and buy copies of the pictures.

How do I know my personal contact details will be kept safe? All UK-based organisations that process personal information must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998. There are eight principles in the Act which must be followed – one of these is to keep personal data secure. Failure to comply can result in legal sanctions.

# **Photobooks**

Create a perfect picture book to display your memories



One of the most popular services offered by the processors we tested was photobooks. See 'Join the photobook club', p51, for Which? member Pam Muir's experiences.

These books are created using a selection of your photographs, which you upload to a website and insert into standard templates of a page layout. They're available as both hardback and paperback and the pictures are printed directly on to the page rather than stuck in as in a traditional album.

High-street stores offer this service, but you may find them less flexible than websites, as you won't be able to play around with layouts to the same extent.

There are many other gifts you can buy – such as posters, t-shirts, jewellery and magnets – but the selection often depends on the retailer.

#### Contacts

Aldi 0871 376 4369; www.aldiphotos.co.uk Asda 0500 100055; www.asda-photo.co.uk Bonusprint 0800 316 0301 www.bonusprint.co.uk Boots 0845 070 8090 www.bootsphoto.com Colorama 0845 270 0470 www.colorama.co.uk Jessops 0845 408 5171; www.jessops.com Klick 0870 750 7112; 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 505555; www.tescophoto.com WH Smith 01926 463114 www.whsmith.co.uk/photobooks