January 2010

BEST BUY photo Calendars

DIY photo gifts let you create the perfect personalised present – but we've found big differences in the quality of the finished product

L ooking for the perfect Christmas present for somone who loves family photos? Some great digital images and an internet connection could provide the answer in the shape of a photo calendar.

Online photo processing – offered by big high-street names such as Boots and online-only companies such as Snapfish – has really developed in the last few years. You can now use your own digital photos to personalise anything from mugs to T-shirts from the comfort of your own home. In the run-up to Christmas, photo calendars are proving increasingly popular choices as gifts.

We asked our lab experts to order and assess online photo calendars from eight leading companies, and found the service you choose can have a big impact on whether your gift will be hung proudly on a wall or shoved away in a drawer.

Most of the online photo processors we tested produced acceptable calendars and our experts felt that, while there were less than perfect prints in many – especially Bonusprint's calendar – none were of such poor quality that we'd send the calendars back.

But as our test results (opposite) show, differences in the creation process, image quality, and look and feel of the finished calendar meant that while Apple and Snapfish sent us calendars that look great, some other calendars might not deliver the professional photos and finish you'd wish for. And if you're ordering for Christmas, get cracking – several companies told us you need to order by December 16 to be sure your calendar arrives in time.

GOOD PRINTING VS POOR PRINTING

These examples reveal the differences we found between good and poor-quality calendars

In the photo on the left (Bonusprint), the red under our model's eyes makes it look like he's been crying, and the image is over-saturated, giving his skin a yellowish tone. In photo on the right (Snapfish), our model looks happy and natural – the print's a good match to the digital image.

These prints show the difference supplying a high resolution photo can make. Take a close look at the corn. On the top (Boots via Flickr photo transfer – not the calendar we tested) the corn is badly pixelated, while on the bottom print (Apple), you can clearly make out individual ears of corn.

Apple Hanging Wall Calendar £18.38

Which? test score 74%

PROS Our testers found creating the calendar was a straightforward and intuitive process. There were lots of design and image tweaking options. The finished product looked fresh and modern, with large images to make the most of your photos. One advantage Apple has over its competitors is that you can create your calendar without needing to be connected to the internet.
CONS This was the most expensive calendar we tested, you can only use iPhoto on Apple Macs, and some photos had an orange/yellow tint.

Snapfish Classic Wall Calendar £16.98

Which? test score 69%

PROS Snapfish gave us consistently decent photo quality, was easy to use and had a good range of photo-editing options, including red-eye removal. There are lots of calendar background designs to choose from to tailor your calendar to the person you're giving it to, and you can personalise it further by adding your own words and photos to special dates such as birthdays.
CONS We were underwhelmed by the slightly amateurish looking front cover, but the interior design is much better.

How we test

Finding out which photo calendars are best

In September 2009 we ordered one calendar from each website in our table. We also ordered a calendar from Asda, but it changed its calendar options between testing and publication, so we have excluded it.

Our lab experts rated each service for website ease of use and customisation options, and rated the calendar received for photo quality and overall design and quality. The photos we used were a mix of high and low-resolution images taken in a range of light conditions and of various subjects.

We also ordered a duplicate copy on an Apple Mac where possible. In all cases, the scores for photo quality and overall design/quality were not significantly different for Mac-created calendars.

COMPANY	SPECIFICATION				WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE			SCORE (%)
	PRICE (£)	SIZE (cm, wxh)	DELIVERY TIME	PHOTO UPLOAD	CREATING CALENDAR	PICTURE QUALITY	OVERALL DESIGN/ QUALITY	
APPLE[a]	18.38	33x53	3-4 days	iPhoto	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★★	74
SNAPFISH	16.98	28x43.5	4-8 days	Flash[b]	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	69
BOOTS PHOTO[c]	17.48	21x28	6-9 days	Web[d,e]	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	65
ALDI	14.95	29.5x42	10 days	Web	★★	★★★	★★★	52
KODAK GALLERY	16.98	25.5x39.5	5-10 days	Windows app[f]	★★★★	★★	★★★★	50
JESSOPS PHOTO	16.95	29.5x42	5-7 days	Web	★★	★★★	★★★	47
TESCO PHOTO[g]	14.72	29.5x42	14 days	Windows app[h]	★★★★	★★	★★★	47
BONUSPRINT[g]	15.98	23x32	10 days	Web[d]	★★★★	★	★★★★	38

a Mac only **b** Flash was already installed on the PC we used, so no software download was required **c** In partnership with Photobox **d** Also offers an application-based upload option **e** Boots also offers an option to transfer photos directly from Flickr, however we do not recommend this option due to very low-resolution images **f** We couldn't complete web upload in IE8 **g** PC only – we were unable to complete the process on a Mac **h** Since our tests, Tesco has introduced a web-based upload option which may also work on a Mac

USING THE TABLE
All calendars were appointment calendars, A4 or closest size and the simplest colour and design available. With the exception of Apple, we created all calendars on a PC using Internet Explorer 8. Unless noted, all can also be created on an Apple Mac.

Specification
Price Includes cost of standard delivery of one calendar to UK mainland. **Size** When hanging on the wall. **Delivery time** Estimated time in working days – includes processing and delivery time. **Photo upload** Where available, we chose web-based upload because no software download is required.

Which? test performance
Creating calendar Website ease of use, photo uploading and calendar design/customisation options. **Picture quality** Fidelity to digital image. **Overall design/**

quality First impression, paper quality, ease of writing on the calendar and its overall look.

Score
Ignores price, and is based on:
Picture quality	**50%**
Creating calendar	**25%**
Final product	**25%**