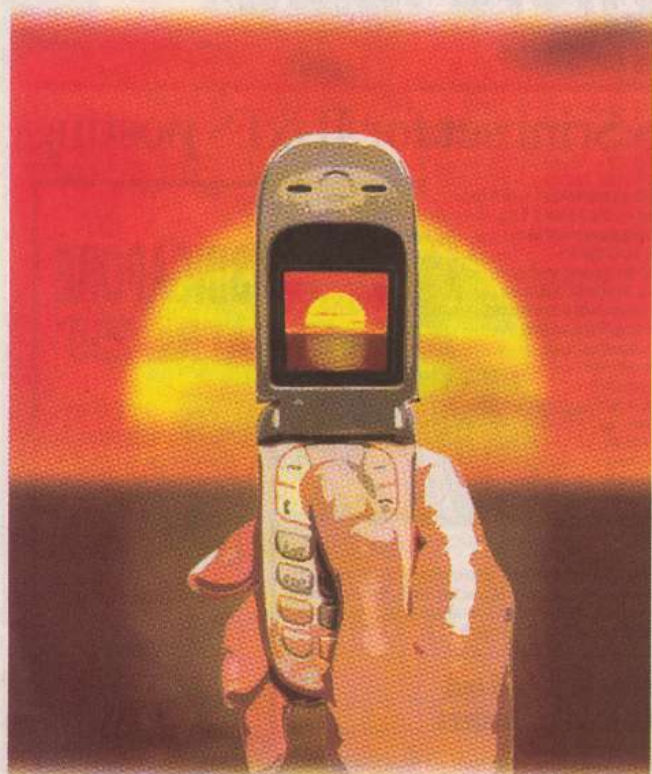


THE TIMES OF INDIA

PHOTOS



Online photo sharing is creating a big business around it, finds Shivani Mody

more pictures and upload them online," he says.

**New innovations**

With online photo sharing gaining momentum, innovations around this is also on the rise. Mobile phones are now being built with cameras having 5 to 10 megapixels that can produce high resolution pictures. These photos can directly be uploaded onto photo sites. Once 3G comes in, this process will become much faster, and it could become the trigger for another jump in the growth of online photo sharing.

The iPhone comes with AirMe, a free, mobile photo sharing application that allows you to instantly send photos in real-time to Facebook, Flickr, Picasa or Twitter. "All photos will be auto-tagged with location, time, weather and any user customized information. This makes the pictures more interesting to view," says Apoorva Ruparel, VP for strategy in AirMe. AirMe will soon have photo and video versions for BlackBerry, Nokia and Sony Ericsson phones, and auto-links to other popular sites too.

Companies are also developing easier ways for users to send and share pictures. One such is uploading and sending pictures as images and also as links through the instant messenger. "While chatting online, users can send pictures as links. The picture will then open up in the receiver's chat screen," says Swaminathan.

The idea of geo-tagging, the process of adding geographical identification to a photo, is also seeing a rise, especially among advanced users. Geo-tagging is seen to be mainly growing among models, fashion designers, artists and beauticians, who want to show their products and designs. "These people can show their work to a large audience and the tagging helps them be visible during online search too," says Swaminathan.

Sites such as Flickr use open source technology. This enables people to develop their own applications, providing a lot of fun activities for users. Swaminathan says users have built applications such as the ability to edit pictures, make col-

S reekanth B is an IT consultant. But more than that, he's a photo freak. He's constantly taking pictures with his digital camera. There are pictures of Indiranagar, JP Nagar and CMH Road — as it looked earlier, and now when it has been defaced by the metro construction.

Sreekanth says he takes simple pictures—of animals, flowers, roads, buildings, mostly things to do with nature. "Taking pictures also acts as a stress buster," he says. "But what's more, many are interested in seeing these pictures and I keep getting requests for more."

Today, he has a collection of 1,000 to 1,500 pictures, which he forwards as links to his friends and others, some 150 people around the world. Sreekanth is focused on capturing a meaningful moment and not on ensuring the picture is technically perfect. But amongst the viewers of his photos are also photo critics, who often comment on how a picture was not technically correct and how he could improve his photography. It's unsolicited advice, but Sreekanth is learning a lot from them.

Sreekanth is one of those who you can

count among the millions who are now part of the online photo sharing industry — a growth driven by human emotions, powered by the digicam revolution and fuelled by the growth of the internet.

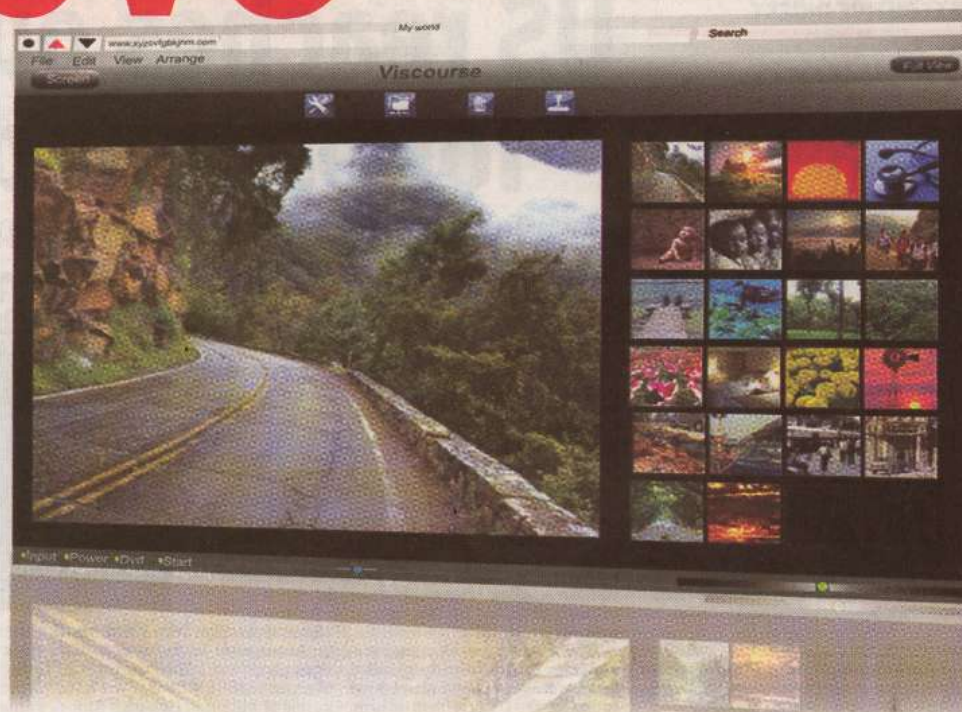
With film cameras, not only was the camera expensive, but so also was developing the pictures. Now, with digital cameras, it's a whole new world. It's become easy to create a huge collection of pictures, and you can easily store them online — on sites such as Snapfish of Hewlett-Packard, Flickr of Yahoo, Picasa of Google, Picsquare and Photobucket. This has also eased the problem of emailing heavy photo files, since you can now send an entire photo collection to as many people as you like, quickly, as a link to the site on which you have stored the collection.

"The response in India has been phenomenal. We already have around 300,000 customers, and we see strong growth coming out of India," says Bala Parthasarthy, MD for APAC & Latin America for Snapfish.

I M Swaminathan, director for communication in Yahoo! India, says the idea of pictures seen by all, and others commenting on them is "a major ego booster" for photographers. "It wants you to take

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Move ONLINE



lages or create a page about a user based only on his photo information.

**Printing pictures**

Printing of digital images is also picking up. While many who have moved to digital cameras and online storage have almost stopped printing, there are some newer businesses that are pushing people towards printing once again.

These include sites that allow users to upload pictures that they want prints of. The site will then print the pictures and parcel them to the given address. "While others work on an advertisement-based model, we bet on a printing-based model," says Snapfish's Parthasarthy. Users order prints and other products like photo-books and photo calendars, made from their own personal photos, which helps us generate revenues. Snapfish charges as little as Rs 2.95 to print a post card size photo. "The almost 100-year-old Bangalore studio G K Vale also provides the service of uploading pictures from Picasa and ordering prints. The pricing starts from Rs 2.99 for a 4x6 photo. Users can make their own personalised photo gifts — frames, greeting cards, cal-

endars, mugs, t-shirts and book & album. The company also provides the option to buy digital cameras, camcorders, iPods, memory cards, photo frames and other accessories online at discounted prices. "The online printing business contributes only 2% of our revenues but this is a strong growth area for us," says Anand Sukumar, CEO of G K Vale. SnapGalaxy, an online digital photo printing service, allows photographers to generate cash by selling their photos as prints or per-

sonalized gifts online. The gifts can be in the form of photo cards, mouse-pads, poster prints, apparel accessories, coasters, plates, tiles, pet gifts and sports ball.

Some are also beginning to print pictures at home using photo quality paper. But while colour printers are available for as low as Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,000, colour cartridges don't come cheap. Cartridges is where printer makers make their money.

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**Who CLICKS the most PICTURES?**

- The Japanese top the list. The average Japanese takes 700 to 1,000 pictures a year. Then come the Americans, with 500-600 pictures a year, followed by Britons, around 500, and Germans, with 300 to 350.
- Asians are fast catching up with Chinese and Singaporeans leading the trend. China currently prints 3 billion pictures a year.
- "India is quickly catching up to the trend in the US and Europe, which are showing sharp increases in online storage," says Bala Parthasarthy of Snapfish.
- Photobucket is said to have 44 million users, with over 7.5 million photos, graphics and videos being uploaded on it daily. Picasquare, set up by ITian Manish Agarwal, has over 1.5 lakh users and over 3 million photographs in store. Snapfish says it has over 60 million users in 23 countries, and that over 300 million new pictures/images are uploaded on Snapfish a month. Flickr has about 2.5 billion uploaded photos.