

spend

FIELD TEST

**WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

Our winner, **Shutterfly**, has all the features you'd want:

- ▶ A variety of preconfigured **themes** that help you create your own look
- ▶ **Layout tools** that let you adjust and place your photos on the page
- ▶ Excellent **picture quality** that has good sharpness and color balance

## Bound for Greatness

New online services can turn your snapshots into a book worthy of your coffee table

BY WILSON ROTHMAN

**W**hen it comes to taking a photo of the kids by the Christmas tree and printing a single copy at home, digital photography is pretty easy. It's when you try to share photos that the hassles come up. Asking the family to huddle around the PC to look at photos from Grandma's house isn't all that convenient; neither is getting Grandma to go online and look at your slide show.

Fortunately, there's a way to get the best of both worlds. Most photo-sharing websites go beyond the slide show and let you transfer your digital images onto the pages of a hardbound book.

When my wife and I got married this past summer, we decided to self-publish our photo album. Our photographer would have charged us \$500 to \$1,000 a

book, and delivery would have taken weeks; online services cost \$30 to \$50 a book and take only about one week.

Armed with a few dozen of our wedding photos, I started assembling books using different services. Many are on the same websites that people use to catalogue and share their pictures, such as Snapfish and Kodak's EasyShare.

The services ranged from point-and-click easy to downright frustrating. Some let me put photos anywhere on the page, while others locked me into a rigid and unsightly template. I preferred the middle ground: enough layout variety to stave off monotony but not so much that I actually had to be creative all by myself. The books arrived a few days later, but it should be noted that, as in all online-

ordering scenarios, "three to five business days" means different things to different companies. So be patient.

Fortunately, you can repeat much of my test without spending a dime. None of the services charge a membership fee, and all let you design a book before requiring that you punch in a credit-card number. In fact, although there are a couple of losers in the pack, it's a good idea to visit more than one of the higher-rated picks before your artistic vision comes together. **\$**

**HOW I DID IT**

- ▶ For most services, I signed up for a free membership and uploaded my images. I then used the site's tools to lay out pages.
- ▶ With Apple's iPhoto, I put together the album right on my Mac and then clicked on Buy Book.



**Tip** When laying out the typical 20-page book, be sure to select at least 60 photos to upload, or you might run out of options.

**Apple iPhoto**  
apple.com  
\$43.98\*

**Kodak EasyShare Gallery**  
kodakgallery.com  
\$50.96<sup>1</sup>

**PhotoWorks**  
photoworks.com  
\$41.94<sup>1</sup>

**Shutterfly**  
shutterfly.com  
\$30.98<sup>1</sup>

**Snapfish**  
snapfish.com  
\$37.58<sup>1</sup>

**Sony ImageStation**  
imagestation.com  
\$36.98<sup>1</sup>

**PROS**

If you organize your photos using iPhoto on a Mac, creating a photo book is just a single click away.

This is a popular photo website that many people are already familiar with; making a book is very simple.

A variety of album choices include some elegant designs; good selection of layout options for your album.

Many hardcover options; tools and templates made designing an attractive album a breeze.

Site offers lots of novelty items for photo printing; simple interface.

Prints photo directly onto cover; lets you enlarge photos and drag them anywhere on the page.

**CONS**

Works with Macs only; not enough page-layout options for each theme (Baby Boy, Travel, and others).

Album templates require text—if you leave it out you get wide open spaces; no borderless full-page pictures.

Higher-quality "Metropolitan" albums lack personalized covers (and won't suit everyone's tastes).

Not enough layout possibilities for landscape-oriented photos; no borderless full-page pictures.

Three-photo-per-page limit means buying extra pages; there's no indication of which photos you already used in your layout.

You can design only one page at a time (no spreads); you can lay out pictures only in portrait, not landscape, format.

**FEATURES**

24 pages, linen cover

22 pages, leather cover

20 pages, blue linen cover

20 pages, suede cover

24 pages, leather cover

22 pages, laminated photo cover

**DELIVERY TIME**

Five days

Six days

Six days

Three days

Eight days

Five days

**PRINT QUALITY**

★★

★★

★★★

★★★★★

★

★★★★★

**RETURN POLICY**

Company will replace defective books but is not responsible for user error.

You can return your book for any reason within 30 days for a full refund.

Not responsible for user error; if you call, company reps will try to work out a solution.

Also not responsible for user error, but you can call and reps will try to work things out.

Snapfish will replace your book at any time and give you 10% off your next order.

You can return your album within 15 days of receiving it.

**BOTTOM LINE**

Decent option for Mac users, but the low image quality took us by surprise.

Skip it. We expected better-looking books and more versatile tools from Kodak.

Potential to be the best, just needs better covers and slightly better print quality.

Unexpected winner, with great picture quality, nice options and the lowest price.

Another one to avoid. Unattractive book wasn't worth the (long) wait.

For original thinkers. Go here if you're not happy at Shutterfly or PhotoWorks.

**B-**

**D**

**B+**

**A-**

**D**

**B**

\*NOTE: All prices include shipping.