Wired to the World

by *Ralph Lee Scott*

Photo-Sharing Web Sites

More and more library users are purchasing digital cameras these days and now wish to share their photos on the World Wide Web using free photo-sharing Web sites. Libraries, Friends groups, and civic clubs can use these **free** photo-sharing Web sites to promote their organizations, too.

Digital cameras are connected to computers by either a cabling or memory stick arrangement. Libraries will probably not want patrons uploading their cameras on library public computers. However, library staff can suggest to patrons that they go home and upload the photos onto these free photo-sharing sites for others to enjoy. Patrons can also burn CDs with the photos on them and then transfer these files to the photo-sharing sites of their choice.

Arguably the largest of the photo-sharing Web sites is Webshots (www.webshots.com), which has for some time provided users with free screensavers and desktop photos and now provides a Webshots photo album feature. Currently this photo-sharing site has 33,070,231 photos available for immediate use and arranged by broad categories: Entertainment, Family & Friends, Scenery & Nature, and Sports. Webshots's feature called "My Photos Assistant" allows users to turn their photos into screensavers and desktop photos as well as make prints and greeting cards. Note that this is a system to *share* photos, so you would not want to upload any photos that you don't want others to access! Webshots will even give you a free homepage for your photos as well as providing news headlines, weather summaries, and horoscopes.

The Epson Printer Company offers another large photo-sharing Web site called the Epson Photo Center (http://photo.epson.com). Epson offers the same services as Webshots but with an additional security level that allows you to keep your photos top secret or shared with the world by allowing users to password protect their photo albums. Users merely share passwords so that family and friends can look at their photos on the Epson site. The Epson Photo Center site is well-organized and user-friendly. Features allow users to send photos in a number of formats, from digital to traditional roll film to old photos ready to be scanned.

Some Internet service providers (ISPs) are now offering photo-sharing Web sites as part of their service packages. MSN Photos (http://photos.msn.com) and the EarthLink Photo Center (http://www.earthlink.net/extras/photocenter/) are two examples. Earthlink offers low-cost roll-film developing ($2.99, plus $1.99 shipping and handling fee), digital camera prints for twenty-five cents each, online photo albums, and online storage of photos. Earthlink also offers online tools to edit, organize, add captions, and correct red-eye in your photographs. The Earthlink service is offered by a partner called Snapfish, which is both a free and a fee-based service. With MSN Photos you can send cards, make T-shirts, and order prints from your uploaded images. MSN also features a fee-based service called MSN Photos Plus, which offers online film development, e-mail photo sharing, and high-resolution downloads.

Helping library users to get their prized photos shared with others via these photo-sharing Web sites is an excellent way to encourage and increase use of libraries. Helping Friends and civic and local interest clubs to publicize their organizations through sharing photos on these Web-based sites is yet another service that will make users think of the library as the very best place to start.

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