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## IN DIGITAL AGE, PHOTOS A SNAP; PROCESS YOUR PICS WITH EASE, EFFICIENCY AND COST SAVINGS.

by STEVE SVEKIS

I love when my daughters share their thoughts with me.

Not those coy or saccharine words and phrases that flow as they work my corner of the room for money, or approval of an idea that has already been shot down by Mom.

It's those infrequent moments of unfettered honesty and connection that remind me why I got into this parenting business in the first place.

Recently, my wife, Holly, and I were in front of our computer, deciding which of the almost-300 uploaded images from our trip to San Francisco during summer break would survive the final cut and get sent to Kodak to be printed.

The photos had been uploaded from the memory stick to our hard drive through a basic computer-provided software, and then up to our Kodak Easy Share Gallery site.

My editing suggestion to start: Cut out the ones with me in them (Also known as: "Paring the pear-shaped pre.")

Vibrant images stretched across the computer screen, ranging from our back-and-forth trek across the Golden Gate Bridge to the kids being faux-jailed at Alcatraz to everyone pouring steaming solitude at the Japanese Tea Garden.

Holly and I noticed we weren't alone. The offspring had had their interest piqued.

"Don't use that one, I look like a chicken with that long neck," noted one youthful voice etched with disdain from behind our chairs.

Then, the other piped in, fully agreeing that: "Mommy did such a great job getting pictures of us in the cable car."

OK ... admittedly not My Dinner With Andre, but it was welcome tonic for Mom and Dad, who so often get brevity and banality when trying to spark conversations after school. Some of those greatest hits: "Fine." ... "Uh-huh." ... "... " (that's right, I can't put a blank stare in quotes).

Even if I were doing a solo photo mission at the computer, the process (without getting into the qualitative differences between film and digital) still would be far improved from dropping off film.

These are the reasons:

No more October (or any other month) surprises: When we drop off film, there is always a chance that a super moment we think has been captured never makes it into that photo-lab envelope. Whether it be due to a photographer's ineptitude, photo lab woe, faulty camera or even defective roll of film, you don't know what you have until the end of the process.

With digital, you know immediately whether the photo you just snapped is up to snuff. If it isn't, then delete it from your camera and, if possible, shoot it again with whatever correction you need to make. Also important, the imagery is saved on the memory stick and then into your computer's hard drive. And, the film exposure risk has been eliminated.

Creativity: Wow, what a shot you have of that Great White Shark jumping over the old guy in the rowboat! You want its print to be 8 inches by 10? Twenty by 30? How about in black and white for a classic old-time feel? Do you want Jaws Jr. above all 12 months of a calendar? On coasters? Bookmarks, stickers, mugs? Sites such as Kodak's offer those options along with many others.

Efficiency and economy: You don't have to go through the rigmarole at the photo counter of selecting which prints make the cut, or the hassle of making another trip if the family decides it wants photos upsized or put onto a mug or calendar. You can send in exactly what you and your loved ones want with one in-home stop. No waste of time, materials or effort.

You also can e-mail a set of images (to another computer or a cell phone), which the recipients can peruse on screen or purchase.

Price-wise, online photo labs and film-dropoff establishments are competitive if you are submitting what would amount to a single roll of film, but digital processing is the better deal if you process more photos.

I would have to pay \$6.99 for next-day pickup of a 24-shot roll of 4x6 prints of film at Walgreens.

At 15 cents a print from Kodak's online service, 24 of them cost \$3.60. There is a shipping charge (\$4.99 for 3-to-7-day delivery), which is constant no matter the size of the order. As you buy more prints, the per-print delivery charge is reduced. Other sites offer even cheaper print prices and/or shipping fees. While there are some same-day arrangements with digital photography (Walgreens, CVS, Wal-Mart, Ritz Camera, Wolf Camera), many sites require a mailing.

Finally, online offers hundreds of free prints if you don't mind signing up (free at all the places I was checking) at a number of sites.

Those sites that I found (prints are 4x6, and shipping charges vary):

Dotphoto.com, winkflash .com: 50 cents each.

Yorkphoto.com, snapfish .com, photomax.com, kodak gallery.com, yahoo.com

(Target), clarkcolor.com, club photo.com: 20 cents.

Myphotoalbum.com, shut terfly.com: 15 cents

Photomama.com, photo

site.com: 10 cents.

While I have only used Kodak, which rated well in my talks with industry professionals and in my other research, here is the skinny on some prominent sites (price per 4x6, plus anything noteworthy):

Snapfish.com: 12 cents per 4x6. Offers sliding-scale 5x7 pricing 79 cents per print for first 10, 59 cents for 11 through 24, 49 cents for 25-49 and 39 cents for more than that).

Fujifilm.net: 27 cents. In a cnet.com survey last year, Fuji was rated the highest in print quality.

Kodakgallery.com: 15 cents. Kodak is the former ofo to.com. Pre-paid plan marks 4x6 prints down to 10 cents each.

Walmart.com: 17 cents. One-hour-pickup 4x6 prints are 19 cents each, but are only produced with a matte finish.

iPhoto: 19 cents. Apple's lab.

Ritzpix.com: 19 cents. That rate also applies to prepaid one-hour orders, which can be picked up locally.

If money is not your main concern, check out a Popular Photography & Imaging in-depth analysis of 10onlinephotolabs([www.popphoto.com/photoprinters/2697/online-photo-labs-put-to-the-test.html](http://www.popphoto.com/photoprinters/2697/online-photo-labs-put-to-the-test.html)) from May.

The digital photo experience has been one of those "how-did-I-survive-before-this" epiphanies.

So, yes, I'm down with a digital photo being worth a thousand words -- including a welcome few by my daughters from over my shoulder.