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OPTIONS APLENTY FOR SHARING PHOTOS

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A couple of weeks ago, I recommended some digital cameras for your consideration in the MoneyWise gift guide. This week, let's consider how to share your photos with family and friends.

Sharing by e-mail is becoming more difficult. The newer high-resolution cameras produce much larger photo files. Attachment of large files is more likely to trigger e-mail service restrictions, preventing delivery of your photos.

You could create a family photo Web site, as I wrote about earlier this fall. This solution requires continuous maintenance of the site. To avoid the ongoing maintenance, consider using a photo-sharing Web service instead.

Selection of a photo-sharing Web service is a project in itself. If you search Google for "photo sharing," you will find hundreds of photo-sharing services. Narrow the possibilities by considering what you really want from the service. Here's a guide to the important things to look for:

Start by considering the media you want to share. If you want to include video and audio clips, that limits your choices considerably. In the sites I researched, only DropShots, MyPhotoAlbum, Phanfare, and Twango accepted video.

Do you just want to post photos for others to view, or do you want to accept viewer comments on your photos? Dropshots, Flickr, PhotoSite, and SnapFish allow visitors to post their comments.

Do you want to restrict viewing to just your family and friends, or make your photos available to the world? Dropshots, Flickr, PhotoSite and SmugMug offer privacy controls.

Consider the purpose for which the site is offered. Some photo-sharing sites are obvious fronts for sales of photo prints and imprinted merchandise. This can be good, if you plan to purchase a lot of what they're selling, but their photo-sharing features may not be up to par.

Some sites cater to family photo-sharing and have strict limitations on the content of images that can be posted. DropShots and SmugMug are two of these. Other sites are oriented more toward the photographer as an artist, and place fewer restrictions on image content.

Most sites which I reviewed specifically restrict commercial use. SmugMug, however, offers features specific to commercial photographers.

You may want to make downloads of your full-resolution photos (which make better prints) available to your visitors. Be aware that not all photo-sharing sites support this.

This is quite a lot to sort out. To make it easier, try using the site selection checklist we've prepared. I used it for my own selection and settled upon PhotoSite.

Photo-Sharing Site Selection Checklist

Does this site...

Accept videos?

Accept audio?

Allow visitor comments?

Place advertising on your album display?

Use proprietary software?

Have software that runs on my computer?

Accept orders for prints?

Accept orders for imprinted merchandise?

Restrict access to family and friends?

Store full-resolution images?

Allow full-resolution downloads?

Offer support via phone? E-mail?

Require visitors to create an account to view?

Restrict postings of photos you would disapprove?

Restrict postings of photos you would want to post?

Restrict commercial use of your account?

How many photos can I post?

How many videos can I post?

How much does the account cost?Where to Upload

Photo sharing Web services reviewed for this column are:

ClubPhoto (www.clubphoto.com)

DropShots (www.dropshots.com)

Flickr (www.flickr.com)

MyPhotoAlbum (www.myphotoalbum.com)

Pbase (www.pbase.com)

Phanfare (www.phanfare.com)

PhotoSite (www.photosite.com)

PictureTrail (www.picturetrail.com)

SmugMug (www.smugmug.com)

SnapFish (www.snapfish.com)

Twango (www.twango.com)

*Please note: This is only a small sample of the photo sharing Web services available.