



Source : The Economic Times
Date : December 07, 2007
Edition : Online
Journalist : P P Thimmaya

Online printing service providers bet on camera phone users

7 Dec, 2007, 0206 hrs IST, PP Thimmaya, TNN

BANGALORE: Mobile phones with cameras could well become the new subscriber base for the digital photo portals, which provide online image printing services. Currently the online digital photo portals in India like Snapfish (part of HP), Picsquare, ZoomIn are targeting the Internet users. However, this scenario may change in the coming years as superior Internet connectivity on the mobiles becomes a reality.

Manish Agrawal, CEO, Picsquare, says, "There is a huge potential as the penetration of mobiles with cameras is much higher than digital cameras." For these portals today, their subscribers are the Internet users who have digital cameras and access their service online.

According to Gartner, the market for digital camera in India was \$110 million in 2006 and is expected to grow 20-22% CAGR through 2011. In the near future, mobiles with camera and Internet could become a big catchment area for these portals. Bala Parthasarthy, V-P, online imaging and printing, HP says that the sales volume of camera phones could see them monetising this situation. Today, the mass market for these portals are the PC users with the Internet connectivity. Presently, the Internet subscriber base stands at 42 million.

Industry players feel that the mobile users could help them grow their subscriber base. However, Mr Agrawal feels that the current Internet connectivity on the mobiles is not of very good standards and image downloads take considerable amount of time.

But, with the emergence of advanced telecom networks, it is expected that such data transfer will be faster and superior. Further, with payment option on mobiles becoming a reality, this may provide a boost to the online photo portals. Picsquare and Snapfish have been getting users who are download images from the mobiles and transfer them to a PC to access their printing service.

The online digital photo service players in India are targeting large metros with attractive price points. Mr Parthasarthy says that Snapfish has seen 2x times rise in subscribers since its launch in India a couple of months ago. Picsquare, which is two years old, has a user base of 70,000.

However, industry observers feel that the worrying factor for the printing services, both offline and online, has been that people are taking more photos than what they actually print.

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