

Good, Better, Best Online print labs

Looking for a great online print lab? We test three services that deliver prints from your uploaded files direct to your doormat

▶▶ After hours tinkering away in Photoshop to create some of your best work – whether photographic or illustrative – creating a tactile print can be the most rewarding way of viewing the fruits of your labour.

Although home printers have come a long way over recent years, ink costs remain high, and using a third-party print lab to print your files is a sure way of getting great quality prints with none of the home-based ink and paper hassle. Online labs are easy to use, cost-effective, and they offer a variety of paper types and print sizes – right up to scales beyond what a standard home printer could achieve. Plus, the prints are delivered directly to your home, of course.

Although the word 'lab' may sound a bit daunting to some, you needn't feel intimidated. The three we've tested in this issue all have an easy-to-use online submission process: You sign up to the service and upload your files using a web browser, where images can be stored in online galleries to reuse at a later date should you choose to reprint.

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Many online photo lab companies also offer print mounting, book printing and a variety of other services that are difficult or not feasible to replicate at home.

Whatever you want to do with your files, you'll find the printing process is a simple case of clicking the right boxes.

But which company is right for your needs? What are the differences in service, print options and final quality? Read our roundup to find out...

What it means...

GOOD A solid product at a competitive price. It won't let you down and offers great value for money, without being the best in its category

BETTER A very good product at a competitive price. It delivers results, offering a trade-off between quality and value

BEST A best-in-class and possibly even cutting-edge product for those who value quality of results above all else, and who don't mind paying a premium



GOOD BUY...

PRINT LAB | Price Various Web www.photobox.co.uk

Photobox

Low-cost, easy-to-use print solution

PHOTOBOX SAYS...

From the outset, our value proposition has been the same: quality, affordable prints combined with exceptional customer service. A simple motto that has led us to where we are now – leaders in the personal publishing market, with our success rooted in our core values of being open, social and ultimately 'people driven'.

WE SAY...

Photobox is an easy-to-use and affordable service – and it's the low price that gives it widespread appeal.

Sign up, generate galleries of JPEG images and you're ready to go. It's even possible to arrange images into different galleries and return to them at a later date. If you want to print TIFF files or any other formats, however, you'd best look elsewhere because Photobox is a JPEG-only service.

The turnaround time was fast in our test, and the prints we got looked decent. The packaging was also sturdy and

foil-wrapped to protect the pictures from the elements during transit.

WE LIKE...

Online galleries allow for scale or actual size preview while matte or gloss paper or without borders also offer more customer choice.

WE'D LIKE...

A 10MB file size limit for uploads is limiting, particularly as lossless formats and larger files are essential for some work.

VALUE VERDICT

Good results despite the low prices, but large files can't be uploaded, and that will cause frustration for some users.

PRACTICAL Photoshop

Definitely worth considering due to its competitive pricing. File size limitations are also a consideration.





BETTER BUY...

BEST BUY...



PRINT LAB | Price Various Web www.jessops.com

PRINT LAB | Price Various Web www.metro-print.co.uk

Jessops

Metroprint

Easy to upload and cheap postage rates

Truly professional results and fast service

JESSOPS SAYS...
Don't leave your photos on your camera or hard drive, turn them into fantastic photo prints to share and relive your best memories over and over again. Our photo prints are manufactured using the latest technology and printed on high-quality Fuji Crystal Archive photo paper.

photo-printing options, such as calendars, mugs, and so on.

WE LIKE...
The online gallery makes for easy access to your files, plus a simple 'quality-checker' ensures that prints will look as good as they should.

WE'D LIKE...
More paper choices. There's only a 'high quality gloss finish' with or without borders – we'd like to see lustre and matte finishes, too.

VALUE VERDICT
The Jessops service is a good all-rounder in terms of cost, overall quality and the ability to handle multiple file types.

Practical Photoshop says

Great balance of value to final quality. A quick, easy and user-friendly service.



METROPRINT SAYS...
Metro has 30 years worth of experience. Prints are produced on laser printers for best detail and sharpness and our papers are all archival quality. If you are happy to prepare your own files, from colour-managing and calibrating your system to softproofing, the Metroprint automated service is for you.

Metroprint the best of the bunch on test here.

WE LIKE...
Bags of choice, proper colour management available and great final print quality. Metroprint was fast, customer service was spot on, and the results are great.

WE'D LIKE...
A better 'Sign In' system with space made available for images to be uploaded, even if only for a temporary period of time.

VALUE VERDICT
The priciest service on test by far, but there's far more choice and control. It's a pro lab that yields pro results.

Practical Photoshop says

It's not cheap, but you do get what you pay for. A great service for those important prints.

