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Picture This

At one time, most people only carried a camera on vacation or when going to a special event. Thanks to the camera-empowered cell phone and the pocket-sized digital camera, most people now have a camera with them at all times.

This camera empowerment has people recording every precious moment as a digital file that is ready for sharing with loved ones or strangers. The historic approach to picture sharing and viewing before the digital age involved photo prints, photo albums, and placing individual photos into picture frames.

The photo print paradigm was the first approach to sharing digital images. People printed their pictures on their own computer or at local store photo kiosks, or uploaded them for sharing to a photo sharing web site.

Now, if your goal is to view and share thousands of photos without a computer, you should explore the advantages and disadvantages of different digital picture frames created by various manufacturers. The digital picture frame combines off-the-shelf components into a rather novel product. (The idea to build them came from a spark of genius that at one point may have left every technology and CTE teacher wondering "why I didn't think of that?" That said, this product is still going through a rapid yet incremental development, so there's still room for innovation!)

Explore frame design options and pick one to add to your classroom or home. Look for a unit that is environmentally friendly at least in the way it uses electricity to power its circuits. At this time, only one digital frame manufacturer manufactures frames that contain a built-in motion detector. You can leave the D-Link DSM 210 on all the time since it monitors its location for motion. When the room is empty, it drops its power consumption to a trickle—just enough to power its motion detector.

D-Link

Most digital frames allow you to view images directly from a USB memory stick or a camera's flash memory card. Not all frames have internal memory and very few are designed to gather pictures from the Internet.

D-Link is best known for its wireless routers and modems. When the company decided to build a digital picture frame it went out of its way to produce one that builds on its corporate strengths. Consequently, its frames are built to provide a WiFi or a wired link to the Internet. I tested the D-Link DSM 210, the frame with a motion detector, by plugging in an 8 GB SD card that was half full of high resolution digital images. I wanted to see if the frame could actually handle showing thousands of images from one file. The internal memory on this frame is only 1 GB, but it allowed me to transfer most of my favorite images directly into the frame's internal memory.

I selected the D-Link frame to illustrate this technology because of its motion detector and special ability to view uploaded images saved at photo-sharing web sites. Its WiFi connection allows you to view your own images, friends' and family images, digital art, trivia, jokes, sports scores, local weather, NASA images, National Geographic images, or choose from at least 400 other channel feeds to view on your frame.

I expect that the digital picture frame will change the picture-viewing paradigm from static prints to electronic images. I also expect that the marketplace will morph the simple frame into an HDTV full-featured home entertainment component.

Recalling the Facts

1. Why is a motion detector component good for the environment?
2. If you were going to design your own frame, what features would you include in your design?

Alan Pierce, Ed.D., CSIT, is a technology education consultant. Visit www.technologytoday.us for past columns and teacher resources.

