

ORGANIZING

Comparing cloud photo services

My last article described the basic steps for organizing digital photos. I recommended using cloud photo services for storage but didn't go into much detail. In this article, my husband, Eric, and I share our experiences using the three biggest cloud photo services

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to complete three commonly performed tasks, and we make recommendations for choosing the service that would best meet your needs.

CREATING A SHARED PHOTO ALBUM

The first task we compared was creating a shared photo album. Eric and I recently spent the month of September in Oregon. We both took pictures on our phones, but we wanted to upload the best of our individual pictures to the shared album. We wanted our family and friends to be able to see the pictures and our comments about them as we uploaded them.

Using iCloud Photos, we found adding photos a bit clunky. The photos were always shown in the order they were uploaded and not by the date they were taken, which was a big disadvantage. Adding captions was easy, but sharing the album with friends and family proved a little difficult. However, once people successfully joined, they generally had a good experience. They could view the photos either using the iOS Photos app or through their browser. The photo presentation was very slick, and the user could view the photos in collage form or one at a time. Also, they could turn the viewing of photo comments on or off as they pleased.

With Google Photos, you can add photos to a shared album via the iOS app, Android app, their browser interface, or upload-only Mac and Windows apps. Comments can be added from any device and viewed from any



METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

I recommend using cloud photo services such as Cloud Photos, Google Photos and Amazon Photos to store your digital photos.

device as well. We found adding people to the shared album a bit easier than on iCloud. Photos in the collection are always sorted by the date the photo was taken. One big advantage of Google Photos is the automatic suggestion of albums to create. Once you have several pictures of your vacation already taken, Google Photos will automatically suggest that you might want to create an album, and with one click, you can start that album.

With Amazon Photos, we found that their advantage was in how they managed groups of people. Most of us usually share our photos with pretty much the same set of people. With Amazon Photos, once you define a group, you can share multiple albums with them, which is a big time-saver. Amazon Photos has an iOS app, an Android app, a browser interface, and upload-only Windows and Mac apps. One disadvantage of Amazon Photos is comments — they could be added from the iOS and Android apps, but not from the browser interface. Also, viewing the comments from any device was more difficult than iCloud or Google

Photos currently does not support showing slideshows from your photos.

MAKING A SLIDESHOW

The second task we compared was making a slideshow from a set of photos. These are often used at events like weddings, funerals and parties. For this comparison, we created a slideshow from our Oregon shared album.

Creating a slideshow with iCloud Photos was extremely easy — you right-click on the album, choose one of seven different themes, optionally choose some music, and click Play Slideshow. You can create a slideshow from either the Photos iOS app or the Photos app on your Mac (but you can't from the iCloud browser interface). Google Photos has the ability to create a slideshow, but only from the browser interface and not the iOS or Android apps. Also, the slideshow is very basic — one full-screen photo at a time with no music. You can't customize either the speed of the slides or the layout of the photos. Amazon

Photos currently does not support showing slideshows from your photos.

For the task of creating a slideshow, we give iCloud an A+, Google a C, and Amazon an F.

MAKING A PRINTED PHOTO BOOK

The third task we compared was creating a printed photo book from a set of photos. With iCloud Photos, you can only create a photo book from within the Mac Photos app. There is no support for photo books in the iCloud browser interface. Within the Mac Photos app, Apple enables multiple third-party vendors by installing an app extension. With the vendors we tried, we found this process complicated and slow. Of course, the experience may be better with other vendors.

With Google Photos, creating, editing and ordering are all done from the web interface, and the whole process is extremely easy. Google automatically makes suggestions and groups photos into albums. Examples would be photos from a location (Trip to Italy) or a time of the year (Best of Summer 2018). Google chooses

a layout, but you can easily change it to multiple other layouts. A caption can be added to each page but not to multiple photos on the same page. As far as ease of use, Google is much easier than iCloud.

Creating a printed photo book on Amazon Photos is also very easy but not quite as easy as Google. Photos can be autofilled into pages or placed manually. The real strength of Amazon Photos is the abundance of features. As far as captions, you can add text not only to each page but anywhere within the album. There are themes with embellishments that look like a scrapbook. Background colors and textures can be changed. For the creative sort who wants to personalize the album for a specific look, Amazon Photos gives you that capability in spades.

For the task of creating a printed photo book, we give iCloud a C, Google a B, and Amazon an A-.

HOW TO CHOOSE

So how do you choose which service to use? Our rules of thumb would be the following. If you live entirely in the Apple ecosystem (your whole family has only iPhones and Macs), then iCloud is your clear choice. On the other hand, if your family has a mix of iPhones, Androids, Macs and Windows, then Google and Amazon are both good choices. How to choose between them? It probably comes down to how much you are willing to pay for pristine image quality. Google Photos has unlimited photo storage, but only if you are willing to let them limit the resolution of your uploaded photos to 16 megapixels. On the other hand, if you are an Amazon Prime subscriber, then you get unlimited photo storage at full resolution.

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