

Technology

Every Wednesday

New digital photo frames arrive already set up and with e-mail

Pandigital, Sony, Kodak make gadgets easier

By Jefferson Graham
USA TODAY

LOS ANGELES — You've got mail — on your digital photo frame, and it's smiling.

Manufacturers of digital photo frames, trying to boost flat sales, are looking at new ways to get pictures into frames, in time for the expected retail boost from Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Pandigital's \$149 Photo Mail frame comes with a dedicated e-mail address so pictures can be sent directly to it, via AT&T's 3G cellular network. Kodak's \$119.99 Pulse also has a dedicated e-mail address; the frame connects to your home Wi-Fi network to receive pictures. The Pulse also links to friends' photo albums at Facebook and Kodak Gallery.

Pandigital CEO Dean Finnegan says he introduced a Wi-Fi frame in 2007, but consumers didn't like it. "They didn't want to go to the bother of setting up the network," he says.

His deal with AT&T means the frame is already set up with Internet out of the box. The price includes 300 photos. More can be sent for a fee, starting at \$9.99 for 100 additional photos.

Kodak has tried Wi-Fi frames before, but the company learned

important lessons for Pulse, says Kodak Vice President Phil Scott.

He says setup is much easier. The frame is managed via the kodakpulse.com website. That is where you can, for instance, connect friends from Facebook and Kodak Gallery accounts.

Photos are stored to internal memory. The Pulse, which has a 7-inch touch-screen, has 512 megabytes of storage, vs. 1 gigabyte for the 8-inch, non-touch Pandigital. Web photos from Facebook and Kodak Gallery are streamed, not stored to memory. Photos can also be displayed directly from a memory card.

Pandigital leads the category in market share, according to IDC, followed by Kodak, then Sony.

Digital frames "grew extremely fast" then "capped out," Scott says. "The Pulse is our response, bringing new life to a category."

Ron Glaz, an analyst at IDC, says frame sales have declined slightly for two years. He projects another slight decline this year to 8 million frames worldwide, from 8.2 million in 2009. "The issue is getting content in," says Glaz. "It's so complicated, consumers turn off the frames after a few weeks and rarely turn them on again."

Beyond e-mail, Sony's new

\$199 DPP-F700 photo frame adds a photo printer, which prints out 4-by-6 photos displayed on the 7-inch screen.

Sony, Kodak and Pandigital's frames are being released at a time when the hottest new tech toy is Apple's iPad, which starts at \$499. The iPad can be a book reader, music player or tool to surf the Web. And it can display photos in a never-ending slide show. Just like a photo frame.

Finnegan, who says he'll ship 2 million frames this year, isn't worried about the competition.

The iPad is a good three times more expensive than the average digital frame, and he says his market is price-conscious. "Digital frames are taking the place of traditional photo frames that people put on tables," he says. "It's a different usage profile."

However, he says, Pandigital has its own answer to the iPad. In late May, it will introduce a \$179 e-reader that doubles as a photo frame and can run four apps at once. It will be based on the Google Android operating system.

Finnegan says Mother's Day and Father's Day represent 600% to 700% sales increases over normal weeks in the first half of the year.

"It's a great lift," he says.



Sony

Sony DPP-F700: This digital photo frame has a built-in printer that rolls out 4-by-6 prints.



See the Pandigital Photo Mail frame at tech.usatoday.com.

► Mom's Day social-media blitz, 2B



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Connected: Digital photo frames by Pandigital, left, and Kodak have dedicated e-mail addresses so pictures can be sent right to them.