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Photo Editing Online, Easy as Pie



Photofunia.com, left, Photo505.com allow users to see how their faces would look in unlikely contexts.

By PETER WAYNER
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When Alexey Ivanov and his future wife, Marina Kiseleva, were dating, she gave him a memorable gift: a photograph of himself that looked as if it were hanging in the [Tate Modern](#) in London.

To create the image, she used a simple photo-editing program. And it gave the couple the idea for their Web site, [Photofunia.com](#), which allows users to upload a photograph, select an image from dozens of templates showing a scene, and then merge the two photographs. It is just one of many Web sites for enhancing photographs that are becoming easier than ever to use.

The Web sites cater to novices, unlike sophisticated software packages like Photoshop, making it possible to create a greeting card, make photo collages, design new images for a Web site and tweak personal photographs without doing much more than clicking a button.

Some sites, like Photofunia, which is based in Ukraine, merge or mash up images. Others are aimed at transforming pictures to look as if they come from another time or place. Some sites have a more commercial aspect, selling products like lipstick by letting you try it by painting a virtual copy of the makeup on a photo of yourself.

Photofunia contains dozens of templates — of art galleries, urban scenes and locations like the Sphinx in Egypt. For example, users can put a picture of themselves into a scene

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from Times Square so that it looks as if the user's image is on a billboard. The site also has tools to digitally detect a person's face, extract it from a picture and graft it onto the head and body of another image, like Santa Claus or the Mona Lisa.

A similar site, based in Russia, is [Photo505.com](#). It offers a wide array of templates, and can place a face in a wanted poster or the cover of a magazine like Cosmopolitan.

"We experiment and realize every idea we have in mind," said the site's founder, Vasily Giharev. "Even the most insane ones."

Mr. Giharev said he was inspired to create the site after seeing the film "Forrest Gump," which sliced film of the actor [Tom Hanks](#) into historical images from the 1960s, making it seem as if the character was present at the important events of that era.

Other sites — like [Aviary.com](#), [Pixlr.com](#), [Splashup.com](#), and [Citrify.com](#) — are competing to offer simple tools for cropping an image, fixing red eye or making other tweaks to an image.

"The typical user is not a professional, but a step below, a beginner," said Ola Sevandersson, the Stockholm-based founder of Pixlr.

While Pixlr itself is meant to be easy to use, Mr. Sevandersson also created an even simpler version that does most of the work with the push of [a button](#).

Pixlr includes another feature that allows users to modify the colors in a photo. For example, effects named Melissa, Sophie or Tony (to make them easier to remember) will mute colors and change the focus to imitate the film and lenses commonly used in different eras. The vintage '60s effect, for instance, amplifies the red tones and mutes the blues, effectively producing more yellows and purples, and imitating the way that films and photographic paper of that time reproduced light from the scene.

Other sites take photo editing into different realms. [Taaz.com](#), for instance, allows people to test various colors of makeup.

"Our main positioning is not as a photo modification site," said Deepu John, vice president of marketing at Taaz, which is based in San Diego. "It's a site where women can try on thousands of different makeup colors on themselves."

Users upload a photo of themselves and can then modify it by trying on foundation, lip gloss, blush and other cosmetics. Cosmetic companies pay fees to the company to include their products. Making the images look realistic was a challenge for the company's software designers, Mr. John said. "We have to focus on light interacting with surface. That's part of the key to realism."

The makeup test is licensed by Taaz to other Web sites like [People.com](#) and [Estelauder.com](#).

Mr. John said more than a quarter of a billion tests of makeup products were performed each month on all the sites.

Yet another site is [Bighugelabs.com](#), where users create badges, jigsaw puzzles and art work meant to emulate the styles of [Andy Warhol](#) or [David Hockney](#). John Watson, the site's founder, said it had almost a half million registered users.

The most popular service, he said, produces images that imitate a popular line of black-matted, motivational posters often found in office hallways. The site matches a picture with a caption and produces an image with the correct typeface. Many of the people visit the site to produce posters that are sarcastic, not inspirational.

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“I think most people can be creative but not everyone is going to learn to play guitar,” Mr. Watson said. “But there are other ways for people to be creative. You can give them tools that allow themselves to express themselves in ways they couldn’t before.”

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: March 11, 2011

Because of an editing error, an article on the Personal Tech pages on Thursday about photo-editing Web sites misspelled, in two references, the name of a San Diego company that lets users try out cosmetics on an online photograph of themselves. As the first reference correctly noted, it is Taaz, not Tazz.

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