

Smile Books –

Photo Book Printing Service

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This company produces a printed photo book of your digital pictures. The software is a free download from their site <http://www.smilebooks.com/>. You create the book on your computer and send the book online. The finished product is shipped back to you.

The download and install of the free software proceeded quite smoothly.

You begin your photo book by selecting a size. They offer seven different sizes, ranging from the Pocket Smile Book at 5" by 5.5" to the Panorama Professional at 16.5" by 12". Each of these can be ordered with different covers. Covers can be hardcover, softcover, linen or booklet. Books begin with a basic 26-page book and can be increased in multiples of 8 pages for an additional charge. The price range is from \$9.95 for a Pocket SmileBook booklet to \$189.95 for a Panorama Professional in a faux leather binding.

I chose to make their Classic SmileBook, which measures 8" by 11", with a hard cover binding. The price for that book with 26 pages is \$39.95. An additional 8 pages is \$8.00. Shipping is \$7.95. Although they have multiple columns showing prices related to quantities, the prices are all the same! There are no quantity discounts. They only charge one shipping charge for multiple copies, so there is some money saved in shipping.

The next step in the process is to select your pictures. They offer an "Assistant." That seemed like a reasonable thing to try when using new software. It was a mistake for me.

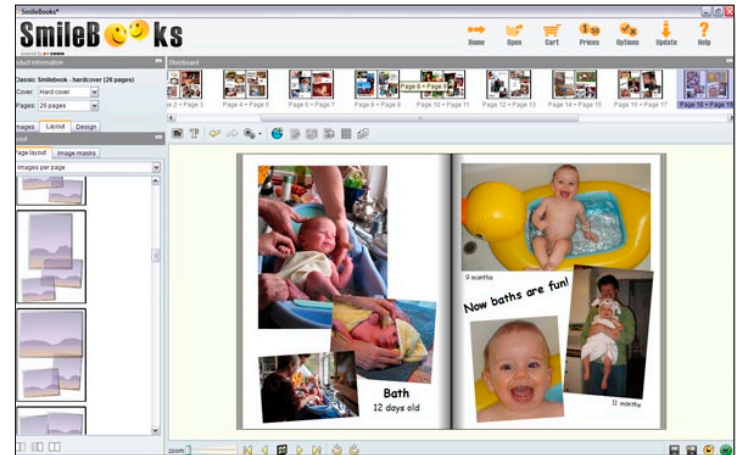
If you use the "Assistant," you select all the images you want and essentially select "Make book." It decides the layouts, the sequence, etc. I found the result very unsatisfactory. I was trying to make a book of our grandson's first year.

To select the sequence, you have one of three choices: by date; by filename, and by event (which you tell it by filename). None of these worked for me, it would be too time-consuming to rename my photos to achieve the desired sequence. The book it created with the Assistant



was not at all in the sequence I wanted and the layouts gave the wrong pictures prominence. I suppose this could work if you were doing a vacation book for instance, and you wanted the pictures in date sequence. You could create a book in five minutes or so. However, it would still be selecting layouts for you – which I find unacceptable.

So I started over without the Assistant. I selected a layout from the almost 200 layouts (see screenshot below) and dragged the layout onto the page. They use something that looks like Windows Explorer to find the photos and drag and drop them onto the layout.



Personally I found it much easier to use my *Elements Organizer* to find the pictures I wanted and drag and drop them from there. That worked great. The layouts are only the starting point for your book.

You can change any layout by dragging the corners of the frame to the size and shape you want, rotating the frames, adding text, shading or adding frames to the pictures. They have more than 400 backgrounds and you can use your photos as backgrounds. Take a look at their website for a myriad of ideas.

The software has a lot of capability. It even offers basic photo editing like cropping, color and saturation changes, etc. You can also choose to use their automatic editor to change photos for best print quality and do things like automatic red-eye removal or you can turn the automatic editor off. They show you with a "happy face" if the picture you're working on is of high enough quality to produce a good printed result at the size you're specifying.

It probably took me 4 or 5 hours to make the cover and 26 pages. I'm sure it will be faster next time. Much of the time was looking at the pictures, deciding which went together on a page, finding the closest layout with the right number of frames and the correct orientations of portrait vs. landscape.

I changed the proportions of pictures, rotated them, and moved them around on the page, but I wanted to start with the closest layout to my desired end product. Adding text took a while. Text was more necessary in a one-year baby book than it might be for some other subjects. Then, because I learned as I went along, I went back through the book, making changes that I had learned later in the editing process.

I am very impressed with their software and the ease of making the book. There was a bit of a learning curve, but once I got started it went quite well. I kept the book fairly simple, using consistent frames, fonts, and design throughout. But I'm anxious to do it again and be a little more adventurous next time.

The upload of the book took about 10 minutes and it went smoothly.

The book is printed on 135# archival paper. Some of the formats are also available in photo paper at an additional cost. They estimate production time at 2 to 7 working days, varying by product, and shipping time from 6 to 10 days. I ordered my book on the 9th and received an immediate e-mail

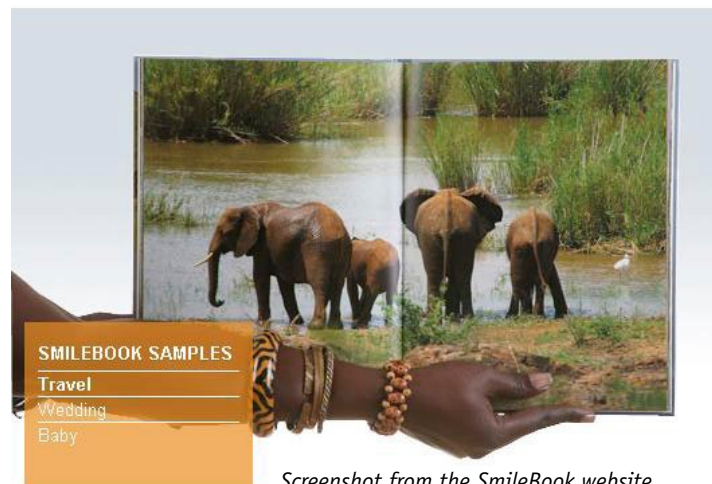
confirmation. They emailed a shipping notice on the 11th, and I received the book on the 15th. Wow! Six days total. And it was from Germany. I'm very pleased with the quality of the book. I ordered 3 more copies, for the parents and other grandparents.

I am enthusiastic about this product. Try it if you have any interest. I shared the book at the June DI SIG and will bring it to a future DI SIG if anyone would like to see the finished product.

About: SmileBooks Photo Book Printers

Vendor: SmileBooks
<http://www.smilebooks.com/>

Price: Varies; read article or visit website



Screenshot from the SmileBook website