11 Google Picasa

How many times has it happened that you have saved a photo on your computer and can't find it? How many times have you lost photos because the hard disk was corrupted or you accidentally deleted the folder? It happens with everyone some time or the other. But there is help at hand.

Google Picasa and Picasa Web Albums were developed with the idea of storing photos centrally on the cloud as a secure and safe back up and also to enable sharing of the photos. Picasa is powerful downloadable software, packed with features that help one to find, edit, organize and share all the photos on one's computer. With Picasa Web Albums, you can create online albums to share with others whilst maintaining control over the privacy.

The good thing about Picasa is that the photos are not moved from their location. Picasa just builds up an index and displays all photos in the same place. Another aspect is that when you edit the photos, the original files are not touched and even when you save the edited copy a new file is created, so your original photos will not be tampered with at any time.

11.1 Installing Picasa

Picasa can be downloaded for free at *http://picasa.google.com*. Once you have downloaded the software, you can install Picasa by running the .exe file. Soon after installation on the computer, the software will run an initial scan on your computer for existing images. For this you will be prompted to specify the folders it should scan. Once the scan is completed, Picasa displays all the photos and images that it finds.

Picasa can also be used to import photos from other external drives like your digital camera, scanners, usb device etc. In this case, Picasa will store the photos on the computer.
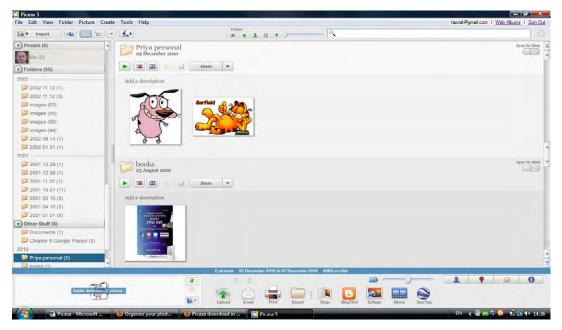

Figure11.1 Google Picasa on Your Computer

11.2 Organizing the Photos

A screenshot of Google Picasa displaying folders and images is shown in Figure 11.1. The left sidebar is the Picasa hub for organization. The Picasa photos are organized in the following manners:

- **Albums** – Albums only exist on Picasa. That means it is just a kind of directory for the photos, which exist on your computer. The albums are displaying these photos without actually moving them. If you delete a photo from an album within Picasa nothing happens to the original.
- **People** – The photos on your computer can be organized according to the people present in the photos. Picasa has a built-in facial recognition technology, which tries to group photos with similar faces across the collection. Just like albums this is a virtual grouping and changes made here do not affect the original photos.
- **Folders** – The items in **Folders** are representing the actual folders on your computer. Any changes made here will affect the original folders, so you need to be careful working with these.
- **Projects and others** – Your screenshots and downloads will be shown as Projects or Others in the organization bar.

11.3 Editing Photos

Picasa offers basic editing tools for making your photos look better. These include tools like cropping, straightening, retouching etc, tools for adjusting colours highlights, shadows, etc and tools for generating effects like sharpen, tint, warmify and convert to black & white or sepia.

11.4 Sharing Photos

Photos can be shared in two ways. Firstly, by uploading selected photos or complete albums to Picasa Web albums and secondly by emailing the photos. Emailing may not be better option to share a large number of photos since most service providers have restriction on the amount of data, which can be attached.

11.5 Additional Features

There are certain additional features provided to make your Picasa experience even better.

- **Taking backups** – Picasa can be used to backup your photo collection on an external drive or CD/DVD.
- **Resizing Photos** – Photos in Picasa can be resized while being exported. If you click the export button, the option to resize photos is given. You can select the desired pixels and export the photo. You can even watermark the photo if so required.
- **Adding Captions** – Adding captions make the viewing experience even better. You can add captions to all photos while editing them.
- **Adding Tags** – Tags can be added to photos so that it is easy to find them if your collection becomes very large. For example, you can tag by an event or by a place you visited.
- **Printing Photos** – If you have a printer you can also print photos directly from Picasa by using the print option. If you do not have a printer or require a high quality print, you can use the Shop option and choose a vendor from the displayed list to order prints for your photos. Please note that you will need an existing account or register for a new account with the vendor you select. Once you place the order, Picasa transfers the selected photos to the vendor who in turn completes your order.
- **Making a Collage or Video** – Making a collage or a movie using your photographs is possible with Picasa, with a click of a button. Picasa also has an option for uploading the movie or video you make directly to You Tube.
- **Publish it on Blogger** – If you are maintaining a Blogger blog, you can post your photos on to your blog directly from Picasa by using the "BlogThis" button.

11.6 Picasa Web Albums

Picasa Web Albums provides 1GB of free space to registered users. After you have uploaded the photos you can share the photos or albums with others. For sharing the albums there is the conventional way of selecting the album and then notifying your friends by email and then there is the sharing of albums via Google+. If you have a Google+ account, you can post the photos or albums to your account and share them by selecting your circles, individuals or email addresses. People in your circles will see the photos in their stream, and the others will get an email notification. Note that people invited by you but not registered for Google+ can still see the photographs without signing up.

If you'd rather not use Google+ to share your photos, there is a link "Share via email only" at the bottom of the share window.

11.7 Privacy Settings

Since the photos are available on the web you need to be careful about setting the privacy options according to your requirements. The available options are:

- **Public** – Anyone on the web can see your photos and the photos will even be searchable and be linked to your Google profile.
- **Limited, Anyone with a Link** – When you send a link of your albums to your friends it contains an authorization key, which will not be available to anyone else, and hence only the people who have the exact link are able to see the albums.
- **Limited** – These albums are visible to only those people that you specify and even they need to sign in with their Google accounts to see the albums. However, Google+ users need to know that other Google+ users that you share albums with automatically have the permission to re-share your albums amongst their circles.
- **Only You** – This is the highest level of privacy and no one can see the albums other than you. If back up of your photos is the only reason for you uploading your photos on Picasa Web Albums, this is the privacy level for you.

11.8 Syncing to Web

Now that you have photos and albums in two places i.e. Picasa on your computer and Picasa Web Albums online, you need a way to manage your online albums from your computer. Picasa has "*Sync to Web*" feature, which allows you to do that with minimal effort.

When you *Sync to web*, the albums on your computer and web are synchronised and updated with respect to photo edits, addition/deletion, captions/tags/geotags and the order of the photos in the albums. This feature obviates the necessity to be online while managing your albums and also the need to make changes at two places.