

reviewed by Clive Thompson

Spitting Images

A tiny printer brings back the fun of instant photography.

POLAROID POGO INSTANT MOBILE PRINTER

\$150

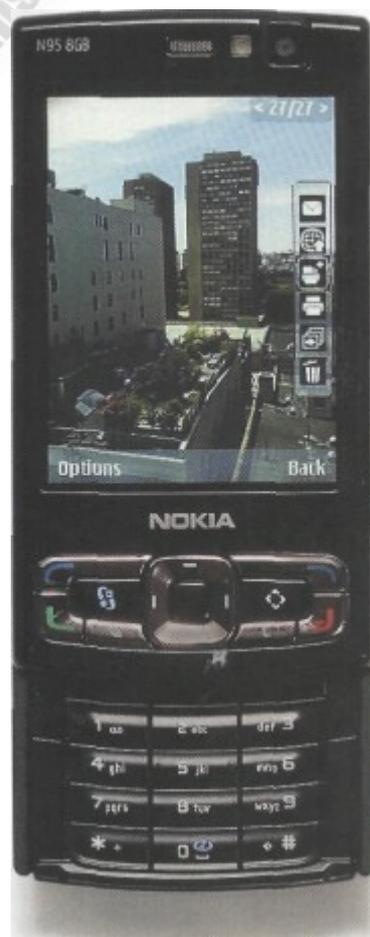
www.polaroid.com/pogo

When Polaroid released its iconic instant camera in the 1960s, it changed the way people related to photographs. Until then, photos were a classic bit of delayed gratification. You waited a few days, or even weeks, until you had your pictures back. But with a Polaroid, the idea of instant memories was born: A record of the event *during* the event.

This giddy freedom produced all kinds of odd photographic behavior. Friends would tote Polaroids to parties to hand out snapshots as takeaway mementos. Real-estate agents used them as a cognitive aid for buyers—a nagging little reminder of just how awesome the house they'd just seen was. And given that you didn't need to ship your film off to nosy developing shops, randy couples used Polaroid as the first form of DIY pornography.

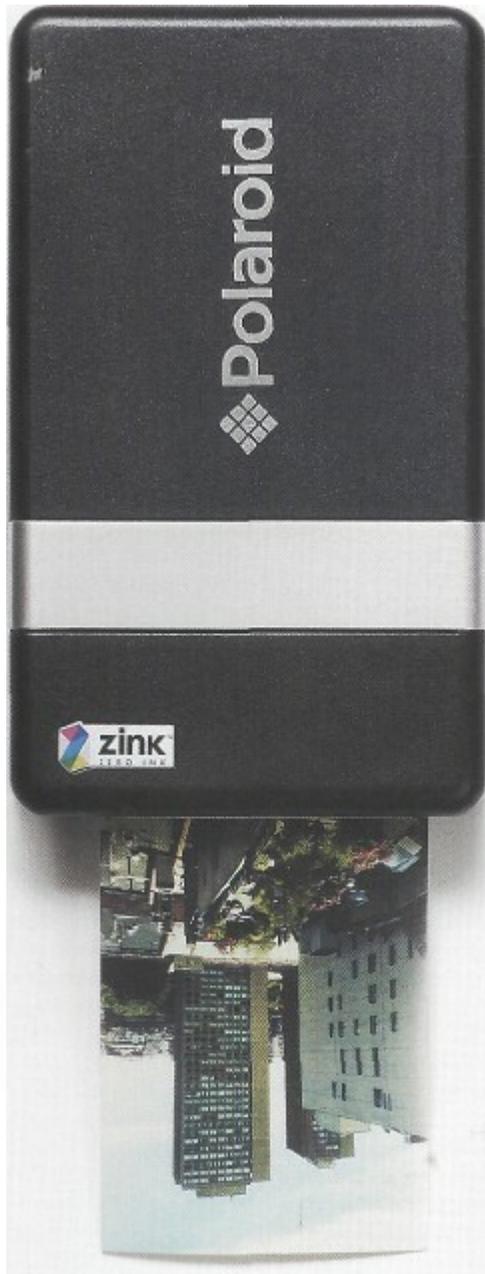
Now Polaroid is trying to see if it can tweak our behavior one more time with a digital update of its classic product. This summer, on the heels of an announcement that the company would no longer be producing instant film, Polaroid launched PoGo, a pocket-sized printer—about the size of two iPhones stacked on top of one another—that generates 2-by-3-inch prints from your camera or mobile phone.

With its black-and-metal styling, the PoGo looks mildly and appropriately retro. Yet it's not just a beautiful object; it's also driven by a nifty bit of high technology. You start by loading in a 10-pack of photo paper embedded with zillions of invisible dye crystals—the so-called Zink Zero-Ink Imaging Technology. To print a picture, you send the photo from your phone or camera via Bluetooth—or a USB cord—and the PoGo uses thermal printing to produce the image. That means no messy ink cartridges to fiddle with.





Polaroid's portable PoGo printer is loaded with a new kind of inkless photo paper.



There is a huge *oooh* factor with this device, as I discovered when I took it along with my two kids to a local park. I snapped some shots, and in less than a minute, the print was in hand. Though I've heard some reports of people having trouble connecting via Bluetooth, my phone had no trouble at all beaming in the images.

Granted, the color in the pictures isn't always accurate. Skin tones, in particular, are sometimes pallid. Part of the trouble is probably the lousy quality of the camera chips inside phones, which don't capture colors terribly well. (Using a high-quality SLR camera will yield better results.)

The thing is, I kind of *liked* the PoGo's color distortions. Much like the original Polaroid cameras—whose wonky chemicals produced surreal results—my PoGo had a tendency to exaggerate color saturation in a sometimes lovely way. My wife's oxblood sneakers popped out of the picture like a hallucinogenic flash.

The most interesting thing was seeing other people's reactions. "That is so *incredibly cool*" cooed the mother of one of my son's friends, mesmerized as the tiny snapshots slowly spooled out of the printer. And yet I can't quite figure out what sort of cultural impact the PoGo will have. In one sense, it fulfills a huge need. We're surrounded by endless digital photos; indeed, because almost every phone now sports a camera, we're living in an age where more things are photographed than ever. But because we don't have an easy way to make photos concrete, we mostly leave them on our computers, never to be printed. The PoGo is a cultural wormhole, turning photos back from information into atoms, the way they used to be.

Yet I wonder whether our need to have photos take a printed form is vanishing. These days, it's not about having a printed copy of a photo instantly. It's about taking 14 photos of your friends, then looking at all of them and discarding the 12 you don't like. Plus, with tools like Flickr and Facebook, the joy of photography now lies in how quickly—and how widely—we can share images. When my second son was born in December, I took a photo of him and emailed it from my phone to my sister in Canada. That's the new instant gratification in photography. Do we need the old way anymore?

Well, we probably need both. After all, when I look down at my desk, I've got a couple of PoGo pictures of my kids and friends stuck to the wall. Sometimes, in the world of atoms, I want my memories solidly fixed.

Give Thompson is a contributing writer at The New York Times Magazine and Wired.