A personal stamp of approval

Teens use their photos to give items such as stamps and CashCards a new look

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When Wendy Tan’s friends receive a card in the mail from her, they know it immediately because her face adorns the postage stamp in the upper right-hand corner.

Every time Yong Li Xuan, 19, who's out of her CashCard to pay for her purchases, she smiles because her boyfriend’s loving face stares back at her.

These students are just two among many youths who have personalised everyday items with their favourite photos, making the generic CashCard or postage stamp something of a keepsake.

While youths used to be crazy over Neo Prints, photographs in sticker form, they are now putting their faces on postage stamps.

Singapore’s MyStamp service started in 2000, with only 10 to 20 orders a month. But it now gets about 2,000 orders monthly.

At a July roadshow at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, students ordered close to 200 sets of stamps.

Orders can be made at post offices, Changi Airport Terminal 2 Departure Hall and the Suntec City Duckbills counter.

For the Christmas season, personalised stamps are available on the spot at Killiney Road Post Office. Customers can bring either hard or soft copies of their favourite photos to be used.

They can also use soft copies of their photos to make their stamps online at http://shop.vpost.com.sg. Delivery takes seven days.

Each sheet of 20 stamps costs $11 or $15, depending on the number of photos used per sheet. These are 25-cent stamps for mailing letters within Singapore.

Sylvia Ching, 19, a student at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, is the proud owner of three personalised stamps. She and her friends had a group photo of themselves made into a set of stamps and split it among themselves.

She considers MyStamp the next big thing after the fast-fading Neo Print craze.

“I used to take Neo Print stickers photos, but I think this is so much more sophisticated and more useful. “Stamps have been around for a long time, but putting together the idea of a Neo Print and a stamp is a great new combination.”

She keeps her five stamps in her drawer, saying they are “too precious to use.”

Wendy, 19, also from Ngee Ann, solved this problem by ordering two sets of local stamps using the same picture of herself. She intends to keep one set and to use the other set for her 21st birthday party invitations.

There is no stopping this fashion of personalisation, who owns a T-shirt and a mug with photos of her friends and intends to head to the Killiney Road Post Office for the Christmas stamps.

She thinks the Christmas set gives real value for money since it comprises eight personalised stamps, eight greeting cards and eight envelops - all for $12.50.

Sylvia is also gearing up for the festive season. “I think I’ll do a set of stamps with a family photo to use when mailing greetings to our friends and relatives. “These stamps are really encouraging me to send snail mail,” she says.

MyStamp is not the only personalised product targeted at the youth.

Retailer Minos sells bags and shoes on which customers can print their photos.

Its outlets in Far East Square and Far East Plaza sell customised bags, clothes and shoes.

Earlier this month, the Network for Electronic Transfers Singapore (Net) launched MyCopyright Card - a CashCard that can be personalised with pictures, fonts and other images like snowflakes or dog paws.

The cards can be bought online at www.nyc.com.sg - the customers need only provide a soft copy of their photos, and the card is usually delivered within seven days.

Each personalised card costs $19.90, compared to $9.90 for the generic MyCopyright Card.

But it is a worthwhile investment for Li Xuan, from Nanyang Polytechnic, who enjoys personalising items with pictures of herself and her boyfriend.

“I use his photo as a screensaver on my mobile phone and we’re also thinking of personalising T-shirts together,” she says.

She also bought the card for the benefit it brings. “I can get free movies and free drinks if I use the card. It’s a good deal, especially since movies are so expensive these days,” she adds.

Every last Tuesday of the month, MyCopyright Movie Day. When users produce five receipts (with minimum purchases of $1 each) at the ticket counters of Golden Village cinemas, they get a free ticket for any movie of their choice, saving $7.

Marketing and retail analyst say personalisation is a clever way of pitching a product to the young.

Associate Professor Thomas Tan Ten Woei, who lectures in marketing at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business at the Singapore Management University, says, “Youths have very little brand loyalty, so any attempt at differentiating the product will help.

“Personalisation gives them a sense of belonging to the product, or a signature to say it’s theirs.”

He says youths go through a stage of searching for an identity. He points out: “When they are caught between childhood and adulthood, identity-building is very important, so the more something can be personalised, the more they can say it belongs to them and thus the more popular it will be.”

The youths were in agreement, says Li Xuan.

Wendy concurs: “There should be more personalised items in the market. They will definitely sell better than the standard things available.”

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