

Digital Photography

What to Consider When Purchasing a Digital Camera

Now that you've decided to go digital, you're probably wondering what type of camera to buy. All the usual suspects produce digital cameras, some are better than others. The top producers are Canon, Nikon and Olympus because they still make most of their optics (lenses). Sony, Panasonic, Fuji, et al., make very good electronic components, but they acquire lenses from so many different vendors you often don't know what you are really buying. Hewlett Packard (HP) and Kodak make cameras for "the masses" and they are usually good and usually inexpensive. Then come the other famous names of cameras — Honeywell, Argus, etc., which you may remember, but unfortunately they have sold off their names to the highest bidder. They are not really making the cameras anymore.

Once you decide on a brand, then you have to decide on a type. If you're an "old timer" with a film SLR and a bunch of lenses, you might explore the new world of dSLRs (digital single lens reflex) because you *might* be able to use your old lenses on the company's newer cameras. The current crop of dSLR's range anywhere from \$600 to \$4000, however, so you might want to start with a point-and-shoot (PnS) which is a basic digital cam-

By Stu Gershon
"The Digital Doctor"



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era. The current price range for these is anywhere from \$100 to \$800 depending upon the amount of bells and whistles.

The primary difference between dSLRs

and PnSs is what experts call shutter lag. This is very important for convenience. All digital cameras have auto-exposure and auto-focus, but this electronic magic causes a slight hesitation of the shutter (hence, shutter lag) that could be up to one-half second. You might think that this short amount of time is negligible, but ask anyone who owns a digital camera and they will tell you it's the most annoying aspect of digital photography. You're shooting your grandchild and you keep hitting that shutter button and suddenly you notice that the picture isn't taken exactly when you

(wide-angle) to true telephoto (300mm). However, a lens like this is big bucks (\$400 and up).

The third difference between dSLR and PnS cameras is that the developers of these products have decided that the more sophisticated dSLRs are more for "purists" so they only shoot still photographs, whereas the less expensive (and more common) PnSs should "reach the masses" so most of these cameras also take digital video. (This video mode won't come close to replacing a real video camera.)

Keeping all this in mind, when someone asks me which camera to buy, the first question that I ask them is, "What are you going to use it for?" If the answer is, "snapshots and vacations" I tell them they really don't need more than a three to five megapixel camera. (Megapixels are a whole other article!)

Then I ask them, "What kind of computer do you have?" and if they answer that their computer is three to five years old, I give them the same answer. The more sophisticated your camera, the more sophisticated your computer has to be.

Finally I ask, "Do you like to aim or hold the camera to your eye or walk around with the camera in front of you?" The reason for this is all digital cameras come with an LCD (a small screen to view the scene and images) while fewer and fewer come with a viewfinder (a small lens to put up to your eye and look through). As trivial as this may sound, this is a very important decision on your part: do you want to aim a camera the traditional way you've done for most of your life, or do you want to hold this device about a foot in front of you and walk around Disney Land with a chance



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The best place to get information about cameras is to go to www.steves-digicams.com/ which reviews all photo-

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Because the dSLRs cost more and are usually more electronically sophisticated, they have larger buffers, which can temporarily store images faster, and therefore, virtually eliminate shutter-lag. YOU have to decide if this convenience is worth the greater cost of the dSLR.

Another great advantage of dSLRs is that you can change lenses for various shooting situations. I personally have a dSLR and after I bought it with its two lens outfit, I realized that it was a real pain in the neck to be carrying around all this equipment and constantly changing lenses. I eventually scrapped both lenses for a high ratio zoom lens that goes from 28mm

graphic products, or to go to my Website (below) and click on "Important Stuff" to find more sources of camera reviews.

Finally, I cannot emphasize this enough — *Don't buy any camera until you've put it around your neck and tried it!* The weight and "feel" of a camera are a very important part of enjoying it.

Next month: Software.

Stuart Gershon is known as "The Digital Doctor." He has given over two hundred classes at 45 different libraries in Nassau and Suffolk. You can get more information and the schedule of his classes at: www.DigitalDocOnline.com.



Stephen D. Barsan, M.D.



Michael H. Brinson, M.D.



William J. Serevitz, M.D.



Jeffrey A. Brown, M.D.



Benjamin R. Cohen, M.D.

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516.255.9031