
The Digital Doctor

Holiday Shopping for Digital Products

By Stu Gershon

This column is devoted to suggestions for purchasing digital products for this holiday season. In order to save space, I will skip over technical definitions which can be found on my Website, www.digitaldoconline.com, then clicking on <Learn>, <Lesson 6 -How to Buy A Digital Camera> and then <How to Buy a Digital Camera HANDOUT>. You can then print that page out and get all the technical definitions of the terms used in this article.

First, we must keep in mind — and answer — five distinct questions:

1. How powerful is the computer I am going to use? This is important because the more powerful your digital camera is — the number of megapixels it uses in its sensor — the more memory and the more powerful the CPU of the computer must be. The more information a digital image has (called resolution), the more power the computer needs to manipulate it. Also, you'll have to consider optical zoom — the telescoping zooming power of the lens — often described as 3x (3 times) or 10x (ten

times multiplication). The more optical power you have, the more your camera should have image stabilization or anti-shake technology.

2. What am I going to use the camera for? This answers the question of how powerful your camera should be. If you are going to take photos of family events, travel vacations and grandchildren and put the prints (usually 4 x 6 inches) into a scrapbook or a CD/DVD slide show, then all you really need is a three-megapixel camera. If you are going to make 11 x 14 prints or posters of the Grand Canyon, then you need a more powerful five to 10-megapixel camera which can record and store more information for each image.

3. How should I hold the camera? Our body has natural movement, and one of the keys to shooting a good photo keeping the camera steady. There are four classes of cameras by size. There are subcompact cameras (cameras which can fit into your pocket or purse), compact cameras (cameras which are light and can fit in one hand), full-sized cameras (cameras which are point-and-shoot

but which need two hands to hold), and then there are dSLRs (digital Single Lens Reflexes) which allow you to look right through the lens but which also need two hands to aim and shoot because these cameras weigh between 20 and 46 ounces. Prices range from \$100 to over \$4,000 depending upon which camera/make/model you choose. The problem is, the smaller the camera, the more difficult it is to hold steady and get a good photo. Also, if you are over 40, you are used to looking through a viewfinder. Since the advent of digital cameras and the "Sony Style" mentality of bells and whistles, more cameras have been switched, almost exclusively, to LCD screens. This means your precious batteries are being used to run a miniature television-like screen on the back of the camera. This is not practical in bright sunlight, and to me, if you walk around holding the camera two feet in front of you (watching the LCD screen and not paying attention to where you are going), you are an accident waiting to happen. Therefore, it is my strong recommendation that your camera have an optical

viewfinder (a small viewing hole in the back) that you can put to your eye and see what you are doing. Not all cameras have an this, so be careful when shopping.

4. What brand should I buy? Any good camera store will sell Nikon, Canon, Fuji and Olympus. These are quality companies that make quality cameras. Minolta was recently gobbled up by SONY, so if you like style and bells and whistles and are satisfied with Minolta quality, you might consider SONY. Pentax and Panasonic are getting better at producing digital products, but both got into the digital camera business just three years ago. Kodak is getting better all the time. Hewlett Packard is at the bottom of the spectrum, but if someone gave it to you as a gift, that's fine. Stay away from those old, reliable names like Honeywell, Bell & Howell, Argus, etc. They all sold off their names and you can buy those knock-off products on HSN or QVC.

5. Where should I buy a digital camera? If you're going to buy a camera for less than \$250, you can buy it at P.C.

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Richard, Best Buy or Circuit City — they all have similar prices and you'll probably know more than the salesperson. If you want a high-end camera go to a camera store — one you can easily go back to in case there is a problem. Neptune Camera or the camera stores (Cameta Camera, Koh's, etc.) mentioned on my Website in <IMPORTANT STUFF> are great places to purchase cameras if you're going to spend OVER \$250. Never buy a camera off the Internet *unless you know what you're doing*. It's better to pay a few bucks more and buy it from someone you know, trust and can complain to.

Finally: Never buy a camera until you've put your hands on it, held it to your eye and experienced how com-

fortable it is to use.

You can find research tools and Websites on my Website under <IMPORTANT STUFF>. Look at camera specs and read camera reviews — and remember that you never know all there is to know about a camera until you've used it.

Good luck on your holiday shopping. Next month we will discuss Special Projects that you can create with your digital images.

Stuart Gershon is known as The Digital Doctor. He has given over 200 classes at 53 different libraries in Nassau and Suffolk counties. You can get more information and the schedule of his classes at: www.DigitalDocOnline.com.
