

How to Buy a Digital Camera

1. Determine what you need

A mistake I see some digital camera buyers making is that they get sucked into buying cameras that are beyond what they really need. Some questions to ask yourself **before** you go shopping:

- What do you need the camera for?
- What type of photography will you be doing? (portraits, landscapes, macro, sports)
- What conditions will you be largely photographing in? (indoors, outdoors, low light, bright light)
- Will you largely stay in auto mode or do you want to learn the art of photography?
- What experience level do you have with cameras?
- What type of features are you looking for? (long zoom, image stabilization, large LCD display etc)
- How important is size and portability to you?
- What is your budget?

Ask yourself these questions **before** you go to buy a camera and you'll be in a much better position to make a decision when you see what's on offer. You'll probably find the sales person asks you this question anyway - so to have thought about it before hand will help them help you get the right digital camera.

2. Megapixels are NOT everything

One of the features that you'll see used to sell digital cameras is how many megapixels a digital camera has.

When I first got into digital photography, a few years back, the megapixel rating of cameras was actually quite important as most cameras were at the lower end of today's modern day range and even a 1 megapixel increase was significant.

These days, with most new cameras coming out with at least 5 megapixels, it isn't so crucial. In fact at the upper end of the range it can actually be a disadvantage to have images that are so large that they take up enormous amounts of space on memory cards and computers.

One of the main questions to ask when it comes to megapixels is 'Will you be printing shots'? If so - how large will you be going with them? If you're only printing images at a normal size then anything over 4 or so megapixels will be fine. If you're going to start blowing your images up you might want to pay the extra money for something at the upper end of what's on offer today.

3. Keep in mind the ‘extras’

Keep in mind as you look at cameras that the price quoted may not be the final outlay that you need to make as there are a variety of other extras that you might want (or need) to fork out for including:

- Camera Case
- Memory Cards
- Spare Batteries/Recharger
- Lenses (if you are getting a DSLR)
- Filters (and other lens attachments)
- Tripods/Monopods
- External Flashes
- Reflectors

Some retailers will bundle such extras with cameras or will at least give a discount when buying more than one item at once. Keep in mind though that what they offer in bundles might not meet your needs. For example it's common to get a 16 or 32 megabyte memory card with cameras - however these days you'll probably want something at least of 500 megabytes (if not a gigabyte or two).

4. Do you already own any potentially compatible gear?

Talking of extra gear - one way to save yourself some cash is if you have accessories from previous digital cameras that are compatible with your new one.

For example memory cards, batteries, lenses (remember that many film camera lenses are actually compatible with digital SLRs from the same manufacturers), flashes, filters etc.

5. DSLR or Point and Shoot?

While digital SLRs are getting more affordable they are not for everyone. Keep in mind that they are usually bigger, heavier, harder to keep clean (if you're changing lenses) and can be more complicated to operate than point and shoot. Of course there are some upsides also.

6. Optical Zooms are King

Not all 'zooms' are created equal.

When you're looking at different models of digital cameras you'll often hear their zooms talked about in two ways. Firstly there's the 'optical zoom' and then there's the 'digital zoom'.

I would highly recommend that you only take into consideration the 'optical zoom' when making a decision about which camera to buy. Digital zooms simply enlarge the pixels in

your shot which does make your subject look bigger, but it also makes it look more pixelated and your picture 'noisier' (like when you go up close to your TV).

If you're looking for a zoom lens make sure it's an optical zoom (most modern cameras have them of at least 3x in length - ie they'll make your subject three times as big - with an increasing array of 'super zooms' coming onto the market at up to 12x Optical Zoom).

7. Read reviews

Before buying a digital camera take the time to do a little research. Don't JUST rely upon the advice of the helpful sales person (who may or may not know anything about cameras and who may or may not have sales incentives for the camera they are recommending).

Read some reviews in digital camera magazines or online to help you narrow down the field. There are some great websites around that give expert and user reviews on virtually every camera on the market - use this wonderful and free resource.