

Yes, You Need To Calibrate

Give Your HDTV A Makeover

It's probably for the best that we consumers don't have access to the settings that will make our HDTVs look their best. Sure, you can use a calibration disc, but chances are good that the TV's menu controls won't let you do everything those discs suggest you do. The advanced stuff requires a trip to the HDTV's service menu, which is accessed by punching a secret code into your remote control. We don't advise that you do so, however, because you can ruin your TV.

The HDTV manufacturers keep the code a secret for a reason: Poking around in the wrong places can have devastating consequences. "Consumers should never go into the service menu," says Ira George, an ISF-certified Elite Services Specialist for Geek Squad (www.bestbuy.com; go to TV & Home Theater Installation) in Omaha, Nebr. "If they don't know what they're doing, they will render the TV useless."

Indeed, one ISF-certified calibrator we spoke with years ago during a calibration session told us the sad tale of a customer who entered the service menu

and accidentally turned off the electron guns used to display an image on the screen. He couldn't see anything—including the service menu—and his television was essentially broken until the ISF calibrator arrived to save the day.

As if going into the service menu isn't perilous enough, there's not much the average consumer can do once they get there. You need pricey equipment to adjust the settings found there—exactly the kinds of equipment ISF-certified calibrators have. "We use calibration equipment provided by Sencore," says George. "It is a color analyzer that is used to set the white balance of the customers' displays. Without that equipment, customers cannot accurately set the colors of their televisions."

What To Expect From A Calibration

If you decide to call in the Geek Squad Home Theater Calibration team to calibrate your HDTV, you can expect the techs to establish maximum contrast between black and white so images

look their best and retain maximum detail. The ISF-certified Elite Service Specialist will also use color analyzer equipment to objectively tune color saturation and temperature as precisely as possible,

letting you see video exactly the same way that the person creating it did.

A calibration session includes two inputs on the set, so if you have a DVD player and cable box, for example, the HDTV's inputs will be calibrated specifically for the video output from those two devices. Calibration also adjusts the sound levels and positioning of the speakers in a surround-sound setup, so your entire home theater will look and sound as good as it can. ●

There are only a few downsides to calibration. The first is that it can't be done right out of the box. "It is recommended that the TV have at least 100 hours of use before a calibration can be performed properly," says George. There also are a few things calibration can't overcome. "Calibration cannot correct alignment issues in rear-projection TVs," George says. "Calibration also cannot correct any service issues with the TV."

Although you can expect to budget 10 to 15% of the purchase price of your television for a professional calibration session, consider it an entertainment investment that will pay dividends for years to come. **FG**

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