

Ten Tips for Buying TVs

Has shopping for a TV left your head spinning? Joel Silver, president of the Imaging Science Foundation, reveals his ten tips for buying a television.

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With so many choices and so many numbers to compare—shopping for a television (or projector) can leave you dizzy. What are the most important aspects to look for, and not to look for? We asked Joel Silver, founder and president of the [Imaging Science Foundation \(ISF\)](#), to provide tips on how to shop for displays.

1) Right Connection – The first question Silver says shoppers should ask is whether the superstore or specialty retail store has a delivery service that will properly connect and calibrate your TV. “Ask if they understand how to make HDMI work, because ideally you should be getting that, but it’s still novel, still buggy,” Silver says.

2) Lighting Matters - Though it may be difficult depending on the shopping environment, make sure you can view the set in lighting similar to your home’s lighting. Is your room usually bright? Go LCD. Dark? Try plasma or a projector. In between? Microdisplays, especially for value in screen size delivered per dollars spent, Silver says.

3) Where’s the View? – Speaking of microdisplays, or rear-projection TVs (RPTV), there is a catch, Silver notes: limited viewing angles. LCDs and RPTVs don’t have as broad viewing angles as plasma, so make sure you can control the angle both horizontally and vertically if you’re considering those technologies, he says. “Room lighting and viewing angles are absolute considerations, and you can’t recover from a mistake there.”

4) Have Discs, Will Travel – Don’t rely on what the stores are displaying for movies; bring your own demo material. Suggestions: something real, something familiar. A digitized Pixar movie like Cars or Toy Story is easy to make look great, Silver says, but doesn’t offer real-life brights, darks and dynamic range of colors the human eye sees every day. “Charlotte Gray with Cate Blanchette, go to the very last chapter where there are bright scenes, dark scenes—challenging scenes. The original Matrix is spectacular in HD DVD, and Kingdom of Heaven is good in Blu-ray,” Silver says.

5) Sweet Concert, Man – Another telling piece of demo material? Concert DVDs. “They’re notoriously tough because they’re dark, and it’s not film-based, it’s video,” he adds. “Dark scenes in a concert shouldn’t be full of little wormy things moving around.”

6) Be Suspect of Specs – We can give you chart after chart of manufacturer specifications, but Silver says let your eyes be the true denominator. If you have five sets lined up in a row, look for the best black levels and truest colors, even if you’re weighing 720p-resolution HDTVs against 1080p models.

7) A la Mode – TVs are shipped in “torch” mode, according to Silver, where blues are accentuated and colors in general are oversaturated. Combat this by making sure your TV’s menu includes modes “that have the words pro, theater, movie and warm.”

8) Go Big – Silver’s simple rule on what size TV: The biggest you can afford. “We believe a big picture is 35-millimeter film,” he says. “Take all the rules you’ve ever heard [for measuring the ratio of screen size to viewing distance] and throw them away. I guarantee your screen at home is too small.”

9) Good Memory – Different content sources produce pictures that need varying levels of adjustment to look good on your TV, so check that it has discrete memory per input. That means your set will remember what settings go with what connection, whether it’s cable, VHS, DVD, Blu-ray, Xbox 360 and more.

10) Darkness Rules – Since Silver can’t stress enough the importance of black levels in an image, we’ll say it again, this time with an analogy. He says to think about it like the differences of black levels in photography of daily newspapers compared with those of a monthly magazine.

On Friday (10/5), read Joel’s 5 additional tips for optimizing the viewing experience once you bring home the TV. In the meantime, write a comment with your tips for buying a television