

# **CHOOSING A NEW DIGITAL CAMERA**

This seminar is based on the digital camera classes that Jim Bilbro and I teach and what we have discovered.

Some of our students have bought new cameras without doing any preliminary research. They had a good salesperson and bad advice. When some of the features of digital cameras were discussed in our classes, they found their newly purchased cameras did not have these features. Hopefully, this seminar will help you determine which type of cameras and which features you might wish to consider in your selection process.

Are you planning to use the camera for sports action shots, nature landscapes, vacation photos, to display as prints, or just to e-mail to family and friends? Some of these needs and/or wants may require certain special features in a camera. The most important thing in choosing the right camera is determining how you will use your camera and then doing some basic research before your purchase.

This portion of the program will discuss non single lens reflex camera choices. The first step is to determine which type of digital camera is right for you.

## **Choosing a Camera -3 Types to Consider**

### **Entry Level**

Few “Bells and Whistles”  
3-4 Megapixels  
May have 3X-4X optical zoom  
Weak flash output  
Prints up to 4”x 6”  
Small LCD display  
Small view finder  
Fairly small memory card  
Cost \$150 -\$200  
May find on sale for about \$100

## **Mid Range**

4-5 Megapixels  
Optical zoom 4X-5X  
Higher flash output  
Larger LCD  
Better viewfinder  
Many user controlled settings or scenic menus  
Print up to 5"x 7" or 8"x 10" pictures  
Cost \$250-\$350

## **Prosumer**

5-7 million pixels  
High quality 6X-10X zoom lens  
Telephoto and Wide angle capabilities  
Manual control over a myriad of settings or scenic menus  
Can print up to 11"x14" prints  
Costs \$400 - \$600

## **Digital Camera Choices -More Decisions**

Determine how you plan to use your camera before you make a decision to purchase. Just because a camera has all the latest bells and whistles, it may not be the best choice for you.

For family and typical vacation pictures, almost any quality entry level or mid-range level camera will perform well.

If you have special uses, then the following considerations may help you make the correct decision.

### **Special Considerations**

Sports/Action –you may wish to have a way adjust the shutter speed or a specific scenic menu selection for sports or action photos.

Landscape – you may wish to have a way to adjust the aperture for depth of field or a specific menu selection to set depth of field..

Portrait Photography - same as above.

Indoor/Museum – you may wish to have a white balance adjustment or a specific menu selection to adjust for not being able to use a flash.

Many newer cameras have special scenic menu selections for :  
Beach/Snow scenes,  
Sunsets,  
Night scenes/Fireworks,  
Foliage,  
Close up photography and many, many more.  
Are these important to you?  
How many scenic modes do you need?

### **Zoom Lenses**

An optical zoom lens enables you to get close up photographs without loss of quality.  
Digital zoom decreases the quality of the photograph since it electronically decreases the number of pixels used to capture the image.  
Look for a camera with an optical zoom of at least 3X-4X.

### **Features to Consider**

Shutter lag – How great is the time delay between when you snap the shutter and the image is recorded.  
Auto Exposure Bracketing – Enables you to take 3 different exposures of the same shot.  
Movie Mode – the ability of the camera to take brief movies. Depends upon size of memory card.  
Lens Quality – Expect a lens with an f stop of f/2.8 in a good quality camera.  
Image Stabilization – In a camera with an 8X to 10X zoom lens, this is important.  
Shutter Speed – Should have speed of at least 1/2000 of a second if you wish to shoot sports or action.  
Spot Metering – Enables you to choose the area the light meter will read.

### **Viewfinders**

Check to see if your camera has an optical viewfinder. Newer ones with very large LCD screens may not have one. LCD screens can be very difficult to see in bright sunlight.

## **Before You Buy**

Write down the make and model numbers of cameras in which you are interested.

Do some basic homework on the web sites listed at the end of this seminar.

See actual reviews and expert opinions before you buy.

Determine your needs (and wants).

Go to Best Buy, Circuit City, Office Depot.

Handle the cameras, ask questions, make comparisons.

Does the store offer a class?

Ask the salesperson to demonstrate the menu system and more specifically how to set the date and time, change the image size and compression, also how to review images and delete them and how to change the scenic modes.

## **Our Experiences**

Don't be caught in the megapixel war. If you are mainly going to e-mail pictures or print them less than 8"x10", you may not need a camera with more than 4-5 megapixels.

If you are primarily interested in setting the camera on automatic and just taking pictures of friends, family and vacations, you may not need a camera with 15-20 scenic modes. Fewer choices may be better.

Ask to see the camera manuals. Can you understand them?

We both recommend Canon or Nikon cameras, not because the cameras are better, but because the manuals are much easier to read, the menus are easier to find and the cameras are generally easier to learn to operate.

We have found that folks who buy other brands are certainly able to learn to use them, but have more difficulty since the manuals do not fully explain the camera features as completely and have more difficulty locating the answers about using particular features.

## **Web Sites to Visit**

These web sites will enable you to compare the features of various cameras and read expert evaluations and opinions

- [www.dpreview.com](http://www.dpreview.com)
- [www.steves-digicams.com](http://www.steves-digicams.com)
- [www.imaging-resources.com](http://www.imaging-resources.com)
- [www.megapixel.net](http://www.megapixel.net)

One great place to get answers to your questions from extremely knowledgeable salespeople at fair prices is Precision Camera in Austin. They may not be the cheapest, but are by far the best place to buy locally.

## **Buying A Camera On Line**

### **Web sites to visit for prices**

[www.pricegrabber.com](http://www.pricegrabber.com)  
[www.nexttag.com](http://www.nexttag.com)  
[www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)  
[www.cnetshopper.com](http://www.cnetshopper.com)

### **Cautions**

If you choose to buy on-line, avoid the grey market.  
Carefully check the reputation of the camera store. Be very cautious.  
Check for a U.S.A. warranty.  
Be careful of E-Bay and other deals that seem too good to be true.

Gary S. Resnick

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