

Digital Cameras

Here's another product that's teetering on the edge of commodity status. But a few things still set digicams apart, and are worth focusing on as you go shopping.

First, decide if you're ever likely to want to get 8 by 10 printouts of your shots. If not, get a 3-megapixel camera with 3x optical zoom. If you do plan on getting enlargements, get a 5-MP camera with the same or better optical zoom.

Still confused by the variety of suitable hardware? Here's another tip: If you're not shopping for an ultra-small camera, go with models that accept standard-sized AA or AAA batteries – you know you'll never run out of juice as long you can find a convenience store nearby.

My other advice is to consider what kind of storage card a camera uses. There are five in the market, but only two really make sense to me – **CompactFlash** and **SD Cards**. The former are the cheapest overall and also the easiest to find. But they're also substantially bigger than other card formats. Buyers looking for smaller cameras will do better with SD Cards, which are a bit pricier but offer the huge benefit of being supported in a wide variety of other devices, from handhelds to laptops to TVs. This way, you can pop the card out of the camera and into your laptop to see the pictures right away.

TOP TIPS

- * If you want 8 x 10 printouts, buy a 5 megapixel camera.
- * It's always easy to find AA and AAA batteries, so consider a model that runs on one of those.
- * Cameras using CompactFlash and SD Card storage formats are your best bet.