

# Buying A Digicam

By Arthur H. Bleich

1

A digicam should have at least 1MP of true optical resolution. That will be fine for web display or prints up to 4 x 6 inches. Here's a rough rule of thumb: 2MP will give you photos up to 6x9 inches, 3MP up to 8x10 inches, and 4MP up to 11x14 inches. And that even allows for a bit cropping (excluding parts of the image you don't want) without degrading the image quality.



2

There's an old saying: "Familiar things are best." So look for a digicam that operates most like the film camera you're used to. This means fast start-up and fast shot-to-shot time and an optical zoom lens (although optical plus digital is OK, but not digital zoom only). Don't be taken in by bells and whistles you never used on a film camera and probably won't on a digicam—like time lapse, movies, sound, and other stuff.

3

If possible, check out the camera's menus. Some digicams make menu navigation tougher than diving for pearls. Others festoon menu items haphazardly around the LCD monitor. Menus should be intuitive and easy to go through. Kodak has everyone beat in this department.



4

Cross off any potential digicam that has only an LCD monitor for pre-viewing. They are notorious for washing out in sunlight and you usually have to hold the camera in an uncomfortable position to use them. A well-designed digicam has an optical viewfinder in addition to the LCD monitor for easy, eye-level viewing.

5

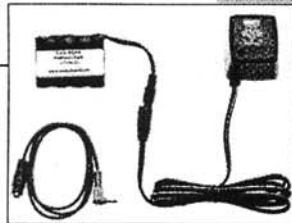
Digicams that use standard floppy disks may seem like the ideal way to go but they can't match the speed and resolution of most other cameras. If you are seriously considering buying a digicam of this type, make sure there's a compelling reason why your images must be on floppies. There usually isn't.

6

Your digicam should come with written documentation. You'd be surprised at how many so-called quality camera manufacturers try to save a few bucks by putting the documentation on CD-ROM. Then, after paying close to a US\$1,000 for a camera, you have to print it out yourself.

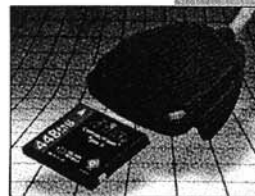
7

Be prepared to buy a couple of sets of rechargeable AA NiMH (Nickel Metal Hydride) batteries and a good charger unless your digicam comes with them or uses Lithium-Ion batteries. Alkaline AA's just won't cut it. Eight Quest batteries and a premium charger will set you back about US\$60. If you really need a lot of power, consider the Unity-Digital power pack accessory (US\$80).



8

Transferring images to your computer can be a long and tedious process unless both camera and computer have USB. But you can also get inexpensive memory card readers compatible with non-USB computers that speed the transfer process. Delkin and Microtech International have them for about US\$60.



9

Your pictures will only be as good as the printer they're output on. So plan to buy a decent photo-quality printer. Printers are like speakers in your stereo system. It does little good to have the finest electronic components pushing sound through a set of bargain speakers. The output from the Epson 780 (US\$99) is photo-quality and, for the price, can't be beat.

10

Speed on playback is more important than you may first think. Most modern digicams will give you an adequate shot-to-shot time (even if it's not blazing fast) but some will make you wait forever to go through a "roll" of pictures. Check that out before you buy.

11

Get a good imaging program. Even though something may be bundled with your camera, it may not always be as easy to use or as versatile as a top-of-the-line product. For only US\$99 you can now get Adobe's Photoshop Elements, a superb program that you're bound to love. Download it free and decide for yourself.



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If you're faced with a choice between an expensive digicam without the extra peripherals (batteries, card reader, printer, etc.) and a less expensive digicam with them, go for the lower-priced camera and buy all the goodies. Why? Because you'll eventually be buying another camera based on what you've learned from your first digicam. But in the meantime, you'll get the best results and have the most fun with the digicam you've bought.