

HD camcorders shoot great video but it's not easy to watch

May 27 2009, By Troy Wolverton



If you want to buy a high-definition camcorder, no problem -- you have a range of options.

If you want to watch your [video](#) on a TV, or share it with your sister, good luck -- the consumer electronics giants have put the cart before the horse, as it were. They've got these great HD [gadgets](#) but no easy way to show off the videos you can shoot.

Argh.

A little more than three years ago, the only HD camcorders you could find cost \$1,500. Today, you can pay as little as \$200 for the hand-held

Flip UltraHD or choose among a wide variety of others from Sony, [Samsung](#) and [Panasonic](#) that cost less than \$1,000.

But in most cases, consumers' "best" option for watching their HD videos may be plugging their cameras into a TV. That can be a hassle, and it also means you can't use your camera while watching videos shot with it, and can't easily share those videos with friends or family.

With some camcorders, even plugging them into a TV is not an option. The Flip MinoHD, for example, is incompatible with high-definition video cables.

This is an area of the market that's crying out for a solution. But don't hold your breath.

Twenty years ago, you could buy a camcorder that recorded video on a VHS tape and play it in your VCR. Five years ago, you could record video onto a DVD and then watch it on your DVD player without too much trouble.

But HD changes the picture (sorry for the pun).

Most camcorders today -- high and standard-definition -- record video onto an internal hard drive or a removable flash memory card. Aside from plugging the cameras directly into a TV, the only other way to watch the video is to first transfer the video files to a computer. That's because you generally can't remove the cameras' internal hard drives. And most TVs or video equipment either don't have a slot for a flash memory card or, if they do, don't usually allow you to play movies off of them.

Working with HD video on a computer is the easy part -- you often just have to drag and drop files to transfer them to the computer or double

click on the files.

But once you've got the movies on your computer, there's no standard way to make something you can watch on your TV. Burning a disc generally doesn't work, because the standard DVD format is incompatible with high-definition video.

There are a couple of solutions.

Devices that burn Blu-ray discs, the high-definition replacement for DVDs, are starting to appear as an accessory in some computers. Meanwhile, Sony's PlayStation 3 and Microsoft's Xbox 360 video game consoles will play HD videos stored on portable drives that you can plug into their USB ports.

The Xbox 360 and Apple TV will play home movies uploaded to your computer via a network connection. Seagate and Western Digital have new HD media players that will play videos stored on portable hard drives.

And you can always plug your computer into your TV to play HD videos.

But none of these solutions is ideal, or all that easy. The gadgets typically cost \$200 or more. And some, like the game consoles or the networked media players, won't play your files unless you have the right software installed or a properly configured network connection. That's always fun to set up.

And even if you get an HD file to play on your TV, you can probably forget about playing it on your sister's TV or your friend's.

I wouldn't use these hassles as a reason to hold off on buying an HD camcorder. Many shoot beautiful videos far superior to those of standard-

definition videos cameras.

Just know that for now you may be a bit frustrated trying to watch them.

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