

Televisions: New technology adds new dimensions to purchases

December 3 2010, By Victor Godinez

Over the past few years, buying a new TV got to be a pretty simple process.

You decided how much you wanted to pay, stared at a bunch of different sets in Fry's or [Best Buy](#) for 30 minutes, tried to look interested and informed while the salesman rattled on about "[1080p](#)" and "[HDMI](#)," and then took your TV home.

But, just as at the dawn of the high-def era, purchasing a television is getting complicated again.

Here are some of the new technologies and options you need to consider if you're out shopping for a TV this holiday season.

3-D: Three-dimensional sets are all the rage this year, if you believe the advertising hype.

Remember how awesome "Avatar" was in 3-D at the theater? Don't you want that same experience at home?

But before you whip out that credit card, let's back up a bit.

First, 3-D sets are still more expensive than their 2-D counterparts, generally by a few hundred bucks. That price difference is shrinking, but 3-D technology still comes at a premium.

Second, you need glasses to see 3-D video, and the glasses for home use are bigger and bulkier than the lightweight, disposable frames you get at theaters. Home goggles are battery-powered and cost \$100 or more a pair. Many 3-D televisions come with a "starter kit" that includes a couple pairs of glasses, but after that, you're on your own.

Third, there's still very little [video content](#) out there in 3-D.

ESPN 3D is by far the biggest broadcast channel with good 3-D content. Many cable, satellite and telecom video providers also offer a handful of on-demand movies in 3-D. But they can only offer movies that the studios originally created in 3-D, which mostly means films released in the last year or two.

You can also buy a 3-D Blu-ray player, but you won't automatically be able to watch every 3-D Blu-ray disk.

That's because several 3-D [TV makers](#) have signed exclusive deals so that certain 3-D Blu-ray films only will be available to buyers of that particular brand of 3-D TV.

Most notably, the 3-D Blu-ray version of "Avatar" is only available right now to buyers of Panasonic's 3-D televisions.

If you bought a Samsung 3-D television, sorry. No "Avatar" for you.

Makes you angry just thinking about it, doesn't it?

All that said, if you're out TV hunting this holiday season, there are discounts galore, and it might be worth getting a 3-D set just to future-proof your living room.

All the TV makers are determined to make 3-D a success, so you might

want to buy the set now and not bother with the glasses or 3-D Blu-ray player for a couple of years until there's more content worth paying for.

In the meantime, you'll still have a great 2-D TV.

INTERNET-CONNECTED TVS: A much safer bet than 3-D, Internet-connected televisions are genuinely useful.

But they might be redundant, depending on which other gear you already have in your TV cabinet.

Internet-connected televisions usually come with several apps pre-installed, programs like Twitter, YouTube, Netflix's and Blockbuster's streaming video services and more.

Research firm Nielsen recently estimated that only 6 percent of broadband households have cut the cable cord to get all their video online.

But even if you aren't looking to go online-only, digital video streaming can be a great complement to traditional TV viewing.

Services like Netflix and Blockbuster, for example, let you endlessly watch and rewatch shows and movies without having to deal with the hassle of renting or buying physical discs.

And those services are regularly making more of their content available in high definition.

But you might not need an Internet-connected television if you already have an Internet-connected Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 video game console, since those devices have their own online video services as well as access to Netflix and, in the case of the PS3, Hulu streaming apps.

Many Blu-ray players also have built-in apps these days, and they'll be selling for well under \$200 this [holiday season](#).

READY TO BUY: Unless you're an exceptionally confident person, you should see your desired set in action before plunking down hundreds or thousands of dollars.

But just because you're in a retail store looking at their displays doesn't mean you have to buy it there, or in a physical store at all, for that matter.

Amazon.com and other major online retailers regularly undercut the prices of brick-and-mortar shops and generally have excellent delivery service.

I bought my TV from Amazon several years ago, and the set was shipped free. The deliveryman even took the television out of the box and carted off the mess.

That said, retail stores usually offer installation and cable-connection services (for a fee) if you don't want to deal with figuring out which wire plugs into which jack.

When considering brands, the big names (Samsung, Panasonic, Sony, LG) are all generally seen as being equally cutting-edge and reliable.

Among discount brands, you can usually get decent quality. But you do want to verify return policies before you buy, particularly for defects such as dead pixels on the screen.

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