

Cameras offer advantages even to smartphone owners

January 28 2013, by Troy Wolverton

If you have a smartphone, you likely take lots of pictures with it. So why would you ever need a stand-alone digital camera? That's a question many consumers are asking. Digital camera sales are falling, while smartphone sales soar. Consumers are taking a large and growing portion of their photos on their phones. For several years now, the most popular camera among users of the popular photo sharing site Flickr has been the iPhone.

With a [smartphone](#), "I can do all my creativity on the same device that I took the picture with," said Chris Chute, an analyst who covers the digital [camera](#) market for IDC, a technology research firm. "That's a value proposition that's very difficult to match."

But Chute and other digital imaging experts say that despite the advantages and popularity of smartphones, there remain compelling reasons to have a digital camera. They offer higher-quality images, particularly in low light. They offer powerful zoom features unavailable on smartphones. And some models come in rugged cases that resist drops and water.

What's more, camera makers are learning from the success of smartphones and adopting some of their features, such as the ability to connect to the Internet or run apps.

"Smartphones and cameras can clearly coexist," said Liz Cutting, a senior imaging analyst at market research firm NPD Group. "They just

have different places in consumers' lives."

One way cameras outperform smartphones is with their lenses. Even low-end point-and-shoot cameras these days offer five times optical zoom lenses. More expensive models offer up to 50 times optical zoom lenses. Zoom lenses are useful for taking shots from far away - say, at a child's soccer game or a recital.

You generally can't get a zoom lens on a smartphone. While you can zoom in on an image in a smartphone, what you are actually doing is cutting out and focusing in on just a portion of what the [image sensor](#) is detecting. This typically leads to much fuzzier pictures than what you can get with a true zoom lens.

Terry Sullivan, associate editor of digital imaging at Consumer Reports magazine, said he recently tested a Canon SX50 camera, which has a 50-times optical zoom lens. He used it to take a picture of the moon and was able to zoom in close enough that he could see the moon's craters in the image. That's something he couldn't do with a smartphone.

"It was really extraordinary," Sullivan said.

Stand-alone cameras also have an advantage in their image sensors, which generally are larger than those found in smartphones. The larger sensors can collect more light, allowing the cameras to take better pictures at night and in dark rooms. The larger sensors also allow more space for their pixels, allowing them to shoot higher resolution, less grainy images.

Another area in which some stand-alone cameras excel is in their ability to deal with water or harsh treatment. You can find an array of cameras these days priced between \$100 and \$400 that can go 30 or more feet underwater and survive drops of 5 feet or more. Smartphones can

typically survive similar conditions only with special, sometimes pricey cases.

[Digital camera](#) makers are trying to make their products more appealing to customers not just by distinguishing them from smartphones, but by making them work better with smartphones or, in some cases, work more like them.

A growing number of cameras include Wi-Fi radios that allow users to upload pictures directly to Facebook or email them to friends. They can also use those radios to transfer pictures to their smartphones and to use their smartphones as a remote control for their cameras when taking self-portraits.

Three different cameras either on the market or soon to come include the Android operating system. Those cameras allow users to shoot and edit pictures with some of the same apps they'd use on their smartphones.

So while smartphones have become popular cameras, digital cameras are far from obsolete. Given their advantages over smartphones, "there's a clear reason to continue buying a camera," Cutting said.

—

CAMERAS VS. SMARTPHONES:

Consumers are increasingly turning to smartphones when wanting to shoot pictures. But they still value stand-alone cameras.

-Smartphones on the rise: Global smartphone shipments rose 33 percent in 2012 to 654 million. U.S. consumers took 36 percent of all their photos with a smartphone last year, up from just 17 percent in 2010.

-Cameras in decline: Worldwide shipments of digital cameras fell 12 percent last year to 122 million. Compact digital cameras were used to take 34 percent of U.S. consumers' photos, down from 46 percent in 2010.

-Break out the phone: Two-thirds of U.S. consumers say they now use a phone to take pictures in spontaneous situations.

-But use a camera when the pictures matter: For vacation photos, just 35 percent of U.S. consumers say they are relying on a smartphone rather than a stand-alone camera.

—

A PLACE FOR BOTH:

Digital imaging experts say smartphones and stand-alone cameras can co-exist because each has its own advantages.

SMARTPHONES OFFER SPONTANEITY ... : Smartphones offer always-on connections to the Internet, allowing users to easily share their photos on social networking sites or over email or messaging services. They also offer a large selection of apps that can be used to tweak, edit or share pictures. And users don't have to remember to bring another gadget, because their smartphones are almost always with them.

... BUT NOT THE BEST IMAGE QUALITY: Because they lack optical zoom lenses, smartphones typically do poorly when shooting from a distance. And they typically do poorly in dark rooms or at night, thanks to smaller image sensors and lower-powered flashes.

STAND-ALONE CAMERAS OFFER QUALITY ... : Digital cameras have larger image sensors, typically better flash systems and often-

powerful zoom lenses, allowing them to shoot high-quality shots from a distance or in the dark. They also typically offer users finer control over the exposure of their pictures.

... BUT NOT CONVENIENCE: Users have to remember to bring along their camera. While a growing number have Wi-Fi radios, most don't, so sharing pictures taken from them is not as immediate or easy. And few cameras offer the kind of apps found on smartphones.

(c)2013 San Jose Mercury News (San Jose, Calif.)
Distributed by MCT Information Services

Citation: Cameras offer advantages even to smartphone owners (2013, January 28) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-01-cameras-advantages-smartphone-owners.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.