

High-def TVs rule the roost at Berlin's IFA

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Increasingly tech-savvy buyers are less interested in the size of the screen and more in its resolution

No-one wants to watch Game of Thrones' bloody fantasy battles on a tiny tablet screen, which is just one reason why cheaper, bigger, higher-definition televisions are the stars of this year's IFA electronics fair in Berlin.

Rather than just fantasise when they gather in front of an imposing 77-inch (195-centimetre) home cinema-style display, gawkers eagerly ask salespeople about the price and when they will be available.

With Ultra-High Definition (UHD) broadcasts set to become more common, "standards and norms are beginning to become established," said Paul Gray of consultancy IHS. "For the first time as a consumer, you can be reasonably sure that a set purchased this year will be usable when broadcasts start in earnest."

Growing confidence about technical standards and intense price competition between manufacturers "is creating a 'must-have' phenomenon" among consumers, said Hans-Joachim Kamp, president of the GFU federation which co-organises IFA.

Increasingly tech-savvy buyers are less interested in the size of the screen and more in its resolution, Gray added.

High-tech arms race

In Germany, households own televisions for five years on average, with consumers spending around 600 euros (\$710) out of a budget of 800-900 euros on new purchases.

That remains well short of asking prices for the top-of-the-range sets on display at this year's IFA, which start at between 1,500 and 2,000 euros and almost all boast OLED screens.

With individually illuminated pixels, OLED offers a high-contrast image with deep blacks and unprecedented sharpness in moving images.

Only Samsung dismisses OLED as a gimmick, preferring its own invention of traditional LCD screens enriched with extra crystals, known as QLED.



Sixty percent of people aged 16-39 are watching more TV than previously as they switch to on-demand viewing

The Korean firm's TV sets produce similar results to its competitors', from dazzling car headlights to hyper-real droplets of blood during a boxing match—to say nothing of spectacular video game effects.

Far from being befuddled by the high-tech arms race, consumers' interest has been piqued, with UHD sets accounting for 29 percent of TVs sold worldwide between January and June, according to GFU. Sales of OLED TVs have doubled in the same period.

But what will be on the TVs?

The incomplete part of the puzzle is perhaps the most important: the content the top-end screens will display.

Most manufacturers brought along one of their new and indispensable best friends to IFA, in the shape of Hollywood studios.

Panasonic announced a partnership with 20th Century Fox and Samsung is to develop a future format known as HDR10+ and put it in the public domain.

How series and films reach TVs is also changing quickly, as an internet connection to access very-high-definition on-demand video becomes indispensable.

"VOD resonates hugely with consumers, from being able to binge-watch a box set of episodes to decoupling from linear delivery of conventional TV," Gray said.

"New providers are emerging—my teenage sons watch Youtube and Netflix as their default providers, not terrestrial broadcast."

According to GFU, 60 percent of people aged 16-39 are watching more TV than previously as they switch to on-demand viewing, with the very youngest especially turning to the screen in the living room as they tire of tablets, phone apps or the desktop computer.

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