

FIRST TIME BUYER'S GUIDE

Digital Video Cameras

Capture the moment—and then edit it to your heart's content.

By Michelle Silver

The only thing stopping you from becoming the next Tarantino or Spielberg is the right video camera. Or maybe you've been trying to confirm that your roommate tries on your clothes just minutes after you leave the dorm. Whatever the reason, here's the low-down on the digital video camera that will make all these dreams—big and small—come true.

The Basics

All digital video cameras have great image quality—even the cheapest. It's the high-end cameras that come with fancy add-ons and editing tools. Cameras record in three digital video formats: DV, MiniDV, and D8. All formats differ in their video resolution, record-

ing times and compatibility. And digital cameras have different ways of recording sound—from mono to high-end recording technologies. If you want good sound, make sure you know what you're buying.

Digital video cameras capture an image as a digital file (obviously), meaning that you can edit the file as much as you want without the quality of the images suffering. And editing is where the fun is: There are plenty of video editing software programs that allow you to add in music, titles, special effects, transitions, narration, and has other editing tools. (Check out our editing article on page 7 for more details.)

What It Costs

Cameras can range from a few hundred dollars to \$3,000. However, to get the same quality on an analog video camera, you'd spend that much anyway.

So when you do bust your roommate trying to squeeze into your favorite jeans, you can set the action to slow motion and play "Been Caught Stealing" by Jane's Addiction, while flashing the boldfaced title "THIEF!" (makes a nice holiday gift). Then go ahead and send your edited film back to the camera to show everyone else. •

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Digital Camera Facts

Lens Size

This may seem obvious, but the larger the lens, the more material you're going to capture.

Progressive Scan

Allows you to capture fast-moving action in still shots.

Optical and Digital Zoom

Digital cameras come with optical and digital zoom. Optical is the real thing; it hones in on the image proportionally. Digital zooming is a way to fake making an image larger by enhancing certain details. The highest zoom capacity will keep your images clear, even when magnified at 1,000 times the original size.

Charged Coupling Device

Measures the amount of light at any point in the image. What you should know: the more CCDs offered, the truer the color.

Auto Focus

Even after a margarita or two, you'll be able to capture the party you're filming with clarity.

Size Matters

You can definitely find lightweight cameras that are a breeze to carry around. Just make sure the knobs and controls aren't too small to operate.

Steamtunnels Digs...

Canon Optura (\$800)

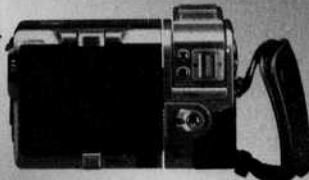
It's cheap, but it's been around and has a good track record. It has a small LCD viewer, and modest optical zoom (14X), but it records in PCM format. Some online prices dip below \$800, making it a great bargain.



color LCD viewer and records in PCM digital stereo audio. Comes with a universal remote control for digital CyberCam viewing.

Sharp VL-FD1U (\$1,599)

Small but packed with goodies. This baby has a 3.5-inch color screen, touch sensitive for easier editing. The LCD rotates 270 degrees so that the shooter can become the subject as well. Comes with all the possible PC, TV and VCR connections built in. Editing software includes PixLab Browser and Photo Suite 8.0.



still images with 4MB of memory. It holds up to 2000 pictures.

Has night shot and super night shot controls for filming after dark.

Panasonic PV-DV600 (\$1,300)

Winner of several editor's choice awards, this Panasonic model isn't the smallest around, but has all the features any high-end user would want. Among them: outstanding video images, excellent still-image capturing, an 18X optical zoom and 300X digital zoom, and easy-to-use controls.



JVC GR-DVL805U (\$900)
Smallest model in the price range, and among the best deals for price and features. Has digital still capability, large

