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Some tips from DIY Network's Erin Manning

Monday, November 20, 2006

FROM STAFF REPORTS

More than 68 percent of American households now own a digital camera. With the holidays just around the corner, many more are sure to be snapping them up as the perfect holiday gift.

To help you make good choices, consider these camera-buying tips from Erin Manning, host of the DIY Network's The Whole Picture, a weekly photography show:

- Decide what's important to you before shopping.

Are you looking for something compact to carry around in your pocket or do you want something a little bigger but with more features? Is the camera user-friendly?

Go online to research and compare cameras; make sure you go to your local camera store to make sure you're comfortable with how it feels.

- Know your pixels.

Digital-camera resolution is measured in pixels. One million pixels make up one megapixel. The more pixels you have, the higher your image resolution and the more details you'll see in your pictures.

If you need bigger prints and require extreme cropping, choose a higher-resolution camera.

- Consider your need for 'zoom.'

How much zoom do you want, and what's the difference between optical zoom and digital zoom?

Optical zoom is better, because it gets you closer to your subject without sacrificing quality. Digital zoom will get you closer but at the expense of clarity and detail.

The term total zoom is marketing hype. It's the manufacturer multiplying the optical and digital zoom. You should pay attention only to optical zoom.

- Assess LCD screens and optical viewfinders.

Most digital cameras have an LCD screen on the back to preview and review images. LCDs are getting bigger on newer cameras, which lets you see your images more clearly; however, they use up more battery life and are more fragile.

The optical viewfinder is the little window located above the LCD and is the traditional way to see what you're shooting. Some cameras that have LCDs don't include optical viewfinders, either to lower cost or to permit a larger LCD screen. It's good to have an LCD and an optical viewfinder, but if your camera doesn't have one, it's not a big deal.

- Determine your need for storage and memory cards.

Digital cameras store images on media cards that are available in various capacities, measured in megabytes and gigabytes. The actual amount of images your card will hold depends on your camera's megapixel size and your camera's image-resolution setting.

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