

High-tech TVs are popular but puzzling

Many buyers don't know how to use all the features

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SAN FRANCISCO — Consumers are buying pricey, high-tech television sets in record numbers — but many don't fully understand new TV technology, says a new study out today from researcher IDC.

The confusion is preventing some from taking full advantage of their sets, says IDC analyst Eric Haruki.

Take high-definition TVs. About 45% of television shoppers surveyed by IDC had at least one in their home. But only 35% subscribed to a high-definition cable, satellite or other broadcast service.

That's a problem. High-definition TVs can display a more detailed picture than traditional sets, but only if they get a high-definition signal. Regular broadcasts won't look better, and may look worse.

Other areas causing confusion:

► **Digital transition.** Only 29% of people surveyed by IDC said they were "very familiar" with the digital TV transition planned for February 2009. At that time, TV stations will stop transmitting analog signals over the air. The change won't affect most people who receive TV signals via cable or satellite. But people who use an antenna will need a digital television or an add-on converter box.

► **LCD vs. plasma.** About 73% of those surveyed said they were likely to buy a liquid-crystal display (LCD) flat-panel TV for their next set. Just 20% said they were likely to

choose a rival technology, plasma. But plasma sets are just as good as LCD — and are better suited for some settings, Haruki says.

Plasmas can be difficult to see in a very bright room, but they're better at showing fast motion and dark colors than LCD, says Jim Palumbo, president of the Plasma Display Coalition, a trade group. That makes plasma ideal for many living rooms and home theaters, he says.

It's not surprising that consumers are struggling, says Bob Scaglione, senior vice president at TV-maker Sharp. After changing little for 40 years, TVs have suddenly been transformed by new technology. People are confused and "overwhelmed by too many choices," he says.

So far, that hasn't stopped consumers from buying bigger, fancier TVs. The average price jumped to \$767 this holiday season, up from \$625 a year ago, says researcher NPD.

But manufacturers worry that confusion may discourage potential buyers, especially those who aren't eager to try new technology. They're stepping up education campaigns to help people better understand new TVs.

In early January, Sharp will launch a toll-free TV help line. Westinghouse Digital is including TV information guides with sets, and putting informational stickers on boxes.

Panasonic is touring the country with a fleet of four large trucks equipped with TVs and a team of experts. The trucks make appearances outside retail stores and sporting events.



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Assessment Questions

1. According to the article, how is a high-definition television set different from a traditional set?
 - A. High-definition sets are thinner and bigger than traditional sets.
 - B. It is easier to plug in and play video games on a high-definition set.
 - C. High-definition sets easily connect to home computers.
 - D. High-definition can display more detailed pictures than regular sets.
2. What is the central problem in the article?
 - A. Consumers don't know enough about high-tech sets to get the most out of them.
 - B. Consumers don't understand that plasma sets are just as good as LCD sets.
 - C. Consumers are unaware that TV stations will stop transmitting analog signals over the air.
 - D. Consumers are buying TVs that they cannot afford.
3. If you were buying a high-tech TV, which detail from the article would be most useful?
 - A. the cost of TVs during the holiday season
 - B. the difference between plasma and LCD TVs
 - C. TV manufacturers are taking steps to inform people about high-tech TVs
 - D. analog signals will no longer be transmitted over the air
4. Based on the information in the article, which of the following is the most objective and reliable source for information about plasma TVs?
 - A. Jim Palumbo, president of the Plasma Display Coalition
 - B. Erik Haruki, IDC researcher and analyst
 - C. consumers
 - D. Westinghouse Digital
5. Why are manufacturers trying to educate consumers about high-tech TVs?
 - A. They think they can sell TVs when people call their toll-free numbers.
 - B. They worry that if consumers are confused about the technology, they won't purchase high-tech TVs.
 - C. They want everyone to know that plasma TVs are just as good as LCDs
 - D. They want to make everyone aware of the digital transition.
6. What statistic supports the idea that people are confused by the transition to digital?
 - A. Thirty-five percent of those surveyed by IDC subscribed to a high-definition cable, satellite or other broadcast service.
 - B. Twenty-nine percent of people surveyed by IDC were "very familiar" with the digital TV transition.
 - C. Seventy-three percent of those surveyed were planning to buy an LCD flat-panel TV in the future.
 - D. Forty-five percent of those surveyed had at least one high-definition TV in their home.