

How to Buy a Monitor

Written by Predrag Janković

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Monitor is considered by many the most important part of a computer system. Most of the time you spend sitting in front of your machine, your eyes are in contact with monitor. This is the reason its performance can greatly influence your experience. Too small a resolution and productivity suffers. Too great a resolution and your eyes ache.

Some decisions are already made

As with almost anything, before buying some decisions must be made. But here, at least, there are fewer of them than a year or two ago. If you are a gamer and need ultra fast response times you don't have to buy a CRT monitor any more. The same is true if you edit photographs and need high color accuracy. It seems nobody needs CRT monitors any more. The bottom line is: nobody makes them any more. Computer retailers are finally glad - no more lugging around bulky and heavy boxes. Buyers are glad - new LCD monitors are cheaper than CRTs ever were. So, type of monitor is not an issue - you want an LCD, and even if you don't, other types are almost impossible to find. What is also hard to find is a model with screen width to height ratio of 5:4. What was the only possibility since the invention of a PC, gave way to ratios of 16:9 and 16:10. One reason is reduction of production costs combined with marketing - with the same diagonal distance screens with greater ratios have less area and are, therefore, cheaper. There is also a physiological reason: our eyes are better in scanning horizontally than vertically. And finally, using computer monitors for displaying movies has its role too.

Size and resolution

Monitor's size is measured by its diagonal, or distance between opposite corners. Some of the first LCD monitors were 15" and cost an arm and a leg. This article is written on a 17" model from 2005. But today, you would be hard pressed to find anything less than 19" and different from 16:9 or 16:10 ratio, while most models are 20 and 22". Both have native resolution of 1600x1050 pixels, which means they can display the same amount of data, but in different size. If you have trouble reading tiny letters buy one of 22" models, otherwise 20" will do. 24" and larger monitors give more comfort in working with multiple windows at the same time. Be aware, though, that a decent graphics card is needed for proper operation.

Avoid reflection

Monitor screens can be glossy or mat. Glossy displays have somewhat wider range, that is, blacks are more black and whites more white, and give more vivid colors. On the downside, they reflect the image of anything in front of them, including you, and they are almost impossible to use with a light source behind you. Our advice is to stick to models with mat finishing, unless you want your new monitor to double as a mirror.

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Types of panels

If you take a close look at an image displayed by an LCD monitor, chances are you will find out that brightness decrease from top to bottom. The similar effect can be observed on wide monitors along the horizontal axis. These monitors have TN displays, which are also characterized by quick response times and low price. This is the reason they are the primary choice for home and non-professional office use. But if you are, for instance, a photographer editing your pictures in Photoshop, and want high color fidelity, you will purchase a monitor with IPS display without being concerned. In that case, you will not be worried about its drawback: a long response time.

Dead pixels

All types and subtypes of LCD panels have one thing in common: no more dead pixels. Only a year ago, some customers demanded to open the box and explore their new monitor before paying. Explanations that a certain number of such pixels (usually 3 to 5) is normal and not considered a fault by manufacturers had no effect. But today, you don't have to worry about it as such items are virtually non-existent and life is much easier not only for buyers, but for retailers as well.