

Home Entertainment 101: *Choosing the Right HDTV and Remote Control*

David Gregg, new product reporter and senior editor at Behindthebuy.com, shares tips from some of his favorite resources including www.ce.org and www.crutchfield.com.

Before You Buy Your HDTV...

There is no true one-size fits all formula when purchasing one of today's new HDTVs. Ultimately, the decision is purely subjective based on what works in your home environment and what HDTV simply looks best to you.

Since most electronics retailers display their HDTVs under bright lights on giant walls, all fed by the same video signal split a hundred times, subjective picture-quality judgment can be challenging at best.

Here are a few things to consider before you hit the store:

Size -- Picking the Perfect Size HDTV: While bigger is generally better, it *is* possible to have a screen too big for a room. Sit too close, and the picture may begin to look grainy, too far away and viewers may miss some of HD's awesome picture detail. Before you start looking at the finer details of picture quality, you may want to narrow your selections by zeroing in on the sets that are an appropriate size for your room.

To calculate the right size screen for your room, simply:

- Determine the distance from TV to sitting area;
- Divide by 2 and then by 3
- The resulting numbers will be an ideal screen size range.

If you're mounting the set inside an entertainment center, be sure it fits in every dimension; also, leave a couple inches on all sides so that the TV has enough ventilation. If you're getting a bigger set, you may want to consider a dedicated stand or one of today's flat panel wall mounting kits.

Display: Almost every television on the sales floor is set to the brightest picture settings, so try to get the salesperson to reduce the controls of the TVs you're comparing. You want the pictures -- not necessarily the controls -- to be roughly equal in brightness, contrast, and color.

Living Room vs. Showroom: Few living rooms are as well lit as the sales floor, so see if the salesperson can reduce the amount of light shining on the picture. If nothing else, try to shade the screen if light is shining directly on it.

Bring Your Own Content: If you have a disc that you're familiar with, see if you can use it instead of the TV signal that's normally shown. Blu-ray provides the best picture a television can display, so it makes for the best reference from which to judge. But if you're used to the look of a particular DVD, use it instead.

Try all the Picture Modes: Almost every HDTV comes with numerous picture presets, such as Movies and Sports, which radically affect how the image appears. After you peruse the manually adjusted pictures, try the different presets and modes to see which ones look best.

Future Proof inputs: Be sure your HDTV has HDMI and Component inputs. This will ensure High Definition video and audio compatibility with your Cable hi-def source. Keep in mind in most cases the aforementioned cables DO NOT come with the HDTV.

SOURCE: CEA

Universal Remotes: One Device Simplifies Your Life

If you're constantly fumbling through a coffee table full of remotes simply to adjust the TV volume, swapping batteries to get the DVD player to work, or having to reprogram the codes thanks to the babysitter, the solution could be a universal remote.

With a universal remote, you can easily control all your components with a single device. And while they're all designed to replace multiple controllers, universal remotes come with different features to meet different needs. Considering all the options before purchasing can ensure you get the right universal remote for your system.

"Multi-brand" remotes: Multi-brand remotes, which are a type of universal remote, are often free with certain gear, like TVs, receivers, and disc players. They generally come pre-programmed with infrared codes for many popular brands of gear, so you can control more than just one component in your system. Normally, these remotes can give you basic control over an assortment of standard audio/video components, such as receivers, Blu-ray players, HDTVs, and cable boxes.

Although a multi-brand remote can typically operate the basic functions of most components, it may not be able to control every function of every piece you own. For example, a remote pre-programmed with the operating code for your Blu-ray player can normally turn on the player's power, adjust its volume, select the menu item you want, and play your disc. It may not, however, have control over more specialized features, like turning the director's commentary on or off or accessing behind-the-scenes footage.

Learning remotes – going beyond basic functions: You can set up learning or "programmable" remotes to operate about any brand of equipment and to accommodate about any function you want to clone. There are a number of features that universal learning remotes use to simplify operation. Below are a few key features:

- **Rechargeable batteries to keep you going.** With some learning remotes, you can avoid changing batteries altogether, and instead plug the remote into your AC power outlet using an included cable to recharge it. A few remotes go one step further and offer a charging cradle. In addition to ensuring that the remote's batteries remain charged, the cradle provides a designated spot for the controller to reside when not in use. If you've ever hunted high and low for the remote, you'll appreciate how useful a cradle can be.
- **PC programming for easier setup.** For certain models, you simply go to the manufacturer's website, and enter some basic information about your A/V components and how they're connected.

All the necessary programming is then downloaded to your remote from your computer via a USB cable. It's a lot simpler than entering in the codes yourself on the remote, or placing the new remote head-to-head with your old remote to "learn" the remote's functions.

- **Macros – assign multiple commands to a single button.** Many learning remotes also feature "macros" -- a series of commands that you can program onto a single activity. If, for example, you have to turn on your TV, DVD player, and receiver to watch a movie, you can combine all of those separate steps into one macro or activity. This lets you turn on all three components with a single button push.
- **Flash memory – program your remote only once.** With simple, inexpensive remote controls, a dead battery can be a nuisance. Once you replace the battery, you usually have to reprogram the remote all over again. Many universal remotes avoid this problem by using flash memory to store their programmed commands. Like the popular USB thumb drives, this electronic memory doesn't depend on power to save data. Even with dead batteries, all the commands stored in a remote's flash memory remain intact. Replace or charge the batteries and the remote is fully functional once again – no reprogramming necessary.
- **LCD screens to show more options.** Many advanced universal remotes feature LCD screens – in addition to traditional buttons – that display system information and put even greater control at your fingertips. They generally let you access your component's more specialized controls, like turning the director's commentary on or off while you're watching a Blu-ray movie. Most of these LCD screens are also backlit for easy operation when the lights are low.
- **Touch screens for greater flexibility.** Some of the most sophisticated remotes use a touch screen LCD to offer the ultimate flexibility in system control from your sofa. The touch screen is typically spacious, which enables it to display a set of control "buttons" specific to whatever component you select to operate. Some touch screen remotes even offer button layouts that are fully customizable – get rid of the buttons you never use and arrange ones you need in any order you like. However, despite the high level of customizable control they offer, not everyone likes the feel of a touch screen's "virtual buttons." If you're looking for an ultra-sophisticated remote, but prefer the feel of traditional buttons, then you may want to go with an LCD remote.
- **RF capability for control beyond line-of-sight.** Most remotes send commands to components via an infrared (IR) beam. In order for the command to be received, there must be an unbroken line of sight between the remote and component, which is why your remote sometimes doesn't change the channel when someone passes between you and the TV. Some remotes also use radio frequency (RF) waves to extend control beyond line-of-sight. Just like AM and FM radio waves, the RF signals can pass through walls and ceilings, making it a great option if your audio/video system is stored in a closet or if most of it is in another room. If your remote doesn't have RF built-in, or if you need to set up an RF system in a particularly large room, then an RF extender can come in handy. As the name implies, RF extenders expand the range of your remote. They use a base station and IR flashers with self-adhesive tips that you attach to your components. They're pretty easy to set up, and are extremely helpful when setting up a multi-room system.

Source: Crutchfield.com