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Reader Q&A

LCD status and issues in 2011?

Hi Geoff:

Just read your old 2007 review of PC monitors. Certainly a very thorough and well written article. Unfortunately, your two top recommended models are no longer available. (Acer AL2016WBbd & Viewsonic Q20WB). Do you have any suggestions for replacements for these models? -- *Bob B.*

Contributing Technology Editor Geoff Walker answers:

In the four years since I wrote about how to select a consumer LCD monitor, some things have changed, as follows:

1. 1680x1050 resolution has fallen out of favor, replaced by 1920x1080. This is good because it adds more pixels both horizontally and vertically. In the LCD-TV world, this resolution is known as 1080P.
2. The resolution change to 1920x1080 also reflects a change from 16:10 aspect ratio to 16:9 aspect ratio. This is another LCD-manufacturer-driven change rather than a market-driven change, but it doesn't make a lot of difference. The positive side is that the even-wider-aspect screen fits movies better. There really isn't a negative side, since a 1080-pixel screen is taller at 100 dpi than a 1050-pixel screen.
3. Average sizes have steadily increased. The two most popular sizes are now 22" and 23", with 24" not far behind. At 1920x1080 resolution, the 22" is 100 dpi and the 23" is 96 dpi; both are within the range that I recommended in 2007. A 21.5" is 102 dpi; even better but the increase is too small to matter. A 23.6" is 93 dpi and a 24" is 92 dpi; both are below my

guideline of 96 dpi minimum.

4. LED backlights have begun to replace CCFL (fluorescent) backlights, especially in smaller display sizes. LED backlights are good for two reasons: (1) the backlight color gamut is higher, which means that color reproduction is better, and (2) they don't contain any mercury, so they're better for the environment. However, it's still difficult to find a high-rated 23" with LED backlight for under \$200.

5. The top surface on consumer monitors is now sometimes glossy (reflective) instead of anti-glare. The advantage of glossy is that movies and photos (typical consumer fare) look richer on a glossy screen. The downside is that it's harder to avoid annoying reflections on the screen, particularly in a brightly lit room. I still prefer anti-glare (also sometimes called "matte"). Unfortunately, this is a characteristic that frequently isn't in the specifications, so it can be hard to determine before buying.

6. In 2007, the standard connectors on a monitor were VGA (analog) and DVI (digital). That hasn't changed, but an additional connector (HDMI) is becoming more common. HDMI is the connector that's used on most LCD TVs, so that means that it's easier to connect TV-type devices such as a Blu-Ray player to a monitor. It appears on about 25% of monitors today.

7. Prices have continued to drop. For \$200 you get more monitor than you did in 2007.

Taking into account all of the above when applying the selection process that I described in my 2007 article, and taking what's currently in stock at Newegg as the universe of available products, here are my current top monitor choices. (Note: the user reviews on the Acer & Asus monitors are at a similar 5-egg level; the Viewsonic is slightly higher.)

- Asus VH236H (23", \$180 on sale, \$160 with rebate; see [here](#))
- Acer H233Hbmid (23", \$195; see [here](#))
- Acer G235HAbd (23", no HDMI, \$130 on one-day sale, was \$180; see [here](#))
- Viewsonic VX2250wm-LED (21.5", LED backlight, no HDMI, \$170; see [here](#))

Regards,

Geoff Walker
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