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HDTV: What is it?

by Everett

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High definition television (HDTV) is the highest form of digital television. It has a 16:9 aspect ratio, which is similar in appearance to a movie theater screen. HDTV has a couple of advantages over the old analog TV format â€” the wide screen and the resolution. The wide screen is good on our eyes â€” we see the rectangular wide screen images better than the old square format. Basically, our eyes see better from left/right compared to up/down. The wide screen will also let us see more of the on-screen scene, which is great for sports and movies.

Resolution is undoubtedly HDTV's biggest selling point. HDTV's resolutions are 720p, 1080i and 1080p â€” the number stands for the number of lines that create the image and the letter describes the type of scan used by the TV to display the picture. Like so many things in life, when it comes to high-definition televisions, size matters. So, too, does picture quality â€” we like watching the devil in crisp detail, after all. With HDTV, you could also play movies in their original widescreen format without the letterbox "black bars" that some people find annoying. As the centerpiece of home entertainment systems, today's flat big-screen HDTV's pull triple duty. And in terms of social status, big HDTV's serve notice that, yes world, you've arrived. There can be no doubt that HDTV renders a picture that is vastly superior to the one on conventional television.

On HDTV, each person could be represented by five different color pixels, which could show them with multiple color outfits and banners. This cumulatively adds up to the illusion of depth, complexity and three-dimensionality. It is, in a word, fabulous. Today's HDTV is digitally broadcast using video compression. On a high-definition TV displaying a high-definition source, a million or more pixels combine to create images that appear sharper and more realistic than TV ever has before. Resolution isn't the be-all and end-all of picture quality, however, and its numerous, well, numbers, can be incredibly intimidating at first. Once you get to high-definition, it's difficult to discern further improvements in the sharpness of the picture.

All other things being equalâ€“namely contrast and colorâ€“HDTV looks more or less spectacular on just about any high-definition television regardless of its size, native resolution, or the HDTV signal's resolution itself. The leap from normal TV to HDTV is so big that additional leaps in resolutionâ€“from high-definition to higher-definition, let's sayâ€“are tiny by comparison.

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