

digital cameras

Imagine never having to purchase film again — no overpriced X-brand from a convenience mart, no long drive to take the film in, nor a seemingly longer drive to get it back.

And the best part? No clerk telling you, "There musta been a mix up at the lab."

It doesn't take a rocket scientist — or techno geek — to understand that digital cameras are redefining the way we share and preserve memories. As the prices tumble and the technology of digital cameras improves, now is a great time to consider making the jump to a faster and easier way to take photos.

There ARE things you need to know before you get started, primarily having to do with the computer and printer you either have — or don't have.



The Epson PhotoPC 750Z is a one-megapixel digital camera with 3x optical zoom and advanced HyPict image enhancement technology, enabling image resolution up to 1,600 x 1,200 pixels.

Increasingly, the cameras work on Macs and PCs, but remember to check the system requirements to make sure one will work with your computer. You will also want to check how the camera can connect and transfer images to your computer — by serial/parallel/USB cable, infrared (rare), PCMCIA card, floppy disc or card reader.

LOOKING FOR A COOL WAY TO CAPTURE THAT KODAK MOMENT?

CONSIDER THESE CUTTING-EDGE PICTURE-TAKERS. BY MARK LUCE

Once you know what you need, choose the price range. Like many electronics items, there are about three tiers of digital cameras — \$350 to \$400, \$400 to \$600 and \$700 and up. The differences in the ranges are real, with lower-end models offering less clear pictures (because of lower pixel capabilities), less strong zooms and less storage capability. When browsing, keep these features in mind:

- **Resolution** — This determines how crisp your pictures will look. If you're just e-mailing vacation pictures to a relative, resolution isn't as important,

but if you want pictures for your club's newsletter, higher resolution will mean better printing.

- **Optical zoom vs. Digital zoom** — Basically, digital zoom is a computerized zoom, and optical zoom works more like a traditional camera.

The higher the optical zoom, the better zoom pictures are going to be. If a camera touts a digital zoom, remember that the zoom pictures will tend to look more choppy and pixilated.

- **Batteries** — Rechargeable is the only smart way to go. Make sure before you buy that you can use either nickel-cadmium rechargeables or Nickel Metal Hydride rechargeables. They will cost more initially, but will save you money over the long haul.

- **Interface and software** — Make sure the interface on the camera is easy to use. If

you don't, it will mean headaches later. All cameras come with software to view the pictures on screen and sometimes allow for picture manipulation (like taking that demon red out of your eyes).

- **Storage** — This is another part of the digital camera equation with many questions. These cards, or sometimes floppies, are where the digital camera pictures are stored. CompactFlash can offer more memory than SmartMedia cards, but in either case, transfer to computers is normally simple, as is transfer to floppy discs.

While final decisions should be personal, one good way to go is Minolta's Dimage EX Zoom 1500 (\$699). The camera has high picture quality zoom and wide-angle lenses and can shoot 7.5 frames a second. The camera is a great introduction to the ease and implicit of digital cameras, and more experienced photographers will enjoy the ability to set manual exposure and focus.

For printers, the Epson Stylus Photo 750 (\$250) delivers excellent printouts, is cross platform and prints a 4-inch by 6-inch print in about a minute.

Digital cameras may not be for everyone, but if you're looking for something easy to use and without the hassles of real film and processing, it's tough to beat one of these powerful tools that operates like it were a toy.

Happy snapping.

Freelance writer Mark Luce always takes the scenic route while traveling in his hometown, Lawrence, Kan.