

Consumer Corner

Tuning In To Some Truths About TVs

(NAPSA)—How serious are Americans about TV? The average consumer takes up to 13 months to make a television selection according to a recent study from Pioneer Electronics (USA) Inc. That's longer than people usually spend shopping for a car.

Some experts agree that consumers spend so much time searching for the perfect television because the amount of misinformation is immobilizing. For example, some people say a plasma TV will only last for a few years, but most major manufacturers report estimated life spans based on controlled laboratory testing of 60,000 hours to half brightness, which is about 20 years of watching the tube eight hours a day.

It is time to clear the air. Many of the facts below are based on the results of a Pioneer Electronics (USA) Inc. sponsored White Paper by IDC, a leading provider of global IT research and advice, titled "Mythbusting—Just the Facts on Plasma TV Performance." The study was released in conjunction with the launch of four new Pioneer Pure-Vision plasma televisions.

MYTH: All flat screen TVs are plasmas.

FACT: There are two types of flat screen TVs: plasma and LCD. The IDC white paper noted that while LCD televisions are now available in larger sizes appropriate for a home theater, plasma televisions provide accurate brightness and colors for movie level viewing.

Another important note is that not all flat screen TVs are high definition. Consumers looking for high definition need to be sure they are buying HDTV.

MYTH: The brighter the TV,



A study found that new types of plasma TVs can last 20 years.

the better the picture quality.

FACT: While "absolute brightness" is lower for plasmas than LCD, the study found that brightness and color consistency from side-to-side was equally important for picture quality. Compared to LCD, plasma remains more consistent across the entire width of the display without worry of "dead spots" or "hot spots" which are areas where the brightness can differ noticeably—making the picture look distorted.

MYTH: All televisions can produce accurate colors.

FACT: According to IDC's White Paper, today's plasma TVs exhibit more accurate colors that more closely adhere to the standards set by the Motion Picture and Television Association. These billions of colors provide the viewer with a more realistic and lifelike image while watching a movie, sports or television shows.

MYTH: The higher the contrast ratio, the better the picture quality.

FACT: Generally this is true, however contrast ratios are measured in so many different ways, it is hard to compare ratings from different manufacturers. A more important level to consider is the black level. When measuring black levels, plasma outperformed the

LCD and even the standard tube TV tested. Better black levels mean more detail in dark scenes creating an almost three-dimensional picture for the viewer. Pioneer's television experts suggest that when shopping for a new TV, you should ask the salesperson to turn the TV off for a few minutes so you can see the empty screen. If it looks black when the set is off, you'll probably get good black levels when it's on. Be skeptical if the set looks gray or greenish black.

MYTH: In order to get a good picture, you have to sit right in front of the TV.

FACT: Some types of TVs do have a "sweet spot" where the viewer gets the best picture, but IDC found that plasma TVs offered the widest viewing angle. "Regardless of where you are in the room, the image quality on plasma will look very similar. Also, even if you're seated in a fixed position, you won't be able to see any difference in quality when, for example, a person walks across the screen or a football flies from one end of the screen to the other," the group reported.

MYTH: Plasma screens are subject to permanent image retention (also known as "burn in").

FACT: IDC ran a 48-hour "torture test" by putting a static image (like a DVD menu screen) on each television to try and "burn" images onto the screens. Following the 48 hours, they ran a continuous video for another 24 hours. At the end of the full 72-hour testing period, there was no report of "burn in" on any of the televisions. That doesn't mean it's a good idea to leave a DVD menu on any television for a weekend, and this does not guarantee that an individual user will not experience image retention.