

# BUYER'S **guide**

**W**hile the primary function of the webcam hasn't changed, more manufacturers are offering expanded functionality and software bundles designed to enhance the convenience, style, and appeal of this old favorite.

Many webcams now come with built-in microphones, video editing software, audio effects, auto focus, and digital zoom. Several feature "face tracking," made possible by motion sensors that attempt to keep your face in the center of the screen, and wide-angle lenses, which are ideal for bringing small groups into view. The Creative WebCam Live! Motion, for example, has a 76-degree wide-angle lens with automatic, motorized pan-and-tilt motion tracking.

Software bundles with special audio and video effects now come standard with many models. Logitech's QuickCam Communicate Deluxe allows you to personalize conversations with hundreds of avatars and face accessories that mirror expressions and motion. Downloadable "fun filters" add video effects such as "fisheye," "'50s movie," and "neon."

Some webcams on the market can compete with digital still cameras in

number of megapixels (MP)— that's a million pixels, the tiny dots that make up a digital image. The more megapixels a webcam has, the better and more detailed its images are. HP's Premium Autofocus, for example, promises up to 12 MP still images with its software interpolation. Logitech's QuickCam delivers 5 MP, and Lenovo's USB webcam boasts 4 MP.

Webcams commonly capture video at 30 frames per second (fps), but some offer more. A webcam's frame rate is the number of times a still image flashes by in a second to give the appearance of moving pictures. Video sensor resolution is another aspect of high-quality video (the higher the resolution, the higher the quality of the video). The Philips 1300NC listed here can capture a maximum of 90 fps with a resolution of 1.3 MP. However, keep in mind that the greater the number of frames you demand, the more bandwidth, memory, and processing power you'll need.

Webcam prices vary from less than \$20 for a basic, no-frills unit to hundreds of dollars, depending on resolution, frame rate, lens quality, and feature set. The units on these pages can all be purchased for less than \$80.

## Webcams

Company	Model	Price
<b>Creative Labs</b> www.creative.com	 WebCam Live! Motion	\$49.95
<b>Creative Labs</b> www.creative.com	 Live! Cam Video IM Pro VF0410	\$49.99
<b>Gear Head</b> www.pcgearhead.com	 WebCam Motion WC755IPT	\$64.99
<b>HP</b> www.shopping.hp.com	 Premium Autofocus KQ245AA	\$79.99
<b>Lenovo</b> www.lenovo.com	 Lenovo USB Cam IC825C	\$79.95
<b>Logitech</b> www.logitech.com	 QuickCam Communicate Deluxe	\$79.99
<b>Logitech</b> www.logitech.com	 QuickCam Communicate STX	\$29.95
<b>Microsoft</b> www.microsoft.com	 Lifecam VX-6000	\$79.99
<b>Philips Electronics</b> www.philips.com	 Philips SPC 1300NC/27	\$68.48

Video Resolution	Image Resolution	Face Tracking	Compatability	Connectivity	Zoom	Frame Rate	Features
640 x 480	1.3 MP	Yes	Windows 2000, XP, PIII	USB 1.1, 2.0	4X digital	30 fps	Motorized pan/tilt, wide-angle lens
800 x 600	1.3 MP	Yes	Windows XP, SP2, Vista, P4	USB 1.1, 2.0	No	30 fps	Plug and play, built-in mic, video and audio FX, manual focus
640 x 480	1.3 MP	Yes	Windows 2000, XP, Vista, PIII	USB 2.0	4X	30 fps	Built-in mic
3 MP	12 MP	Yes	Windows XP, Vista, P4	USB	5X digital	30 fps	Wide-angle mic, video editing software, auto focus
1.3 MP	4 MP	Yes	Windows 2000, XP	USB 2.0	7X digital	30 fps	Built-in mic, video/image editing
1.3 MP	5 MP	Yes	Windows XP, Vista, P4	USB 2.0	No	30 fps	Manual focus, built-in mic, wide-angle glass lens
640 x 480	1.3 MP	No	Windows 2000, XP, Vista, P4	USB 1.1, 2.0	No	30 fps	Privacy shade, built-in mic, photo editing software, fixed focus
1.3 MP	5 MP	Yes	Windows XP, Vista, PIII	USB 2.0	3X digital	30 fps	Built-in mic, wide-angle lens
3 MP	12 MP	Yes	Windows XP, Vista, PIII	USB 2.0	8X	90 fps	Built-in mic, wide-angle lens