



Buying an LCD projector

So you're buying new digital projectors for your school, but where to start? There are several things you need to know. First, digital projectors have become so inexpensive that they have become like tires on a car: When they wear out, you replace them. With that in mind, know that you are buying a piece of technology with a limited life span. Other than replacing light bulbs, you generally replace them when they break.

LCD vs. DLP

The first decision that you have to make is what kind of projector do you want. There are two different basic kinds LCD (liquid crystal display) and DLP ("Digital Light Processing"). While both kinds have their pluses and minuses, you can make arguments for each type. To sort out the basic differences between them you can follow this link:

<http://www.projectorreviews.com/advice/dlpvslcd/index.php>

Salesmen often try to overwhelm the non-techie with all the stats and specifications on their projectors, this is often not a critical decision.

Brightness

The brightness of projectors is measured in ANSI lumens and most people simply buy the brightest projector they can. How bright a projector you need to buy is a factor of several things:

- Size of the image (the projector light is spread over how big an area)
- How dark or light is the room
- What kind of things you are projecting

Here is a link to a brightness calculator that might help you decide on how bright a projector you need.

<http://www.projectorpoint.co.uk/Projector-Brightness-Advice.htm>

Warranty

This is a key element. Projectors can have warranties that run from 30 days to 3 years. In a school environment, a digital projector is run hard for hours and hours every day. A strong warranty generally is very much worth it. Remember, this is not something that you fix.

Bulb Life

Again, this is a cost avoidance and cost of operation issue. Before you buy you should research the cost of a replacement bulb and how many hours it is rated at. Some projectors have an economy mode that reduces the brightness and gives you more hours. My feeling is that you should just buy the proper brightness projector in the first place. If you can reduce the light and have it look great, you bought too much to begin with!



Focal Length

If you are mounting the projector, you need to be sure that when it is mounted on the ceiling, it will focus a clean image on your screen or Interactive White Board. What is the vendor's commitment to keeping the same focal distance over time? If they do not keep the same focal distance, then you may have to move the mounting bracket each time you change projectors (this might be as often as every three years!)

Portability

If you are going to be moving the projector around, then the weight and size of the projector is something you want to consider. Obviously, you pay more for a small, light weight projector.

Wireless

If you want to have your computer a distance from your projector, or you simply don't want to hook up the sVGA cable, then you can get a wireless projector. The computer will connect to the projector via Wi-Fi, and you can move the computer and still show the image. Very cool, but you have the limitation with most wireless projectors that they will not connect wirelessly to a network and to the projector at the same time. That means you cannot use the projector to show the Internet in the classroom.

Management

If you have lots of projectors in your school or district, then you will want to know if there is a connection and software that will allow you look at the readout from the projectors remotely. You can tell how many hours are on the projectors, shut them down at a certain time (saving valuable bulb hours), see heating warnings, or check maintenance cycles (LCD projectors often have a screen that needs to be cleaned).

Control

If you want to use your projector with a switching system/remote then you need to be sure that it has an RS 232 or USB connection that will allow the switcher to control the projector.

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