



“how do I look?” Breakfast At Tiffany’s 1961

the myths of “HD”

“HD” is currently the most hyped technology for home entertainment. But its also one of the most misunderstood and confusing consumer technologies. Different logos, lots of numbers - the bigger picture of HD is not quite as you may have first imagined. Here are some of the most commonly asked questions about HD.

“HD” stands for “High Definition”. While new sound technologies are an integral part of new HD systems, the main focus is on the improved picture quality. Not only are HD images far sharper and clearer than anything yet seen in the home, the increased resolution also allows screens to be much larger than ever before without a perceived loss in quality.

But beware, we are still some way from experiencing everything in HD.

My new flat screen has an “HD Ready” logo. Does that mean everything I watch on it will be in HD?

Unfortunately not. The flat screen may display HD, but you need to feed it with an HD source. DVDs are not HD. Computer games are not HD. Television broadcast is not HD.

So what’s the point of buying a flat screen saying its “HD Ready”?

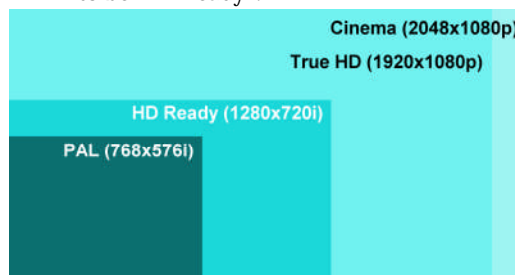
To be able to watch HD images three things must in place. Firstly, the image must have been created in HD (e.g. filmed with HD cameras). Secondly, the recording and playback medium must be HD. And thirdly, the display device, i.e. your flat screen, must display HD.

These three things were never going to happen at exactly the same time. Flat screen displays got there first, which is why they say they’re “ready” and waiting for everything else to catch up. DVDs are on the brink of being replaced by either Blu-ray or HD-DVD disks (or maybe even both), broadcasters are just starting to experiment with broadcasting HD images (e.g. the new Sky HD service), and the new Sony Playstation 3 will bring HD video games. And only when these new technologies are connected to your new HD Ready flat screen will you enjoy the benefits of your “HD Ready” screen.



So is HD a single standard and always the same?

Unfortunately not. Traditional PAL television systems give approx 576 lines of vertical resolution. New flat screens offering vertical resolutions of anything above 720 are all considered to be “HD Ready”.



What is “True HD”?

Some screens with even higher vertical resolutions of 1080 now claim to be “True HD” or “Full HD”. In terms of compatibility with other technologies, both HD-DVD and Blu-ray offer resolutions up to 1080p. Sky HD is currently broadcasting with 1080i.



What are the letters “i” and “p” used for?

The complications don’t stop here – its not just the ‘numbers’ game of screen resolution. Some display devices are offering “interlaced” pictures (signified by the letter “i” after the resolution numbers) and some are offering “progressive” pictures (signified by the letter “p” after the resolution numbers). Progressive pictures offer a more cinematic feeling to the images and smoother image panning.

My new HD flat screen is widescreen. Does that mean everything I watch on it will be in widescreen?

For many years, television systems have enjoyed a single standard aspect ratio of 4:3. Everything was presented just as it should have been. But systems then came along such as DVD which offered widescreen formats more closely matching those found in the cinema. So the televisions then became widescreen as well to match.

But many people incorrectly leave their TV permanently set to widescreen mode even though they’re watching a 4:3 television broadcast. Instead, the only option during this period of multiple aspect ratio standards is to manually switch the flat screen between different modes to match the correct aspect ratio.

How do I connect all this HD equipment together?

A standard connection technology has been designed to connect all HD equipment together. This is called HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface). Many flat screen displays, projectors, DVD players and AV amps now have HDMI sockets as standards. HDMI also carries as audio down the same cable.

Is HD just about picture resolution?

While the main focus of HD is the improved resolution bringing sharper and bigger images, the HD standards also encompass high quality sound technologies (Dolby True HD, and Dolby Digital Plus), better image colours and contrast ratios, and digital interconnects reducing noise interference to ensure sound and picture are perfectly reproduced.

