

Ripoff Report: HDMI Cables

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As I wandered around an electronics store the other day on my lunch break, I was reminded of a disturbing price-gouging scam that seems to be so widely accepted that it has become status quo. I'm talking about cables; specifically, digital A/V cables like HDMI, DVI, optical TOSLINK, etc.

Big-box stores are exploiting confusion about the differences between analog and digital signals, and the effect that small changes in the signal quality might have on the picture you see on your TV or the sound from your audio receiver. See, in the dark ages (up until a few years ago), A/V signals were commonly transmitted in an analog format, which turns out to be remarkably inefficient in comparison to digital. Another downfall of analog signals, more pertinent to this discussion, is that they are susceptible to a number of adverse distorting effects caused by loss of signal strength.

You've seen the effects that moderate to severe interference or attenuation can have on an analog TV signal - snowy, ghost-like or rolling images, rendering your favorite shows unwatchable. You've also seen the effects of minor signal interference, which can typically be ignored but are annoying nonetheless. Cable manufacturers have a rich history of fighting against common causes for analog signal weakening. Many household devices produce some level of electromagnetic interference, so manufacturers introduced magnetic shielding. These higher-end cables made a real, perceivable difference in picture clarity.

The time of battling the shortcomings of analog signals has passed. Today, digital video and audio devices are the standard, Digital signals are based on a simple protocol that consists of 1s and 0s. There is very little room in a digital signal for errors. Either the picture appears on your TV, or it doesn't.

Expensive brands like Monster Cable want you to believe there is a difference in the signal carried by their product. This just isn't true. So please, if you're looking for an HDMI cable to hook up your new 52-inch plasma, don't spend more than \$10.

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