



What did Simon and Hannah want?

- Projection to reach 40ft
- Model to cope in brightly-lit room
- Stylish looking device
- Moderately lightweight
- Clear/crisp image

Reader's choice: digital projectors on a budget

For a company that needs to communicate its business to lots of people a digital projector is invaluable. But they don't come cheap. Spencer Dalziel selects three compact projectors that can be used in-house or on the move, but do they all have what it takes?

A digital projector is a vital piece of equipment for any business utilising PowerPoint presentations. Be it in-house or on the road, it is the best tool of communication when presenting your business information to a room full of people. And, as always, choosing the right one is no easy task. Constant price drops mean you can get more for your money but there's a wealth of projectors available over a range of prices and specifications.

We were contacted by a *PC Advisor* reader who wanted help choosing the right projector for her work and she came to our offices accompanied by the man holding the purse strings – her boss. Hannah McKenzie and Simon Coates-Walker work at Futures Resourcing, a Basingstoke-based recruitment company that specialises in the pharmaceutical

industry. Simon is the commercial director and Hannah has recently been employed as the IT and web marketing associate.

One of her many jobs is to revamp the office hardware: "At the moment we're upgrading a lot of equipment. Among the things I have on my to-do list is to find out about and buy a digital projector." Hannah added that the company has grown rapidly and she's currently "the only official person dedicated to anything to do with IT".

Simon added: "We need a projector with a throw of about 30 to 40 feet. Our office space is brightly lit so we need a model that can compete with the light. We'll use it in-house and for travelling so it needs to be compact." Future Resourcing has a budget of around £1,300. The models we looked at were the CTX PS-5140, NEC VT45 and Sharp PG-C20XE.

First impressions

The first problem we encountered was the price bracket. As you'll see from our chart on page 269, the average price of a digital projector is more than £2,000. That said, the three models we found were sub-£2,000 and Simon agreed to up his budget if he saw a model good enough to justify the higher cost.

Hannah was immediately taken with the Sharp PG-C20XE. It's a compact model and the hardware styling would fit nicely in the office: "We're using Sony Vaio at work and the purple and silver colouring matches." Hannah also said that the wireless mouse receiver was a bonus as they had a wireless mouse or two at the office. Simon pointed out that the remote control has a built-in pad to operate as a mouse so the receiver "is fairly redundant", but he found the pad awkward to use. Unfortunately the PG-C20XE doesn't have a case which means paying extra.

NEC's charcoal VT45 stands out from the other models because it mounts the ports on the front rather than the back. Simon thought this gave the projector an untidy finish and detracted from what would otherwise be a nice model. However, Hannah and Simon liked the fact that the

Pros and cons: the contenders measure up

NEC VT45

Pros: good for home entertainment

Cons: not a great performer

Price: £1,237

NEC: 0845 404 020

Website: www.nec.co.uk



Sharp PG-C20XE

Pros: styling, best resolution

Cons: costly, not a great performer

Price: £1,850

Sharp: 0800 262 958

Website: www.sharp.co.uk



CTX PS-5140

Pros: best performance, best value

Cons: heaviest

Price: £1,113

CTX: 01923 810 800

Website: www.ctxeurope.com



lens can be moved separately so you don't have to shift the whole projector about to get the image set up on a screen or wall.

At 2.7kg CTX's brand new PS-5140 was the heaviest model and had the largest dimensions, but both Simon and Hannah liked its sleek styling. Simon was particularly enamoured at the manual focus ring: "It's sensibly positioned and easy to use." Simon was even more impressed with the fully functional remote control and testified to its simplicity by working out how to use it before he'd even read the instruction manual.

What the experts say

One model that we excluded early on is a former Best Buy – the VT45. NEC's model is a great home entertainment product for watching DVDs but it didn't perform as well when hooked up to a PC for PowerPoint slides. The 800x600 resolution, 1,000 Ansi lumens and low contrast ratio were outperformed by the other models. Since we last looked at the VT45, NEC has lopped a generous £700 off the price so it falls well within the budget for Future Resourcing. However, the expensive replacement bulb only lasts for 1,000 hours.

Sharp's model was the most expensive contender by far and had decent enough specifications. The PG-C20XE has the best native resolution of 1,024x768 and the replacement bulb costs almost the same as NEC's while lasting twice as long. We pointed out to Simon and Hannah that the noise level on the Sharp was high but they were adamant this wouldn't disrupt a presentation: "With 20 people in a room already making a noise and someone

shouting to get heard I don't think it would be a problem," added Simon. When we showed a colourful graphics and text presentation using the Sharp, Simon immediately noted the disappointing brightness: "It's making the colours look cloudy and murky. It's similar to NEC's model but more expensive – I don't think it's worth the money."

The CTX has an amazing combination of features, specifications and cost. The lower resolution of 800x600 means it can't deliver the detail of Sharp's product but when it comes to the all-important brightness it's a clear winner. The 1,400 Ansi lumens rating is a great offering at any price point so seeing it on such a value-for-money model is impressive.

We fired up the PS-5140 with some PowerPoint slides and there was no competition – they were bright, colourful and detailed even on the lower resolution. Its luminosity showed that it can cope well with the brightly lit rooms at Futures Resourcing.

The reader's choice

Usually in Reader's choice there's a careful weighing up between the chosen contenders, with each pro and con being prudently measured. This can lead to some long umming and ahhhing among the *PC Advisor* staff about which model really does suit the reader's requirements best. This month, however, proved to be a no-brainer. The PS-5140 from CTX measured up to Simon and Hannah's requirements in every way.

Simon was really pleased with the result. "This is definitely the model we want." We pointed out that the CTX PS-5140 is so new that, at the time of writing, CTX didn't have any information about it on its website. This means that Futures Resourcing won't be able to purchase it for at least a few weeks.

This didn't worry Hannah, though: "We're starting the overhaul of office equipment in a couple of months from now so we can wait until then." ■

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