

The numbers are in, folks. Digital still cameras captured over 40% of camera sales (over \$100) this past holiday season, up from 13% 2 years ago. Wow! Why?

Are they better? No. If a \$200 35mm camera had the same feature set that a \$200 digital camera has, no one would buy it.

Are they easier to use? No. Both types of cameras offer all the same conveniences. Both are easy to load and unload, and have equal degrees of automation.

Are they more durable? No. Not that 35mm cameras are built like tanks, but they will take more abuse than digital cameras.

Are they more convenient? This is a gray area. The 35mm cameras are more energy efficient, easier to get film and batteries for, and have simple controls (most of them do, anyway). Digital cameras are often smaller, lighter, can take more pictures on a memory card than 40, and bad pictures can be deleted before printing.

Are the pictures better? Another gray area here. A 3+ megapixel (MP) camera can produce as good a picture as a point and shoot 35mm camera up to a 5x7" print. (If the digital file is not printed properly, however) it can be a much worse print.) Home inkjet and dye sublimation printers can make excellent photos, far beyond what the amateur could do in a home darkroom. These printers are also extremely simple to use, are inexpensive, and do not require any computer knowledge.

Are they as easy to get pictures from? Almost. A year ago, 35mm had a great advantage. Today, small machines (such as "Rosie" at the Photo Summit) and major processing labs can make prints for about the same price as from 35mm film. By April 1, prints and enlargements up to 8x10 will be available at popular prices while you wait.

Will the images last as long? A moot point. As recorded on a memory card, digital images have an unpredictably short life span and can accidentally be erased. A film negative is far more permanent, but can also be thrown away. You can make a copy negative from a print, but there is always a loss of quality. With digital images, you can easily make a "duplicate original" with no deterioration at all.