

Sometimes things break. Sometimes they have help breaking. Sometimes we even break them on purpose. Today's question is "What will it cost to fix my...?"

Let's divide the repair issue into 2 different considerations – warranty vs. out of warranty. It is always worth getting anything repaired if covered by a valid manufacturer's warranty or guaranty. Sometimes this is easy, sometimes not. A camera (or other imported device) brought into the U.S. via the contracted representative of the factory or a division of the manufacturing company has a valid, limited warranty by the owner of the brand name on the product. As an example, Pentax U.S.A. is an American company owned by Asahi Optical K.K. in Japan. Where Asahi Optical K.K. in Japan warrants every camera they manufacture (wherever they are sold) and honors the warranty at their headquarters in Japan, Pentax U.S.A. is only responsible for the cameras they have imported and distributed into the North America.

How does all this legal mumbo jumbo affect you? Pretend you just bought a new Nikon product, which fails after 2 months use (It came with a 1 year limited warranty.). Under terms of the limitation, you (or your agent) must bear the cost of returning the Product to Nikon U.S.A. for warranty service. Nikon will then repair or replace the product and pay transportation charges back to you or your agent. If, however, the product in question was not imported and distributed by the trademark holder, Nikon is not required to repair, replace, warrant, or even return the camera to you!

Many photo products are imported each day by other than the manufacturers' U.S. agents. These are referred to as "parallel imports", or "grey market". These products may or may not be warranted when sold as new, but the warrantor is not who you think it is. Any warranty claims on these products, if any, must be carried out by the factory in the Orient, or a repair service hired by the seller (which is usually the lowest bid). These domestic repair facilities will never replace a defective product, and might not have access to original factory parts or diagnostic equipment. Thousands of parallel imported products are sold daily. Please be aware of the risks if you want to purchase one.

In the case above, Nikon U.S.A. has borne the expense to supply factory trained repair personnel, to maintain parts inventory, to hire clerical workers to keep track of your products in order to warrant the products they have imported. This costs money, and someone has to pay for it. The factory will reimburse Nikon U.S.A for the parts used in warranty repairs, but not the shipping and labor. Nikon cannot charge for warranty service, so the overall cost of the warranty is included in a price now higher than the grey market price.

Some foreign manufacturers and/or their American importers offer warranty extensions for their products sold in this country. Most Canon U.S.A. cameras and lenses are sold with a 1 year limited warranty. Canon also offers, at an additional price, warranty extensions of from 2 to 5 years on their cameras. Cameras needing service under these limited warranties are handled by Canon U.S.A. (factory service, factory parts, and factory specifications). Some individual repair shops offer their own brand warranty extensions. Don't confuse them with the real thing.

Before buying a product which could require a costly repair, investigate the warranty.

Even a more complicated concept is out of warranty repair. There are a few concepts to explore.

Not everything is repairable. Some merchandise made within the past few years was designed not to be repairable. Some are expensive. Our stores once carried a series of lenses which was found to be unrepairable. We stopped carrying that brand immediately. Many injection molded items are sealed by sonic waves, and cannot be reopened and resealed. Some are less costly to replace than repair from the makers' points of view.

Cameras are precision instruments. It is not uncommon to find a 35mm camera made with over 2000 separate parts. Simple cameras can still have several hundred parts, all of which must operate with tight tolerances. Keep in mind that cameras must be within 1/1000 of an inch at just the right time to be able to accurately autofocus, and be within a maximum of 1/2000 of a second to supply the correct exposure. It doesn't take much to knock out those tolerances.

Many cameras, lenses and flashes today are not economically repairable. Part of the reason for this is the differences in labor costs comparing robotic assembly lines in third world nations vs. skilled labor in the U.S.A. If a new camera sold for \$239, and an average repair costs \$130-\$155, having it fixed is questionable. A good yardstick to measure this by is to ask yourself, "Would I buy a used camera (of the same brand and model) for \$(the amount of repair), with a 90 day warranty from the store selling it?" If the answer is yes, have the work done. If the answer is no, or I don't know, replace it.

Not all cameras need repair for the same reason. Although a camera which suffered impact and a camera with sand damage from the beach are equally malfunctioning, only one can be repaired successfully (impact). (As we approach beach season, remember NOT to take your camera to the shore or boating unless it was designed for that use. Most cameras are not.) Check with Geoff in Madison PhotoPlus or Lynne in the Photo Summit before rushing to have a repair done or throwing something out.

Sometimes sentimental value is an issue with having a camera, projector, lens (or even car) repaired. Sentimental value cannot really be measured in dollars and cents; repair people don't accept sentiment as payment. Really consider whether the sentimental value will be increased by performing the repair. It usually isn't. Put yourself in the position of advising a neighbor about the repair in a similar situation to help you decide.

Just like new cameras, repaired cameras have warranties, usually 90 to 180 days from the date of the repair. The repair warranty period does not begin when the camera is back in the customer's hands. To avoid potential arguments and legal considerations, most repair services warrant the entire camera, not just the specific work done. This is commonly referred to a "GWO" (Good Working Order). The goal is to have the camera working up to new factory specs as closely as possible.

Whether a repair is done under warranty or not, NEVER, NEVER TAKE A NEWLY REPAIRED CAMERA (etc.) ON VACATION OR USE IT TO SHOOT A JOB UNLESS YOU THOROUGHLY TEST THE CAMERA AND SEE RESULTS FIRST! NEVER!

Please stop by and say hello to Mariesa in Madison PhotoPlus. Mariesa, our newest staff member, comes from the Cincinnati, Ohio area, and has a photographic and graphics background. In addition to graduating Magna Cum Laude, Mariesa was Photography Supervisor at Antonelli College. She has freelanced (mainly with her Nikon N-90s system) and managed the Wolf Gallery of Photography in Cincinnati.

For a fun idea working with pictures and young children, please go to <http://www.takegreatpictures.com/articles/default.asp?aid=1005> and read how to enhance kids' pictures with very little effort or expense.

Here's a snapshot Jerry took on Lake Erie last month of a 100+ year old lighthouse near Toledo. Jerry was at an international meeting of independent photo businessmen, representing his customers (you) to imaging companies from around the world.

