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First and foremost, I would like to wish a Happy New Year to all the readers and hope you had a wonderful holiday season. The next few weeks will probably entail a lot of returning and exchanging gifts. The hottest purchase of this holiday season was the flat-panel HDTV. Did you get one? If so, here are some must-have accessories for your brand new HDTV.

Comments? Write to techtalk@citymasala.com.

Invariably, as you head toward the HDTV section of your local consumer electronics store, you'll walk right past the shelves bearing bland-looking HDTV accessories. Sure, these accessories have multichannel audio, gold-plated connectors, nitrogen-injected insulation, and fully-articulating mounting arms, but they just can't compete visually with their big-screen, flat-panel HDTV counterpart. Despite outward appearances, however, there are a handful of accessories that are absolutely vital to getting the most from your HDTV.

1. HDMI CABLES



Who wants a living room full of cables and cords? Certainly not your wife; and besides, those wires can be a nuisance (and a danger) to pets and little ones.

HDMI cables are all-in-one cords that carry uncompressed digital audio and digital video signals to and from your HDTV and its components, eliminating the need for separate cords for video and audio. Acoustic Research's AP085 6-foot HDMI cable (\$99.99; www.araccessories.com) is the perfect accessory to pass your digital signals, nicely and neatly, of course, among your devices. Be sure to budget for this must-have.

2. WALL MOUNT



There's nothing better than showing off your home videos and photos when friends and family are over. An elegant way of doing so is by displaying them on your HDTV that is mounted on a wall, turning your videos and photos into veritable works of art framed by your TV's sleek bezel. A wall-mounted HDTV also gives you more floor space and keeps your living room neat and clutter-free. Once the mount and TV are installed (you can take advantage of Best Buy's Magnolia Premium Home Theater Installation service), many mounts will let you tilt and rotate the HDTV to ensure a perfectly level picture. Sanus VisionMount VMPL50, www.sanus.com, fits most 30- to 50-inch LCD and Plasma TVs.

3. STAND

If you'd rather not drill holes in your home's newly painted walls, or if you live in a condo and your walls are cement or cinderblock, a



stand is a better option than a wall mount. Today's A/V furniture manufacturers offer gorgeous, showroom-style stands in a variety of materials, including warm wood (available in stains of many colors), minimalist brushed steel, and clean-looking glass. You can get a triangular corner model, a high-backed cabinet that includes a mount for flat-panel HDTVs, and stands with shelves to accommodate the rest of your A/V gear. Some of the really good places to get these are Salamander Designs, www.salamanderdesigns.com; Bdl, www.bdiusa.com; and Sanus Systems, www.sanus.com.

4. SURROUND SOUND-SYSTEM

I'm willing to bet that you've struggled with



keeping volume levels steady when you're watching something on TV. There's nothing more annoying than being startled by a loud commercial in the middle of your favorite show; likewise, nothing is more jolting than when a quiet, serene part of your favorite movie is suddenly interrupted by a too-loud scene change. Eliminate this by investing in a good-quality surround-sound system, which will prevent volume extremes by automatically equalizing the audio in movies and HD broadcasts that are



capable of 5.1 or better surround sound.

5. UNIVERSAL REMOTE

Let's face it - everyone, you, your wife, mom, dad, grandma, and even the kids, get remotes mixed up when there's one for each component



in your home-theater system. Get rid of that mountain of plastic with a programmable universal remote, which lets you control everything with a single device. The Logitech

Harmony 880 Advanced Universal Remote (\$249.99; www.logitech.com, lets you control 15 devices in your home-theater system at once. Better still, you'll keep your living room clean and clutter-free.

5. CALIBRATION

With this set up, you're almost ready to enjoy your HDTV, wait ... one final thing that will take it to the next level - CALIBRATION. You want to optimize your set to offer the best possible contrast ratios, colors, and picture settings. There's more to brilliant, sharp pictures than screen resolution; calibration makes a big difference. Most retailers offer professional calibration (such as Best Buy's Geek Squad premium installation services) that uses special equipment otherwise unavailable to consumers in most cases. This might be your best bet. At the very least, though, you can do a little home-brewed tweaking on your new set to improve the often blown-out, oversaturated, out-of-the-box picture quality. Several do-it-yourself calibration DVDs are available, but Digital Video Essentials offers the best combination of reliable test patterns and in-depth information for aspiring videophiles.

Now, sit back and enjoy that awesome flat-panel TV.

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