

The Truth about Expensive Cables

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I saw an advertisement at Frys Electronics for Monster cables with a huge discount. Normally these 5' HDMI wires ran about \$35 bucks, but on sale they were only \$13 bucks! Great deal right? Not so much...

I also had a person at Best Buy more than a decade ago try to sell me "nitrogen cooled wires" for my new JBL home theatre. He said with such a nice system, I'd have to have top notch wires... and that the supplied wires wouldn't cut it. Puzzled I asked why JBL would sell a complete, expensive system with inadequate wires. Wouldn't that just make JBL look bad? - He had no logical response, just nonsense. I passed.

People are often fooled into thinking simply because something is more expensive, it's better. Wiring is perhaps one of the worst or best examples of this.

While I have no doubt the technical quality of the wires are superior to cheap knockoff wiring, the end result is still usually the same. This is because of the nature of digital technology.

In the digital world, everything is a 0 or 1, on or off, signal or no signal. Your beautiful picture or phone call is made up entirely of a large number of 0's and 1's that are then translated into picture, audio or data.

In the analog world (the old world), the strength of the signal was very important to clarity and quality of your video or audio. The analog signals compete with naturally occurring analog signals in the universe, signals generated from the Sun, distant stars, even our Earth. Therefore analog signals are susceptible to interference from these sources.

Digital is not. Well... for the most part.

So long as the receiving device can "hear" the 0 or 1 being transmitted, then everything is fine. It doesn't matter if the signal is a little weak, or even fairly weak. The receiving end is simply concerned with the 0 or 1, not the quality of that 0 or 1. So long as the receiver can discern the 0's and 1's, then you will have a perfect experience, be it HD video or surround sound audio.

Now there is a slight technicality: if the quality of the signal is pretty bad, and a lot of the 0's and 1's are lost in transmission, you will encounter problems. You will see things break up, or freeze. You may hear glitching or scratching sound effects or other odd things may happen. However the signal has to be pretty bad before you start having issues.

In the end, weather you spend \$100 or \$5 on a digital cable, as long as the 0's and 1's can make it to the other end it's all good. If they make it on a "weak signal" or a "strong signal" there no difference, it's still a 0 or a 1 and that's all the receiver cares about.

I personally have always bought the cheapest digital cables I can get my hands on. Almost always they work perfectly with no issues. There have been a couple that didn't work well; the TV would cut in and out. However at a cost of \$5 bucks, I happily replaced it with another \$5 cable and was good to go.

What kind of cables are digital? HDMI, Digital Coax and Optical are the most common for Audio/Video. For computers, virtually all cables are digital. So for your USB wire, buy the cheapest

you can get your hands on. Generally speaking Fry's electronics or smaller places will have wires for far less than Best Buy or other electronic stores. The internet, especially Ebay is another good place to get cheap wires that work just fine.

Now, consider yourself enlightened and the next time the sales person tries to sell you on some crazy expensive wires, point him to this article.

Expensive



Digital Wires

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