

Selecting a Digital Voice Recorder

(A brief outline of the general features to consider when selecting a digital recorder)

Record Time

The first thing to consider when selecting a Digital Voice Recorder is the amount of record time needed. Each Digital Voice Recorder has a maximum record time, which is based on the memory (storage capacity) and the Record Mode. The Record Mode is very important as it determines the quality of the recording.

Below is an example illustrating how the Record Mode can affect max Record Time on the same device:

LP Mode: 5 hrs 45 min (lowest quality of recording) Long Play Mode
SP Mode: 2 hrs 10 min (better quality of recording) Short Play Mode
ST(HQ) Mode: 40 min (best quality of recording) Stereo Mode

If you are recording in "High Quality or Stereo" Mode for example the recording will be clearer (better quality) but take up more space, thus the record time in this mode will be less than "Long Play" mode which will produce a less quality recording but will take up less space.

Note: "Maximum" record time promoted in marketing is referring to "LP Mode" which may not render the quality recording desired.

Record Quality

Record quality is an important feature to consider. Depending on intended use, the record quality needs will vary. For example individuals that plan to use the device for dictation purposes will most likely only require Standard Play Mode (SP Mode). However if you want to use the recorder to capture Audio from around the room, for an interview, conference, or to record music, then a recorder that offers High Quality or Stereo Recording will be crucial to achieving record clarity.

Built-in Memory / Removable Memory

The next factor to consider is the type of storage: built-in or removable. Built-in memory limits storage (record time) to a fixed amount while removable media allows you to remove and replace the card with a card of a larger capacity (generally up to 1GB) for greater storage.

Removable media offers greater flexibility in other areas as well. For example, if you need to have a file transcribed or downloaded to the pc you can simply read directly from one media card, while continuing recording memos without interruption on another card.

PC Connectivity

Most digital recorders connect to a pc to enable file download. Some units come with a Docking Station to allow you to dock the recorder in a cradle for quick download. The cradle often acts as a recharging station as well. Other Recorders connect to a USB cable to download files. The last category uses a USB Direct (essentially the unit is a flash drive) connection, this means the recorder plugs directly into the USB port -- no cable requires. This is a great option for people on the go with laptops that don't want to keep up with cables.

Recorder Features

This is a more complex topic since there are numerous features and desired features tend to vary depending on industry. Thus we will only cover general areas.

One of the first features to consider is basic operation of the digital recorder, which can be done one of two ways through "Push Buttons" or a "Thumb Slide Switch" to Play, Record, FF, Rewind, or Cue. This is basically a preference issue but individuals that use their recorders for extensive dictation will find the "Slide Switch" is much easier and faster to use. Where as individuals that are using the device for interviews, to record meetings, music, etc generally prefer push button.

Popular features can generally be broken down into the different market sectors. For example Physicians, Attorney, Insurance adjustors complete numerous dictations and need to be able to insert a recording into an existing recording, complete a partial erase of a file, and/or assign an Author ID and file type to a recording. In addition these industries frequently require recorders that are compatible with a pc transcription kit (foot pedal and transcription software.)

On the other end of the market are for example individuals in the press, corporate professionals that need to record in large conference setting, public speakers that require a recorder that can provide high quality recording in a multitude of environments. Important features for this sector include top-quality audio, ease of use and extensive recording times.

There are several other options that might be of interest. Certainly the software that comes with the recorder is important since it controls what you are able to do with the recorded files once they are downloaded to the computer. Features vary but almost all "player/editor" programs (software that is packaged with most recorders) allow you to play, edit, and convert files to other formats if needed.

And then there is the size and weight factor to consider. They are handheld recorders thus they easily fit in the palm of your hand, but some are more compact. Again this is a preference issue; however we have found some recorders can be difficult to operate because the buttons are too small, close together and hard to manage.

The great news is, there are many different models and a wide variety of features making it relatively easy to find a digital voice recorder that will meet all your needs.