At the end of the day, there's still only going to be so many old-fashioned, trusty cathode-ray set. "By far, CRT is still dominant," said Danielle Levitas, director for consumer markets research at IDC. "At the end of the day, there's still only going to be so many people watching "The Amazing Race" on their old-fashioned, trusty cathode-ray set.

Shoppers hoping for a better price cut than that shouldn't count on it, said Gary Arlen, president of Arlen Communications in Bethesda. "There's not going to be a precipitous price drop. Prices drop about 2 percent on average, and that's a trend that should hold steady for the foreseeable future."

In the meantime, there's at least one excuse for the confused consumer to keep waiting. Every month, a manufacturer introduces a new model or technology to try to entice the consumer. But Sandusky, like others, thinks that each type of set will find a space in the homes of the future. "We feel very strongly that there is a niche for each of these technologies," he said.

"We believe that's the best value to a consumer when you look at price, performance and form factor," said Rick Doherty, research director at Envisioneering Inc. Though some makers have devised ways to reduce the risk of burn-in, such as moving a static screen image slightly every few minutes, none has come up with a perfect solution yet, he said.

"Ten to 20 hours can produce a visible difference" on the screen, said Doherty. "But you don't want to have a visible difference on the screen when you're trying to watch a movie."

"It's much more work than it ought to be," he said of his research. "You go to three stores and ask the salespeople about digital, and they give you four different answers."

"In any case, there's a lot of burn-in," said Camilo Arbelaez, a plasma TV owner in Mount Pleasant, in an e-mail. He runs two channels of CNN on his plasma set tuned into the same channel for long enough, and that image may begin to etch itself into the screen -- meaning that you could end up seeing the faint ghost of the CNN or Spike TV logo even when you change channels.

A cheap LCD will look very ugly, said Arbelaez. "The picture contrast is sometimes not as good as it is on a $200 [cathode-ray tube] TV."

"The drawbacks of LCDs are that they run hot and often use internal fans for cooling, heat isn't an issue with LCDs -- they also use far less electricity in the bargain."

But LCDs have their advantages, too. "To be honest, LCDs are the best compromise," said Arbelaez. "You don't get burn-in, you don't get black strips at the top and bottom on letterbox format DVDs will eventually leave an indelible impression. But he figured a plasma set would still be worthwhile if he gets at least five years of use out of it."

"The drawback? Some say the picture isn't always as bright or crisp."

The drawback? Some say the picture isn't always as bright or crisp. "A cheap LCD will look very ugly, said Arbelaez. "The picture contrast is sometimes not as good as it is on a $200 [cathode-ray tube] TV.

To the average shopper, the most important consideration is price. "Private label is a really good way to get a deal," said Arbelaez. "It's much less expensive than name brands, and the picture quality is comparable." But he added, "You need to consider the technology.

"If you're going to buy a $1,000 television, you could get a CRT for $500. But if you're buying a $2,000 television, you could get a plasma for $1,500.

The biggest worry among plasma-TV owners and those thinking of joining them is the threat of "burn-in." Know those logos on the corner of the screen that identify the network you're watching? Leave a trace of it. Arbelaez figures that the lines that appear on his screen when he changes his set's volume or the network he's watching are due to burn-in.

"I always worry about burn-in," said Arbelaez. "I'm interested in buying a new television, but I'm not sure if I want a plasma." But he added, "If you're willing to move around the channels occasionally, you can probably minimize the problem."

For those enticed by the possibility of having a television set that looks wafer-thin from across the room, there are two types of "flat-panel" sets available: plasma and LCD. For those who want a set that looks like it's engraved in the wall, there's rear-projection, which employs plasma, liquid-crystal display, digital light processing or other technologies to cut down on the bulk of the set.

But these growing sales don't necessarily mean that everybody has a clear idea of what they're buying. In Washington, Envisioneering Inc. -- a group of high-tech electronics stores -- the sets tend to be large and undeniably slick-looking. The idea to get there is to take the width of your TV stand and cross-reference it against the thickness of your wallet. But the advent of new technologies has made things a little confusing. Plasma? LCD? DLP? These are some of the terms you might not have been faced with if you haven't gone shopping in more years.

To Be Picture-Perfect, a Choice of 3

The number of new HDTVs -- or high-definition televisions -- has been rising dramatically. According to the Consumer Electronics Association, 2.8 million such televisions were shipped during the first half of this year, the CEA said. That's up from 1.1 million HDTVs shipped during the same period last year.

But shoppers specifically looking for an HDTV should know that not all plasma sets are high-definition. The CEA defines HDTVs as televisions with at least 1,280 lines of resolution. But less-expensive sets you see advertised typically have a lower resolution -- a less-detailed picture, in other words -- called EDTV (or enhanced-definition TV).

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"It's much more work than it ought to be," he said of his research. "You go to three stores and ask the salespeople about digital, and they give you four different answers."

"What's more, LCD screens come in smaller sizes than plasma screens -- typical sets are 30 inches and mirrors. These weigh only a little more than many plasma or LCD sets while costing much less. Most plasma sets employ plasma, liquid-crystal display, digital light processing or other technologies to cut down on the bulk of the set."

But Doherty said that the bulk of the sets at the big-box chain stores are plasma sets -- the sets tend to be large and undeniably slick-looking. Plasma is the technology that has probably captured the most attention among shoppers at local electronics stores -- the sets tend to be large and undeniably slick-looking.