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## Electronics

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## Electronics Buying Guide ...



Chuck Worst

*Chuck Worst, our Electronics expert, helps you assess your needs before you make your product decision. Look for other buying guides, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and glossaries written by Chuck throughout the Electronics area.*

So many electronics are available for your boat, how do you know what you need? Here are some overall recommendations to bear in mind when selecting marine electronics.

- **Buy state of the art equipment at the time of your need that fits your budget and boat.** Then don't worry about the introduction of new models.
- **Strongly consider product performance and reliability.** Select products from well-known and reputable manufacturers. The performance is far more important than features, whistles and bells.
- **Remember that you still need traditional tools.** For example, paper charts and a reliable magnetic compass are still a necessity should you lose power or suffer an equipment failure.

There are three main categories of electronics that you need to consider when putting together your electronics package -- [communication](#), [navigation](#) and [depth sounders](#). A package with these three elements will give you peace of mind.

### Communication

Communication tools allow you to talk with other boats, locks, bridges or marinas and to monitor weather. Some form of communication will give you set your mind at ease, especially when you need a tow. Marine communications consist of more than radios. Some of the communications tools you might consider include a VHF, SSB or CB radio, satellite communications, cellular phones or a hailer.

### Navigation

Traditional instruments like magnetic compasses are still very much part of navigation but one stand out tool is GPS (Global Positioning System) - a wonderful tool that is easier to use than anything we've had in the past. It works in all weather conditions and anywhere in the world. Use the GPs with a chartplotter, autopilot and a computer with navigation software and you have a two-way communication system working for you. Add the anti-collision security of using radar for guidance through fog or darkness.

### Depth Sounders

Water depth beneath the hull is among the most basic of a boaters needs. Your depth sounder (or echo sounder) will also aid you in poor visibility by showing you the contours on the bottom and comparing them with the paper charts. Depth sounders are available in several forms including digital sounders and fish finders. Digital sounders provide a digital readout of the

water depth but a fishfinder or video sounder can show fish, bottom structure and hardness and can be very useful to fishermen and cruisers alike.

### **Electronics Integration**

Integration refers to the distribution of navigation data among various electronic equipment. For example, a GP's receiver can send waypoint range and bearing information to an autopilot (when properly configured). This lets the autopilot automatically steer the boat to the target waypoint.

One should be cautious and take a conservative approach to integration since it can be overdone, beyond what is useful or necessary. And don't forget to learn to use your electronics independently to avoid failure of an integrated system far out at sea.

### **How to Navigate iiCaptain's Electronics Area**

Each sub-category within Electronics offers an overview of the product offering, a glossary specific to that category, and often accompanying Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). As we receive customer comments and questions, we will update this information. Please e-mail [customerservice@iicaptain.com](mailto:customerservice@iicaptain.com) if you have questions or comments.

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