

GADGETS

The Big Picture, Condensed

PORTABLE MONITORS ALLOW DIRECTORS TO AVOID VIDEO VILLAGE AND STAY CLOSER TO THE ACTION
BY KAREN IDELSON

» With all the complicated issues that can plague a production, directors, DPs and digital imaging technicians (DITs) long to see things on set just as they will look later on the big—or any other intended—screen. In their quest to get a glimpse of how their work will play for audiences and avoid or correct problems in the moment, many have turned to small, or small-ish, monitors that can be easily carried from place to place throughout the course of the day.

Directors have been using these monitors for years, and there are a large number of options that can work for just about any production. Several companies offer products designed to weather the demands of challenging locations, while others offer simpler, less expensive equipment that can handle a less pressured work environment.

“It really helps in terms of communicating with actors, because I like to be able to speak to the actors in a normal tone of voice,” says Hanelle M. Culpepper, who has recently directed episodes of *Supergirl*, *The Flash* and *Gotham*. “If you’re doing an intimate scene and you want to be able to give one quick note before going again, it’s much easier to be using a small monitor than sitting in village. I can move faster and I can see everything as I’m standing there with everyone.”

Here we look at three of the leading options out there:

THE BASICS: This monitor is 7” and weighs just over 11 ounces. Since the A7S has an HDMI 1.4 input, it can be used by filmmakers working with UHD 4K. You’re also able to create customizable shortcuts for your most-used monitor functions. The monitor also offers image flip, check fields, pixel-to-pixel, audio-level meters, pixel zoom, color temperature selection, timecode and other advanced functions. Its price is listed at a very reasonable \$159.

IN PRACTICE: The A7S earns its positive reviews for being functional, getting the job done with relative ease and hitting the right price point for experienced users and newbies alike. With many smaller monitors, there are user frustrations over compatibility issues, but the A7S seems to receive fewer criticisms than most on this point, which is hopeful news for those looking for a simplified setup time and less troubleshooting.

TAKEAWAY: This monitor seems to hit that sweet spot where very few pieces of equipment ever land. The lightweight and 4K compatibility also make it a gem for those who find themselves in an upgraded environment but don’t want to bust their bank on a handheld monitor. Whether or not your workplace adopts 4K soon, it’s good to know you won’t have to dump your favorite small monitors if they do.



» **A7S Full HD 7-Inch Monitor with 4K Camera Assist (Red Case)**

» FSI DM250

THE BASICS: As a top-of-the-line monitor, the FSI DM250 offers users all the bells and whistles starting with robust, consistent color management. The monitor also boasts integration with software packages such as FSI's DM Series IP Remote Utility, Pomfort's LiveGrade Pro, QTake's Grade Module, FireFly Cinema's FirePlay and FireDay, and Filmlight's Prelight. There's a zero-delay fast mode that makes it possible to use the monitor on set with apps that need instantaneous video processing speed.

IN PRACTICE: Users of this monitor are quick to praise FSI for being responsive to questions and comments about their equipment, which is good to know since the DM250 offers a complex set of functions. Overall, FSI seems to be pushing the edge of its technology and actively engaging with users to improve what it does. The monitors themselves are also reputed to be the kind of tough machines that can withstand the most demanding locations and challenging shoots. Because of the customer service



behind them and their high level of accuracy, they've won over DITs, as well as directors and cinematographers. Of course, all of that comes with a price and productions will have to weigh cost against need.

TAKEAWAY: At a \$24,995 purchase price, this monitor isn't for all budgets. But if you can rent one, it may be worth the investment if your production requires an environment that will give you some pushback. It's also designed to make things like on-set color management much easier.

» Elvid WCM-758G SkyVision 7" Wireless LCD Monitor

THE BASICS: This lightweight monitor comes in at just one pound, and has a 7" screen with 1024x600 resolution, so you can see either SD or HD and not have to contend with huge scaling problems, regardless of the video resolution. It has a built-in 5.8 GHz receiver and is also designed for use with drones. There's a check field mode that's designed to help with calibration as it shows only the chosen color on the screen. It features a tool to allow the onscreen image to fit 16:9 or 4:3, and buttons on the front of the monitor provide especially functional shortcuts to camera, focus and checkfield modes. Its \$299.95 list price makes it affordable for a variety of production budgets.

IN PRACTICE: This agile monitor has earned raves for ease of use in a range of circumstances, and is considered a sound choice for the price. The shortcut controls will no doubt cut down on the overall learning curve when DGA members are introduced to this equipment. But that's not the whole story. Some reviews complain that the image can be a bit soft or that initial setup was a challenge and they faced image interruptions.

TAKEAWAY: If you have the time for setup and troubleshooting, this budget-friendly monitor could be a solid choice for those looking to stay close to actors in a tight space or work with drones.

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Hanelle M. Culpepper
Director: *Supergirl*, *Gotham*



PHOTOS: (TOP) FLANDERS SCIENTIFIC; (BOTTOM) ELVID CINEMA