

The Best Way to Save Money on Your Avionics

Today everyone is looking to save money in that unending quest for the best price. Avoiding some common errors will not only save you money in the long run but can save you lots of time and effort.

Tip #1: Buy from a fellow pilot, specially trained in avionics, who can properly assess your needs.

Even if you call 10 different places, you won't find a substantial difference in prices between major avionics companies. Nearly all avionics companies shop each other for price and the best avionics companies may only be a few dollars higher than the marginal ones. You may spend hours on the phone all over the country in an effort to find the cheapest price. And in the end, you can almost count on finding the poorest staff and customer service as well. You'll probably talk with an untrained, uninformed operator, not a fellow pilot. The order taker is interested only in your credit card number and shipping address. They cannot tell you if you're buying the wrong item or give you even the most basic advice. When you ask for a unit, they will blindly send it to you. Heaven forbid you need any information.

Tip #2: Buy your avionics from a reputable avionics company.

Buying any avionics is a major purchase. These are not \$20 to \$30 items. Buying avionics from a company that sells charts, oil, paint, clipboards, T-shirts, rivets, upholstery, etc. can be risky. A company that spreads itself thin by trying to supply all things to all customers is unlikely to do anything well. Buy avionics from a company that specializes in avionics.

Tip #3: Deal with companies who offer customer technical services to handle any problems and questions with installation or service.

Manufacturers cannot always deal directly with pilots. They simply do not have the manpower to handle every pilot's problems or question. That's why they have dealers. Many manufacturers may in fact refer you back to the selling dealer. Beware the dealers who are generally too busy, unwilling, or unable, to give you the product assistance you need. Select a dealer who is capable of providing technical assistance and supporting the product after the sale.

Tip #4: Does the company with the lowest price always have the equipment in stock?

Many companies will try to draw you in with a low price. But if you call them to order, they don't have any inventory. Why? They don't have the money to buy the inventory. Some will wait until a number of customers send in their money before they place an order with the manufacturer. Because most manufacturers have lead times of several weeks to several months, the customer generally can wait for many weeks before the equipment finally arrives. Essentially, these companies operate on the margin, using your money to maintain cash flow and borrowing from future orders to fill yours. You might eventually get your radio; unless the company goes out of business first.

Tip #5: Avoid buying low priced equipment based on price alone because "It's a good deal."

Several years ago a new company introduced a low cost handheld transceiver. At only \$299, it was the cheapest, lowest quality handheld on the market and it even came in a nice case with a bunch of accessories. After selling thousands of them, the company went bankrupt and closed

their doors. Pilots who had purchased the units were left without any factory to handle repairs, supply accessories or replacement battery packs. Today, these used units are virtually worthless. Not long ago, another company took out a full page ad for a handheld GPS with moving map at an unbelievable price. Pilots blindly sent in their money. After waiting months they got what looked like an electronic calculator. The company quickly went out of business. If, at the time, these customers invested in equipment from reputable manufacturers, they would have had a far better unit in terms of performance and quality. In addition, the current resale value would still have been in the hundreds of dollars. Furthermore, factory support and parts availability are assured, as you would expect from such leading avionics companies.

NEW OR RECONDITIONED? Should I Buy New or Reconditioned Equipment?

This is one of the most commonly asked questions. When available, buying reconditioned equipment will save you money. Certainly if the model you are looking for has only been on the market for a short period of time, finding a reconditioned unit is unlikely. However, depending on the category of equipment you need, reconditioned equipment can make a lot of practical and financial sense.

The biggest benefit of buying reconditioned equipment is that the previous owner got to take the depreciation on the radio.

After that initial depreciation, most radios tend to depreciate very slowly. However, if you want equipment with the latest technology and features and a full manufacturer's warranty, buy new equipment.

RECONDITIONED EQUIPMENT BUYING TIPS...

Tip #1: Avoid "Working When Removed" radios.

Unfortunately, there are many degrees of "working." Many working radios will not meet FAA serviceable specifications which means your shop cannot sign it off in your aircraft. Furthermore, a radio that was "Working When Removed" three years ago may not be worth too much today.

Tip #2: Always get a full warranty on a radio.

A promise that you can return the radio for a refund if it doesn't work isn't very much, particularly if you go to all the trouble and expense of installing it in your panel first. Unless this is a well known company, you should consider that you could send the unit back and still end up without a refund.

Tip #3: Beware salvage radios.

Salvage operators may or may not be experts in avionics.

Some salvage operators offer a "if it doesn't work send it back" warranty and a harness which may be the unusable tangle of wires out of the old aircraft. Be sure you know what you are getting when attempting to save money with salvage radios.

Tip #4: Avoid any deals that are too good to be true.

In the avionics business, margins are razor thin on new and reconditioned radios. If the price is too low, the radio is either someone else's lemon, out of a wreck, missing critical parts, accessories and cables, or worse. ■

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