

## How to Buy Hi-Fi

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*Intimated by hi-fi shops? Take a quick look at our "How to Buy Hi-Fi" survival Guide.*

**A**re you interested in buying hi-fi from a real hi-fi shop? Well, it would be a pretty good guess to assume so as you are now reading this article from one of Australia's longest established specialist retail hi-fi stores and on one of the most authoritative and comprehensive websites available. However, this page is advice for people who don't normally come into hi-fi stores, who may feel a little intimidated and would like some useful tips. By hi-fi store, we mean a specialist store that has its core business in selling hi-fi standard audio visual components. The dictionary definition for hi-fi is "to a degree of excellence."



### **Beware! Enter at own risk!**

If you are like many people, you'll hate shopping. You'll hate being pounced upon by salespersons – male and female – and you'll be keeping a tight reign on your wallet. Unfortunately, if you really want the best value for money, the best sound for your dollar, then it is not the solution to avoid the

salesperson! However, when you buy hi-fi or home cinema from a 'pile them high, sell 'em cheap' merchant it usually means you have no real idea whether the product 'sounds good' or is the best long term value for you in your home. You need a proper demonstration. Reading of course can help, especially when it comes to getting an idea on the quality of a brand, or the type of product that will best suit your needs. Of course, it depends on whose opinion you trust.

Interestingly, most of our business and that of similar stores comes from either repeat custom or referrals. Around 30% of Audio Trends customers have previously never been in a hi-fi store. So, if that description fits, then you will not be out of place!

Hi-fi is such a subjective business and so there is no substitute for the personal touch. So, how do you cope with an excursion into this potentially baffling world? Let's start with a look at what makes a good salesperson...

### **The secrets of a good salesperson**

More than likely, the person who greets you is going to be the person who will show you around and talk to you about your needs. Anyone in sales should recognise that in order to make a sale, the customer has to be satisfied. This is really a lot more important than this product verses that product. However,

this basic fact and service is often more elusive to find these days as big stores, in order to reduce overheads, cut back on essential staff training. Just a bit further on that subject, one famous department store that once-upon-a-time had a hi-fi department and where I worked at many years ago had an interesting saying. In big, bold type on their wages form they stated that "wages were the biggest expense" and in very small type followed "but good staff is our best asset." Sure, they are still in business, but it is well known that you can sometimes struggle to even get someone to even take your money – never mind get knowledgeable assistance!

A specialist store is usually a lot different. The staff don't usually need to be taught this basic requirement – it usually comes naturally with their own enthusiasm for you and the products they sell. They have a genuine desire to help you with what will best suit your needs. A good sales person is taught to ascertain what knowledge, if any, the customer possesses. He does this before any product is introduced to the discussion.

The sales assistant should be asking you questions like listed to ascertain your thoughts on the following:

- What type of music do you enjoy?
- Will it double as a home cinema?
- How big/small is your room?
- How is it furnished?
- How loud does it need to play?
- What are you currently using?
- How many will have access to the system?

Answers to these questions will help him/her to determine your level of knowledge, so they don't lose you when showing you products and help simplify the choices. A successful sale requires the sales staff to understand your

requirements clearly and this information will help them to deliver products that fully satisfy. You should give some thought to these **before** leaving for the store.

### Prepare for the excursion

Let's assume that you are now planning a visit to Audio Trends, we cannot vouch about other. Firstly and very importantly, the products we sell are vetted before we stock them. We actually audition them carefully and consider things like build quality, reputation and after-sales-service, as well as value for money. You need to do the same. There are pages elsewhere in this web site which show the variety and depth of our stock. Most specialist stores, including Audio Trends do not keep every brand and every model. This only leads to confusion for the customer, and what's the point, other people can do that better than us! By nature of us being a long established specialist retailer, we've weeded out the chaff from the wheat before you visit. Our job is to make sure that our recommendation fits you perfectly.



Before you visit think, what is most important to you. Is it sound? Is it price? Is it looks? What percentage would you put on each of these? Remember that if you try and cram in too many features for a price – especially a low price – then the overall sound quality goes down. This is only logical. Audio Trends customers tend to be more interested in music or home

cinema rather than flashing lights and gadgets. If you are only interested in flash there are a lot of big stores out there with rows upon rows of portable stereos dressed up in big boxes – ‘plastic-fantastics’ as they are usually called!

It is therefore helpful to have a basic idea of what you need. In addition to what the salesperson needs to know, ask yourself the following:

- How important is sound?
- Do I really need everything right now?
- Am I prepared to add to the system later?
- How long do I expect this to last?
- Where will I put it, is space a problem?
- How much am I prepared to spend?

This latter one can be a bit tricky. Some clients have deliberately stated a lower amount than they are prepared to spend! They do this with the belief that the salesperson is going to up-sell them anyway. That may be true of some, but good people are interested in you first and should treat you with respect. If there is a good relationship between both parties, then frank and honest discussions will benefit everyone. You should be able to get a good ‘feel’ for how things are going after about 10 minutes.

Another aspect to consider carefully is your room. Look at your room beforehand, get an idea where you would place the speakers and clap or talk in the room. Is it bright sounding or heavily furnished and dull? Bright sounding rooms don't generally go well with bright equipment. And that is another interesting factor. Equipment does sound different in different environments! A lot of people read the UK publications which tend to prefer

‘warmer’ sounding equipment and conclude that this is the way to go. Not necessarily! A ‘warm’ sounding amplifier with a ‘warm’ sounding speaker system in a heavily furnished room can be a recipe for disaster! All good products, but the combination may not be the most suitable. (Audio Trends has different room environments to better demonstrate these differences including open spaces and tiled family rooms)



### **The big trip**

Good, you have your thoughts together. Whether or not you feel you have to do some further homework is up to you. Most background information you require to visit a hi-fi store can be found settling down with a cup of tea/coffee and plodding through our web site. If you can, pick a weekday or Saturday afternoon as these are traditionally quieter times and you'll certainly get better attention just after the coffee intake for the day!

From my experience, the best service is given to people who are polite but positive. Expressions such as: "I'm interested in a hi-fi/home cinema system, I don't know much about it, but I'll know the right one for me when I hear it" are good. This is not an admission of lack of knowledge. Positive comments to the salesperson shifts the pressure onto them to satisfy your ears, and no-one can argue with them! It is then their responsibility to get it right.

We would also suggest that you never listen to a lot of equipment at one time. Discussing the various qualities of each brand and component in conjunction with your requirements can often eliminate items and thus narrow the choice to just a few items. However, before you make the final decision, yes, listen to the next level up the line. Usually, you'll still be happy with the equipment you have selected. At least it will confirm your thoughts and make you comfortable with your final choice.

Likewise, if you've been reading up and prefer to take the advice of a journalist, then by all means listen to the equipment. But, before taking that final plunge, may we recommend that you say to our staff "ok, let me hear what you would recommend". Again make up your own mind. If you have a really good CD that you are familiar with then by all means take it along. Good hi-fi shops expect you to listen to the equipment with music you like although sometimes we have 'discovered' hidden talent that is not mainstream. Again, ask us what we have available. A final word of advice: Not all CDs are created equal. Digital does not guarantee a quality reproduction. Likewise, burnt or copied CDs should be avoided when it comes to serious auditioning. There is a difference.

### **Specialists are expensive!**

Some hi-fi stores may be expensive but Audio Trends is not an extreme 'high end store'. One look at our **'Special**

**Offers'** page shows we keep a wide range of equipment. By nature we don't keep poor quality stuff and good equipment is usually a little more expensive, but it is normally possible to purchase less but get significantly higher quality. In the end this for most consumers, is more satisfying. Audio Trends has a price policy and competes very well with big discount stores.

Many people mistakenly think that you have to be a technician to come into a store like Audio Trends and yes, this is a common problem in some stores where they often employ 'standover' tactics, talking down to their customers. Leave, or just don't go there if that is the reputation. Audio Trends training policy is don't talk technical, talk in easy to understand and plain language and no, you won't be confused. We would suggest that going to a bulk-store or online shop with hundreds of products picked on features and price is significantly more confusing. Personally, I want someone to vet the products, demonstrate them and give decent back-up service when necessary.

So, we sincerely hope that you are now fully armed and ready to go and say 'hello' to your local hi-fi specialist store. We also hope that you will come and visit Audio Trends in Ringwood – a store with some of the best, friendliest and most enthusiastic people you will meet anywhere!

*Do you agree or disagree with these thoughts? Email us now.*

## **AudioTrends Showroom**

**10 Argent Place, Ringwood, VIC 3134**

**Phone 9874 8233**

Hours: Mon - Thurs 10am to 5.30pm  
Fri 10am to 7pm, Sat 10am to 4pm

