



# PC WORLD



Microphones

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## **The pricey Eyeball Webcam offers good looks and phenomenal audio quality, and it's built for on-the-go Webcasters.**

Sound quality can make or break an online video chat or VoIP phone call, and sometimes a built-in desktop or laptop microphone just doesn't cut it. Blue Microphones' Eyeball is a golf-ball-size, retro-style microphone with a flip-out HD Webcam that delivers great sound and slick looks--for a relatively high price (\$100 as of 4/21/09).

Blue is known for making high-quality microphones, so it's no surprise that the one on this device is the product's most redeeming feature. In other words, even though the Eyeball's Webcam is an "HD" Webcam, you shouldn't expect your video chats to look like something you'd see on Discovery Channel HD or in an IMAX theater. The image quality is fairly vivid, but colors appear dark and dull when the subject isn't perfectly lit.

There's no tedious installation process for this little thing, and it fits easily into a laptop bag or purse, so it's ideal for using on the go. After mounting it to your monitor (which can be a tad awkward due to the nonadjustable mounting clamp), you simply plug it into your PC's USB port and wait for your system to recognize the device.

On Windows Vista, I did have to restart the computer after I plugged it in for the first time. After that, however, I was ready to use a video-chat service. I used Skype, but the device also works with video-supporting instant messaging services such as Google Talk, iChat, Windows Live Messenger, and Yahoo Messenger. When I launched Skype, the program instantly listed the Eyeball Microphone as a Webcam and microphone option.

During my call to a cell phone using the microphone through Skype, the sound quality was far better than in a typical phone-to-phone conversation.

When you're ready to start recording video, you simply push the button on the left side of the microphone, and the postage-stamp-size HD Webcam pops out. Again, the video quality is relatively sharp considering the size of the camera, but it doesn't noticeably surpass the basic quality you can get from most built-in Webcams. Once you're done using the camera, you simply push it back into the side of the microphone.

The Eyeball is more expensive than other Webcams we've seen; but with its cool retro design and great sound quality, it provides solid value for the money. It's rare to find a Webcam with such an emphasis on audio, and the Eyeball definitely delivers on the sound-quality front.