

<http://www.pocket-lint.com/review/3763/microsoft-lifecam-vx-5000-webcam>

Microsoft LifeCam VX-5000 webcam

Will this keep you in the picture?

by Chris Hall published on 9 January 2009

Microsoft have been fairly consistent with their hardware accessories of late, producing peripherals that are well built is not terribly exciting in terms of design. The LifeCam VX-5000 follows that trend. But is this a webcam you should consider?

Sometimes it feels as though there is no real difference other than mounting options between the variety of webcams on offer and you'd be forgiven for saying that about the LifeCam VX-5000. The camera has a gloss black square body, with a shortcut button for diving right into Windows Live Call and getting in contact with Windows Live buddies.

So far, so typical. The biggest difference between this and other models is the stand on the back. Taking the form of a bendy rubberised strip, it allows the VX-5000 to be widely adjusted. It will happily sit atop a CRT monitor or desk with no problems, but designed with such flexibility, you'd expect it to easily sit on your laptop.

Sadly it doesn't. The part of the stand nearest the body of the camera has no flexibility in it. That means the first 2cm don't bend at all, so you can't just clamp it to your laptop, you have to try and bend the rest of the stand round to offer support further down. With laptops getting thinner, this isn't convenient, and whilst happy with the flexibility in other scenarios, the poor mounting on a laptop makes this less convenient than you'd first think.

There is a small degree of swivel in the camera head, but only horizontally, so getting the exact position depends on the stand being correctly set. As said this is pretty easy on a solid base, but not on a laptop.

Moving along, the front of the camera houses a small blue light that will tell you when the camera



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is active and a microphone for all your calls. The light is just about the right brightness too, so doesn't dazzle you when you are talking into the camera. The microphone too is pretty good, better than most built-in mics on notebooks.

The camera will give you a 640 x 480 resolution for video capture, easily dropping lower if you want to save conversion times when filming for web or mobile device usage. It will also capture stills at 1.3MP.

The performance overall is pretty typical for this type of small format webcam. It's adequate for your common tasks online, chatting with friends and video calling, and is fine for web-based filming, but it does suffer quickly in changing light conditions. The VX-5000 does react quicker than some webcams we've seen, so if you are moving around in front of the camera it adjusts pretty quickly, so there aren't too many lags whilst it switches from light to dark.

That said it deals with dark much better than light. Light causes a blow out of the pixels, especially light reflecting off skin, so if you sit facing a window or side-on to a window then it will struggle. Your best option is to close the blinds and avoid strong light sources.

As with all Microsoft webcams, it comes with the standard LifeCam software, requiring a quick installation and offering control over the settings, as well as standalone support for recording your own video and grabbing photos. The LifeCam software also gives you access to quick functions like editing images and video, emailing and posting to Windows Live Spaces. If you mainly use a video application like Skype, you can probably ignore the Microsoft software after a tinker with the settings.

VERDICT

It is a compact and smart looking little webcam that copes well with the demands of general webcam usage, from recording short internet

At a glance

What is it?

Webcam

Good

Size, good build quality, indicator light

Bad

Stand not great for laptops, struggles with bright light and contrasty scenes

Verdict

A compact webcam that copes well with web usage, but is sadly let down by the stand

Price £30

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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videos, to chatting on Skype. Problems with the quality are pretty common to webcams and things are not so different here.

But sadly we cannot recommend this for those on the move because of the frustrations with getting it stable on the lid of a notebook. It is fine if you are happy to have it on a desk, but if you want it at eyeline then things are not as stable as we'd like them to be.