



## 10 Ways to Turn a Depthfinder Into a Very Good Fishfinder

**M**any anglers buy a depthfinder, read just enough of its owner's manual to complete the installation, hit the "On" button, and then let the unit run itself. That works because the auto modes in today's electronics are plenty smart. But those who go auto are missing out on getting a lot more fishing value for their money.

Some extra thought before the installation, along with a few simple manual tweaks, can usually increase performance while greatly improving a depthfinder's human-to-machine interface.



ALLAN TARVID PHOTOS

■ *Going beyond the automatic mode teaches you a lot about sonar, and helps you get more from a unit. Spending a day or two on the water playing with feature adjustments instead of fishing is time well spent.*

Follow these 10 suggestions, the majority *not* found in the owner's manuals, and you'll not only get the maximum performance from your depthfinder, but you'll end up making it a worthy fishfinder along the way.

**1. Mount the unit where you can see and reach it.** If it's going on the console, the closer it is to the driver's natural line of sight the better. Walleye fishermen who drive from the console and back troll from the transom need the unit positioned where it can be seen from both places. Up front, bow-mounted units should be visible to fishermen seated or standing on the front deck.

**2. Think twice before flush-mounting a fishfinder.** Flush-mounting may be stylish, but it's not practical. If the unit is flush-mounted you can't tilt or swivel the unit to avoid glare. The closer to horizontal a

flush-mounted unit up on the bow is positioned, the greater the chance that rainwater will pool on its screen and shorten its life. Flush-mounting does not provide any cushioning, so units must deal with every bump and jolt. Finally, when a flush-mounted unit needs to be replaced, good luck finding one that will fit in the same hole.

**3. Aftermarket brackets rule.** Brackets, like those made by RAM, offer infinite angle adjustment and enough vertical and horizontal travel to mount two units where one unit's factory bracket might not fit. They also

make it easier to remove a unit for trailering, storage, repair or replacement. And, their rubber ball joints cushion a lot of the shock and vibration suffered by units riding in their factory brackets.

**4. Crank up the sensitivity.** Some water conditions are less than perfect for sonar operation. Setting the sensitivity on automatic is fine while cruising. But when you stop to fish you need to turn it up. Increase the sensitivity until you see random dots of interference

all over the screen, then turn it down until they disappear. You'll see more underwater detail if you do that each time the bottom depth changes five feet.

**5. Filter the use of filters.** Surface clutter and interference filters usually reduce screen detail. If you don't have problems that call for their use, turn them off. If you do see interference, turn the filters up just high enough to remove the interference. No higher. I'd rather look through a tiny bit of interference and still be able to see important details than risk hiding those details with too much filtering.

**6. Keep the bottom where it belongs.** Today's automatic range-adjustment features often keep the lake bottom's indication in the middle of the depthfinder's screen. This cuts screen resolution in half, wasting half of that

vertical pixel count that you probably paid extra for. Eliminate this problem by switching to manual depth-ranging and choosing a range that puts the lake bottom at the bottom of the screen.

**7. Experiment with backlighting.** Almost all color displays and many monochrome screens are more visible in bright daylight with maximum backlighting. When you can't see the screen picture as well as you'd like, try different backlight levels until you find the one that makes the screen the easiest to view.

**8. Run a background check.** Color displays let you display the screen's background in several different colors. The default setting is usually white. But under troublesome light conditions choosing blue, black, or an inverse "night mode" can make the screen picture much more visible. Don't forget to experiment with the screen's brightness and contrast levels, too.



■ *Manually switching to a range that puts the bottom contour at the bottom of the screen — not near the middle — lets your unit use its full vertical pixel count to show you better detail.*

**9. Use split-screen zoom.** Split screens are great. By displaying a "zoom" view of the depth segment holding the most fish on one side of your screen and a "top-to-bottom" view on the other side, you never miss a thing. The zoom view gives you a magnified look at the fish, while the other view keeps you from missing fish above or below the zoomed-in area.

**10. Fear no adjustments.** Don't hesitate to experiment with every feature on your depthfinder because you're afraid you might permanently foul it up. Almost every unit has the option somewhere in its menu to reset everything to the out-of-the-box factory settings so you can start over with a clean slate. **BWB**