

Tried and true gifts for tech lovers

December 7 2010, By Kevin Hunt

This is no fantasy-league gift guide compiled from weekly sales fliers and the Hammacher Schlemmer catalog.

This guide comes with a pledge: I have tested, evaluated or otherwise observed with excruciating, bug-eyed concentration all products listed here. (Asterisk: That does not guarantee you will like them, too.)

1. Grace Eco Extreme All-Terrain Speaker Case (\$50, gracedigitalaudio.com): A heartier waterproof case for your mobile device, secured in a mesh pouch inside the storage area. A partier, too: The Eco Extreme, 8 inches tall and 5 deep, includes a 3-inch speaker that runs on three AA batteries. Decent sound, too, until the volume is pushed too high.
2. Eton Soulra solar-powered sound system for iPhone/Touch (\$200, etonsoulra.com): A rugged, sweet-sounding speaker dock powered by a flip-up solar panel. All hail Ra, the Egyptian sun god.
3. Microlab MD332 (\$120, microlabav.com): A clock-radio disaster - a 24-hour clock, a terrible radio and way too big - but the year's supreme-bargain iPod dock. Good enough to use as a TV soundbar. Hard to find: Try the secondary dealers at Amazon.com.
4. Pelican i1015 protective case for iPhone/Touch (\$37, pelican.com): In the roughest, most rugged terrain - like jostling in line for first-cut prime rib at the holiday carving station - your [iPhone](#) or Touch needs the strongest protection.

The Pelican i1015 puts your device in protective custody, shielded from water, dirt and au jus in a clear-lid plastic case, resting on a rubberized bed. (The Droid and other smart phones will also fit.)

These heavy-duty cases have a [headphone jack](#) on the exterior but prevent access to the device's controls. For that, look for slightly less bulletproof cases from Otter Box (otterbox.com).

5. Ion VCR 2 PC (\$100, ionaudio.com): Looks like a VCR but also transfers old videotapes to your computer. Easy to use.

6. Audio-Technica ATH-ANC27 noise-cancellation headphones (\$120, audio-technica.com): Maybe this isn't the year to spring for the \$300 Bose QuiteComfort noise cancellation cans. Make the ATH-ANC27 your post-recession choice.

Good sound, decent external noise suppression and a durable soft-shell carry case. Available online for less than \$50.

7. Clear iSpot 4G Hotspot for Apple devices (\$99 with service starting at \$45 a month, no contract, clear.com/spot): At its best, Clear's new 4G service reaches mobile download speeds of close to 6 megabits per second - oh-so-close to a tower, I hit more than 11 mbps regularly - but sometimes 4G is nothing more than 3G with a marketing slogan.

The go-anywhere iSpot disc feeds Wi-Fi service to up to eight Apple devices, including the iPad. For non-Apple devices, try the Clear's Spot 4G.

Check for availability, and signal strength, in your area.

8. Klipsch Lightspeaker (\$600 bundle includes two speakers, transmitter and remote control, klipsch.com, lightspeaker.net): Just what you've

been waiting for: a speaker-LED light combo that fits into a recessed can and a standard Edison socket. Send music wirelessly into the kitchen or den from a computer or stereo in another room.

Note: The light is controlled only by the transmitter, not the on-wall dimmer switch for the rest of the room's lighting.

9. Mophie Juice Pack charger (\$35, mophie.com), FatCat's ChargeCard (\$60, fatcatpower.com): Anyone with a smart phone or iPod can use a stocking-stuffer charger.

I like using the Apple-only Mophie with my Touch - not for recharging but for holding a full charge, hoping to extend the device's long-term battery life. For all-purpose recharging, try the ChargeCard, which works with almost any mobile device, including GPS units.

10. Panasonic Viera TC-P50VT25 50-inch 3-D plasma HDTV (\$2,100, panasonic.com): Easily the best TV I saw all year during in-home auditions. No, I don't really care about 3-D, either. As a real-world 2-D machine, this Panasonic comes close to the late, legendary Pioneer Kuro sets.

Don't want to spend this much? You're the boss this holiday season, with brand-name 42-inch sets for as low as \$500. If you're not going to do your homework, at least download an app (try CNET Reviews) to avoid making a bad in-store impulse buy.

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