

Gift guide for tech fiends

November 26 2010, By Troy Wolverton

It's that time of year again - time to start thinking about holiday gifts.

I've been on the lookout for tech gift ideas and have found quite a few for everyone from the budget shopper to the big spender. The good news is that, thanks to falling prices, you don't have to spend a lot of money to get some great gifts.

UP TO \$50: Apple is offering its [iPod shuffle](#), revamped for this year with buttons, for \$49. For less than that, you can get an MP3 player from SanDisk that includes an FM tuner and a screen.

If you're looking for a portable device that will do more than just play music, you can find an assortment of entry-level smart phones running Google's Android software for anywhere from free of charge to about \$50 - not including the monthly service costs, of course. Among them: Motorola's Charm and Cliq on T-Mobile and Motorola's Citrus and LG's Ally on Verizon.

If you've got a gamer in the household, you'll find nearly all games for the Nintendo [Wii](#) and DS, including top titles such as "Donkey Kong Country Returns" in this price range. You'll also find lots of games for the PlayStation 3, PlayStation Portable and [Xbox 360](#), including all of the titles designed for Microsoft's new Kinect motion-detecting accessory for the Xbox 360.

And don't forget gift cards. A \$50 gift card to Amazon.com or [iTunes](#) can buy a lot of digital music, videos and apps.

\$50 TO \$100: On the smart phone front, stepping up to this price range gives you a greater selection of devices that tend to be newer or more capable than the less expensive ones. Apple's iPhone 3GS - last year's model, but nearly as capable as this year's [iPhone 4](#) - is priced at \$99. You'll also find a nice collection of Android devices, including the new Motorola Flipout from AT&T, the Motorola Devour on Verizon, the Samsung Behold II on T-Mobile and the Samsung Intercept on Sprint.

For media lovers, you'll find Apple TV, which allows users to watch videos from iTunes, Netflix and YouTube on their televisions, and Roku's line of digital media players, which offer a wider variety of video content providers. You can also find some more powerful iPod speaker systems, including JBL's doughnut-shaped On Stage Micro, in this range.

On the game front, you'll find recently released or soon-to-be-released hits such as "Halo: Reach" for the Xbox 360, "Gran Turismo 5" for the [PlayStation 3](#) and "Call of Duty: Black Ops" for both game machines. You can also get Sony's motion-sensing PlayStation Move accessory pack. And you can now find a brand-new game system - OnLive's MicroConsole - for about \$100.

But digital cameras might provide the most bang for the buck in this price range. You'll find a variety of entry-level cameras from top brands such as Canon, Nikon, Casio and Kodak for \$60 to \$100. And entry level isn't what it used to be: These cameras have features formerly found on high-end models, such as 10-megapixel sensors, 3-times optical zoom lenses and even the ability, in some cases, to shoot high-definition videos.

\$100 TO \$250: This price range moves into the sweet spot for tech gadgets. For gamers, you'll find mainstream systems, including the Nintendo Wii (\$200), Nintendo's line of DS handhelds (\$130 to \$170), Microsoft's 4-gigabyte Xbox 360 (\$200) and Sony's [PlayStation Portable](#)

line, with models ranging from \$170 to about \$200. You'll also find Microsoft's new Kinect accessory for the Xbox 360 (\$150), and Apple's entry-level iPod touch (\$229), which has been catching on as a new-style handheld game device.

Most major e-readers are also in this price range, thanks to price drops over the past year. For less than \$200, you can get the Wi-Fi-only or Wi-Fi plus 3G models of either Amazon's Kindle or Barnes & Noble's Nook. And for \$250, you can get the Nook Color, which has a color screen and is effectively a low-end tablet computer.

Smart phones in this price range present some great options, including not only the 16-gigabyte [iPhone](#) 4 but notable Android models, such as the HTC Incredible on Verizon, the HTC Evo 4G and Samsung Epic 4G on Sprint, and the Samsung Captivate on AT&T. You'll also find some of the new Windows Phone 7 devices, including the Samsung Focus on AT&T.

For creative types and those looking to record family memories, you'll find some top-notch point-and-shoot cameras, including some finger-slim models from Sony, and some from Samsung with up to 15-times optical zoom lenses. You'll also find all models of Cisco Systems' simple Flip video cameras and Kodak's rival line of Playtouch and Z-series video cameras.

And there's more, including entry-level HD televisions up to about 26 inches, entry-level netbook computers and even Sony's Dash (\$200), a wireless Internet device that acts as a photo frame, alarm clock and even as a simple tablet computer.

\$250 TO \$500: In this price range you'll find Apple's iPad, which is at or near the top of many wish lists this holiday season. Apple has conveniently priced its 16-gigabyte, Wi-Fi-only model at a cool \$500.

With a free software update expected this month, the gadget will be able to multitask, stream movies and music to Apple TV and wirelessly send documents to be printed on a local printer.

Those not ready to make the jump to a keyboard-less device will find a wide range of Windows-based netbooks and thin-and-light laptops in this range. For about \$500, you'll generally find a laptop with a full-size 15-inch display, 320-gigabyte hard drive, 3 to 4 gigabytes of memory and a midrange Intel or AMD processor.

On the HDTV front, you'll find screens of up to 46 inches and some LED-backlit models in smaller sizes. Best Buy, for example, is offering a 46-inch, 60-hertz TV in its Dynex brand for \$500.

In gaming, you'll find all of Sony's PlayStation 3s in this range, including the new Move console bundle, which includes both the console and the motion-sensing controllers for \$400. You'll also find all but one of the Xbox 360 models, including two with the Kinect accessory (\$300 for the 4-gigabyte model and \$400 for the 250-gigabyte one).

For the snap-happy, you'll find a nice variety of digital cameras and high-definition camcorders in this range, including some low-end DSLRs. If you're looking for something different, you can check out Fujifilm's new FinePix W3 camera (\$450 on sale), which takes stereoscopic 3-D pictures. Note, though, that if you go with the W3, you're going to want to have a 3-D television or computer to view the images you take with it.

As a parent, one thing I've got my eye on is Lego's Mindstorms NXT 2.0 robot kit (\$280), with which kids can build and program simple robots.

ABOVE \$500: Beyond \$500, you can get all kinds of neat things, if you're in the mood and your wallet is willing.

On the tablet front, you'll find the broad range of Apple's iPads, including the top-of-the-line 64-gigabyte model with 3G networking (\$830), which is as close to a perfect gadget as you'll find these days. If you're looking for a tablet that's smaller, can run Adobe's Flash and isn't tied to Apple, there's Samsung's Galaxy Tab (\$600), which is the first tablet of note running [Android](#).

Those in the market for a laptop will find a wide variety of desktop replacements, gaming machines and Apple's entire notebook lineup. The standout model among all these is Apple's 13-inch MacBook Air (\$1,300 for the 128-gigabyte model and \$1,600 for the 256-gigabyte model), which is superfast, ultralight, razor-thin and way cool.

For the living room, you'll find numerous 3-D-enabled, LED-backlit and Internet-connectible televisions. If you want and can afford the top of the line, Samsung's 9000 series televisions (\$2,600 for the 46-inch model, \$3,100 for the 55-inch one) are stunning with their thin profile - less than one-third of an inch - and burnished stainless bezel. And their picture's not bad, either.

If you get a 3-D television, you'll want to watch more on it than the handful of 3-D movies and programs now available. Panasonic's 3-D digital camcorder (\$1,400), one of the first such camcorders targeted at consumers, can fill the need. The camcorder has the ability to shoot in 1080p and dual-image sensors to generate the stereoscopic effect.

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