

Troy Wolverton: A gift guide for tech lovers

November 29 2013, by Troy Wolverton

FOR THE LIVING ROOM: If your loved ones are looking for an easy way to watch Internet content on their big-screen TVs, Google's Chromecast (\$35) is an inexpensive choice. Owners use their smartphones, tablets or computers as a remote control to tune in Netflix, Hulu Plus, Pandora and other online content.

For a much wider range of online content, check out Roku's latest line of digital players (\$50 to \$100). For iPhone and iPad owners, a better choice might be Apple TV (\$100). While the box itself remains the same as last year, it has added PBS and some other new channels and connects with Apple's new iTunes Radio service.

For the gamers in your life, you could make this holiday season a happy one by picking up one of the new game consoles. Microsoft's Xbox One (\$500) includes a new version of the motion-sensing Kinect, can serve as a set-top box for pay-TV services, and offers a strong assortment of new games. Sony's PlayStation 4 (\$400) offers comparable power and an optional camera system that's similar to Kinect.

If you've got the money to spend, you could upgrade their boob tube. Some of the latest televisions offer a new screen technology that's been called 4K or ultra-high-definition, which offers super-sharp pictures on extra-large screens. There's not a lot of 4K video to watch, but some of the TVs will upgrade standard HD television to make it appear sharper on their screens. At your local Best Buy or Fry's, you can find a 55-inch Sony 4K TV for around \$3,500 and a 65-inch model for around \$5,000.

SMARTPHONES, SMARTWATCHES AND TABLETS: Apple's latest iPhone, the 5S (starting at \$200 with a two-year contract), is my favorite [smartphone](#). It's got a superfast processor and a snazzy new operating system. But you can find a far greater range of choices if you go for an Android device. Among the tops are Samsung's Galaxy S4 (starting at \$100 with a two-year contract), HTC's elegantly designed One (\$50 with a two-year T-Mobile payment plan) and Motorola's Moto X (\$0 with a two-year Sprint contract). If you don't want to saddle your loved one with a two-year contract, take a look at Google's Nexus 5, which costs \$350 without any kind of service agreement.

You could also help your significant others outfit their smartphones with accessories and media. One way to go is with a set of add-on camera lenses for smartphones, such as the four-in-one system (\$70) from Olloclip that includes both macro and wide-angle lenses. Another is to purchase gift cards from Amazon, Apple's iTunes, or the Google Play store to help your loved ones stock up on apps, music and movies for their devices.

Among the newer gadgets on the mobile scene are smart watches. Samsung's Galaxy Gear (\$300) is among the most capable of the devices, with a built-in camera and the ability to run smartphone apps, but it only works with a handful of Samsung phones. The Pebble [smart watch](#) (\$150) is more versatile - it works with both iPhones and Android devices - but doesn't have a camera. The Fitbit Force (\$130) is for fitness fanatics who want to track their every step.

In terms of tablets, Apple has scored again with its iPad Air (starting at \$500), which is significantly thinner and lighter than its previous tablets. If you're an Amazon fan, check out the Kindle Fire HDX 8.9 (starts at \$379), which is even thinner and lighter than the Air, but is closely tied to the e-commerce giant's digital services. If you're looking for something less expensive or smaller, the Google's Nexus 7 (starting at

\$230) is an excellent choice, with a beautiful high-resolution display and an unadulterated version of Android.

BOTS AND DRONES: Lego has a long history of offering robot-building kits for tinkerers and kids. Its latest, the Mindstorms EV3 (\$350), offers a big leap forward in capabilities, including allowing users to pilot their creations with their smartphones or tablets.

If you're looking for a robot that's already put together, take a look at the new Sphero 2.0 (\$130), a robotic ball that can be used to play augmented reality games via a smartphone or tablet.

Another option is Romo (\$150), a robot that looks like an iPhone dock with tank treads. After docking an iPhone into Romo, you can use the device to take pictures or video of its surroundings, play games or remotely interact with your kids.

Remotely controlled smart devices don't have to be earthbound. You'll find a large number of remote-controlled helicopters and drones at a wide variety of prices. But the pacesetter for consumer-grade unmanned flying vehicles has long been Parrot's AR.Drone. The latest model, version 2.0 Power Edition (\$300), can stay in the air for 36 minutes, three times longer than before. An optional flight recorder accessory (\$130), allows users to preprogram the drone's flight path on a map and have it return automatically to where it took off.

©2013 San Jose Mercury News (San Jose, Calif.)
Distributed by MCT Information Services

Citation: Troy Wolverton: A gift guide for tech lovers (2013, November 29) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-11-troy-wolverton-gift-tech-lovers.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.