

Gift Guide: Small, smart stocking techie stuffers

December 11 2014, by Ron Harris



This Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2014 photo shows the ASUS S1 digital projector, in Decatur, Ga. The projector has a built-in rechargeable battery, HDMI input port and weighs less than a pound. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

If you were naughty this year, you might end up with something big and boring, like a vacuum cleaner. If you were good, you might ask for one of these little high-tech gems instead.

— Asus S1 LED projector (\$330):

Yes, there is a digital projector that can fit into a Christmas stocking. That, in itself, is an accomplishment. It's also a hearty performer for its size.

The Asus S1 weighs less than a pound and has a battery that can last up to three hours. That claim held up well during my tests, which included hosting a children's sleepover viewing of "Frozen" on a large wall.

I successfully connected an Android smartphone and an Xbox 360 and used the S1 to project what's on those screens. The most fun came when I plugged a small Roku Streaming Stick directly into the projector's HDMI port. Within minutes, I was watching Netflix and playing "Angry Birds" on large walls throughout my house, with no power cords in sight.

The S1 has a nice built-in speaker, but I tethered it to a large portable speaker for movie night.

— Cogito Classic smartwatch (\$180):

If you're going to buy your loved one a nice watch, it might as well talk to your phone. Right?

The Cogito Classic does just that, connecting to your phone via Bluetooth and alerting you when text messages, social media updates or phone calls come in. I often tuck my phone in a back pocket or backpack when I'm walking around town or on assignment. With a quick glance at the Cogito, I can see who's trying to reach me. I also get

calendar alerts with some details about upcoming meetings.

Unlike other smartwatches that require daily recharge, the Cogito Classic uses standard watch batteries that should last for months. It also has traditional analog hands alongside a digital time display.



This Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2014 photo shows the Cogito Classic smart watch, in Decatur, Ga. The watch contains Bluetooth technology and can communicate with a smartphone to deliver social media notifications as well as email and calendar alerts. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

There are a lot of smartwatches, but the Cogito Classic stands out by blending classic handsome styling and just enough smart notifications to keep you informed without overburdening you with gobs of information to read.

— Orbotix Sphero 2.0 smart ball (\$130):



This Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2014 photo shows the Sphero robotic ball, in Decatur, Ga. The Sphero is controlled with an app on a smartphone and can roll, glow, spin, shake and dance, all under the direction of the user. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

The Sphero is a plastic ball full of smart electronics and sensors. With a phone or tablet, you can make the ball spin, swim, chase your dog and even dance in response to completing challenges. For the rugged outdoors, you'll want to outfit the Sphero with a knobby rubber cover, which is sold separately for \$15.

The Sphero comes with a couple of jump ramps. It can quickly reach top

speed and go flying off the jumps, or you can create your own robot obstacle course out of ordinary objects. It is the smart round robot of choice.

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— Intel Edison and Arduino Breakout Kit (\$100):

The Edison is an Intel-chip Linux computer about the size of an SD memory card. It has Wi-Fi and Bluetooth capabilities built in, making it ripe for developing portable or wearable devices, or just fun side projects.



This Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2014 photo shows the Intel Edison, a small programmable computer the size of an SD memory card, seated on an electronics expansion board, in Decatur, Ga. The Edison has both Wi-Fi and Bluetooth technology built in, as well as a full distribution of the Linux operating system. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

I tried a kit that included an Arduino expansion board, which allowed me to program the Edison using both a Mac and a Windows computer. I connected the Edison to my home Wi-Fi network and got a few lights to blink in sequence. From there, I can incorporate small speakers, proximity sensors and other small add-ons to flesh out the project of my choice.

This kit and other Edison-related products are great for seasoned electronics or software enthusiasts who like to brew their own projects around the house. The online retailer SparkFun Electronics sells these kits, along with a multitude of Arduino-friendly expansion devices.

— NuForce Mobile Music Pump (\$60):

The amplifier in your smartphone likely isn't strong enough to drive high-quality headphones. That's where a portable headphone amplifier can be useful.



This Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2014 photo shows the NuForce MMP, a small headphone amplifier, in Decatur, Ga. The amplifier increases the volume of audio coming from small portable devices to optimize the performance of high-quality headphones. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

This matchbox-sized amp from NuForce pumped up the volume for me while retaining clarity and limiting distortion on several larger, over-the-ear headphones I tried. My headphones plugged into the amp, and the amp plugged into my phone. My music suddenly had more bass and more acoustic range.

The NuForce MMP is a nice affordable companion for the audiophile on the go.

— MOS phone cables (\$30 Lightning of Apple; \$20 Micro-USB for

Android):

The good news? Your smartphone came with charging and syncing cables. The bad news? They don't always last very long, given the daily use we put them through. Give the gift of durability with these tough cables from MOS.



This Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2014 photo shows the MOS smartphone charging cables, in Decatur, Ga. The cables are reinforced with strong woven material along their length and anodized aluminum protection at the connector ends. (AP Photo/Ron Harris)

I tried the company's Lightning cable for the iPhone 5s and Micro-USB cable for a Samsung Galaxy S4. They're better than the standard, out-of-the-box cables thanks to a spring-relief sleeve where the cable meets the plug and a rugged woven sheath that protects the full length of the cable.

They're smartly finished with sleek, anodized aluminum heads housing the connector ends. If cables can be sexy, these MOS cables are sexy.

More information: ASUS: bit.ly/1ICbUqe

Cogito: cogitowatch.com/classic.html

Sphero: www.gosphero.com/sphero-2-0

Intel Edison: www.intel.com/content/www/us/en/..._yourself/edison.html

NuForce MMP: bit.ly/1yR0EC7

MOS: www.mosorganizer.com

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