

An entertaining holiday gift guide for techies

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With the holiday season almost upon us, it's time to start thinking about what to get those special people in our lives.

You know, the tech enthusiasts.

There are lots of great tech products out there this year, from smart home devices to drones to new computers to smart watches. But to me, the most exciting products of all - and the ones most likely to thrill your techie - are those in the entertainment category.

From [virtual reality](#) devices to game consoles to TVs to digital streaming devices, you'll find all kinds of new and compelling stuff - and might even find a thing or two for yourself. Here are some of the highlights:

-Virtual reality

This has been the year of VR, with several major virtual reality systems and lots of less well-known headsets hitting store shelves.

For now, the ultimate VR experiences come from Facebook's Oculus Rift (\$600) and HTC's Vive (\$800) headsets. Both offer smooth video, immersive sound and a growing number of VR experiences. While Vive comes with motion sensing hand controllers, you'll have to order Oculus' similar Touch controllers (\$200) separately. Both headsets also require a high-powered Windows computer - with Vive being even more demanding than Rift - such as Lenovo's Ideacentre Y700 series (starting at \$800). One way to save money: Amazon, Best Buy and other

companies are bundling a PC with the headsets at discounted price.

But you can get an experience that may be almost as good for a lot less with Sony's PlayStation VR (\$400). Sony's been courting major developers to make games for its VR headset; you can already get titles from the "Star Wars Battlefront," "Resident Evil" and "Batman: Arkham" series. If you don't already have them, you'll need a PlayStation 4 (starting at \$300) and a PlayStation Camera (\$60) to use the PlayStation VR. You'll like also want to get a Move motion controller (\$40).

If that still sounds too pricey, here is another option. If you have one of the latest Samsung smartphones, you can plug it into the Gear VR headset (\$100). Samsung's VR app creates a stereoscopic effect by dividing the phone's screen in half, presenting a slighting different image for each eye. Google is offering a similar system called Daydream View (\$79) for its new Pixel smartphone (starting at \$650).

If you've got an iPhone or a different Android phone, check out Mattel's View-Master Deluxe (\$30), Homido's V2 [virtual reality headset](#) and the Zeiss VR One Plus (\$130). Or go with the cheapest options of all: Google's Cardboard and related headsets (starting at \$9), which are literally made of the same stuff as packing boxes.

In addition to playing virtual reality games and seeing professionally edited VR videos, the techies in your life might also want to shoot and view their own videos in their VR headsets. Among the options: Ricoh's Theta S (\$350) and Nikon's waterproof KeyMission 360 (\$500), both of which shoot 360-degree videos. There's also Samsung's similar Gear 360 (\$350), which is designed to be used with the company's smartphones, and the LucidCam (\$400), which shoots 180-degree stereoscopic videos, giving them a 3-D effect.

-TVs

If your techie gets queasy at the thought of strapping on a VR headset, you might want to go old-school and take a look at getting him or her a new TV. Flat-screen televisions have come down dramatically in price in recent years. And even those with some of the latest features are often amazingly affordable.

4K, HDR and OLED are some of the newest technologies in televisions. 4K offers a higher resolution picture, which is really only important on the largest sets. HDR, or high-dynamic range, helps bring out details in bright and shaded areas. It helps improve the picture on sets of all sizes, but it only comes on those that also support 4K. OLED, or organic light-emitting diode, televisions are amazingly thin sets that use a new kind of display technology that offers the best pictures available.

You can find HDR sets for as little as \$450 for a 40-inch set. The starting price for a 4K HDR 65-inch set - about the size where 4K actually starts to matter - is around \$1,200. Expect to pay \$2,000 for a 55-inch OLED set, which generally are only available right now from LG.

-Digital streamers

Once your techies have a new 4K HDR TV, they'll want to watch something on it. Although many come with their own built-in apps, they are often difficult to use and quickly outdated.

For something simpler that's likely to stay useful longer, check out the latest digital streaming devices from Roku and Google. Roku's digital media players are known for being affordable, easy to use and offering the widest selection of streaming channels available. Its new Premiere (\$80) box will stream 4K videos, while its Premiere+ (\$100) and Ultra

(\$130) devices support both 4K and HDR.

Google helped shake up the industry three years ago with the Chromecast, a tiny, bargain-priced streamer. The new Chromecast Ultra (\$70) is similarly small, but it adds 4K and HDR support.

-Video games

With their latest game systems now three years old and starting to feel dated, Sony and Microsoft recently released upgraded versions. The most notable new feature of both is each supports 4K HDR video and can stream movies and TV shows in that format from sources like Netflix and Amazon.

Sony's PlayStation 4 Pro (\$400) is the more impressive upgrade of the two. Sony ramped up the graphics processor in the console from the original PlayStation 4, giving the updated machine the ability to play games that are in 4K resolution. So, if your techie is looking for something to play on his or her new jumbo-sized ultra-high resolution television, the Pro is the way to go.

Microsoft's Xbox One S (starting at \$300) doesn't have the ability to play 4K games, but it does have a trick the PS4 Pro lacks. Unlike Sony's game gadget, the Xbox One S can play ultra-high definition movies that are stored on 4K Blu-ray discs. It also comes in a version that has two terabytes of storage (\$400), double what you get with the PS4 Pro.

Nintendo has something to offer its fans too. The company recently released the NES Classic Edition (\$60), a miniaturized version of its original game console from 1985. It comes with 30 games pre-installed, including classics like "Donkey Kong," "Pac-Man," "Castlevania" and "Super Mario Bros." Assuming you can get your hands on it - it's been selling out widely - it's perfect for older techies with a bit of 80s

nostalgia.

If your techies are Nintendo enthusiasts of a more recent vintage, you may want to give them a rain check or a gift certificate to their favorite game store. The company is supposed to release a brand new game console called the Switch next spring.

Oh, and don't forget the games. Among the most popular recent or anticipated releases are "Titanfall 2" (\$50, for the PS4, Xbox One and PC), "Watch Dogs 2," (starting at \$60 for the PS4, Xbox One and PC) "Final Fantasy XV" (starting at \$60, for the PS4 and Xbox One), Civilization VI (\$60, PC and Mac) and "Pokemon Sun" and "Pokemon Moon" (\$40 each, both for the Nintendo 3DS). You might also want to check out "Roblox," a popular app for kids on PCs, smartphones and tablets that offers thousands of mini-games.

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