

Headphones, speakers top gift lists

23 December 2013, by Mae Anderson



In this Thursday, Nov. 29, 2007, file photo, a display of three nutcracker soldiers wear iPods at the Apple Store on Chicago's Magnificent Mile. Americans spent several years stocking up on smartphones, tablet computers and ever-bigger size TVs. But in 2013's holiday season, they're buying headphones, wireless speakers and other accessories to go with them. (AP Photo/Charles Rex Arbogast, File)

Headphones, speakers and other audio gear are topping the holiday gift lists of many Americans this season.

Audio equipment is among the top-selling electronics gifts, accounting for 13 percent of the \$8 billion in [consumer electronics sales](#) between Nov. 24 and Dec. 7, according to research firm NPD Group.

Headphone sales rose 14 percent. Sound bar sales grew 80 percent. And streaming speaker sales nearly quadrupled.

The trend is being driven in part by the economy. Audio gear, which can range from \$50 to more than \$500, is being considered by some an affordable luxury during a still shaky economy.

Americans also have spent the last several years buying tablets, smartphones and TVs. Now, many

are looking for ways to squeeze better sound from those gadgets.

"It stands to reason that people at some point want a better audio experience than the ear buds you get in the box," said Ben Arnold, NPD's director of industry analysis.

Indeed, Drew Smith, 21, began coveting better headphones when he got an iPhone 5 in August. Now, headphones are the only big present he's asking his parents for.

"Because of my smartphone, I listen to more music and ... I want a good set," said Smith, a cinema manager who lives in Paragoule, Arkansas.



This undated photo provided by Beats by Dr. Dre shows the Beats Pill wireless, portable speaker. Headphones, wireless speakers and sound bars are flying off the shelves in 2013's holiday season. (AP Photo/Beats by Dr. Dre)

Likewise, Adam Daniels, 23, a commercial banker from Sharonville, Ohio, decided to buy a Phillips sound bar for his parents for Christmas after they purchased a 50-inch (127-centimeter) TV.

"They have a great TV, but the audio on it is terrible," he said.



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The trend this season is a continuation of an audio craze that started last year. That's when Beats by Dr. Dre, oversize headphones that come in different colors and run about \$200 per pair, became the "it" [holiday gift](#).

Some competitors also have upped their sound game. This year, stores and analysts say Bowers Wilkins, Bose, Jawbone and JBL all are among those offering more products, colors and stylish designs.

Beats doesn't give sales figures. But the company said it grew its share of the market for headphones over \$99 from 71 percent last year to 78 percent this year.



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"Audio has been really popular this holiday," said Josh Davis, manager of Abt Electronics, a large electronics store in Chicago. "Last year, it seemed like all anyone wanted was Beats ... But we're seeing good competition this year among other brands."

At the same time, prices have fallen for some audio gear. For instance, the average selling price for wireless speakers dropped 33 percent to \$73 this year compared with last year, according to NPD. And Best Buy, Amazon and other stores have offered deep discounts on some audio gear.

Target, which says sales of [headphones](#), wireless speakers and sound bars have "increased significantly" this year, offered deals on the day after Thanksgiving known as Black Friday in late November. They included the Beats Solo HD Headphones for \$119 from \$179.99; Sony Bluetooth speakers for \$49.99 from \$89.99; and a JBL sound bar for \$99.99 from \$199.

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