

Techie gifts for your holiday shopping

For work or play, there's something for everyone

By **MJ Shoer**

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Happy Thanksgiving! Once you have enjoyed time with family and that wonderful sleepiness that comes from turkey with all the fixings, like many, your focus may quickly move to the holiday shopping season and Black Friday. This year, I've noticed that some stores are opening up late Thanksgiving night, before midnight, backing up Black Friday into today.

Whether you choose to brave the masses who throng to the stores at hours when I prefer to sleep, or if you are just getting into the holiday spirit, if you are looking to get someone a technical gadget of one form or another, I hope you will find a great idea here. Welcome to my seventh annual gift guide for the techie on your list.

Each year at this time, I look back at prior lists and this year, in particular, I got a pretty good chuckle from the recommendations from my first list back in 2005.

Gaming systems were the hot item that holiday season and while they continue to be sought-after gifts for the younger people on our lists, this year we have not seen a new introduction to fuel that must-have rush to the store to get it before they are all sold out. On the gaming front, the hot items this year are new releases of popular games like the "Call of Duty" series and others. If you've got someone who has a game system and is an avid gamer, the latest version of their favorite game is always a good choice.

The item that really caught my attention from the 2005 list was the fact that the Motorola RAZR was the hot cell phone of the season. Take note that I said cell phone, not smartphone. This season, the RAZR is again one of the hottest items, but this time, it's a reborn RAZR, the Droid RAZR Android smartphone. It's the thinnest smartphone to date and boasts a Kevlar skin for durability, and has one of the largest and sharpest smartphone screens we have seen to date.

There are many high-end smartphones available, most running the Android operating system.

With the expansion of 4G high speed mobile data networks, these smartphones deliver Internet speeds that rival your home broadband connection and deliver great mobile Internet experiences. The iPhone 4S is the latest version of the incredibly successful iPhone family and it continues to deliver on the excellence we have all come to expect from Apple. The S in the new version is a nod to Siri, the new voice-activated intelligent digital assistant built into the iOS operating system. At the rate smartphones are progressing, artificial intelligence will seem old school in the not-too-distant future. There's not much you are not able to do with a smartphone these days.

Next to smartphones, the most popular gift request may be a tablet.

The iPad and Galaxy Tab (Android) tablets remain the standard to beat, with the iPad being the clear leader. Many wish lists will have the iPad on them this season, I'm sure. In the business arena, we are starting to see purpose-built business tablets come to market. For the business person who wants a tablet too, these may be an interesting option as they may be able to cross the line between personal entertainment device and business productivity tool without making your IT security suffer. Models like Lenovo's ThinkPad Android tablet have several business features, like device encryption for security, built in. Depending on the primary purpose of the tablet, you may have lots of options to choose from. If you are an iPhone user, I recommend you stick with the iPad. If you are an Android user, I recommend you stick to an Android tablet. Why? Because your apps will work on both your smartphone and tablet, without having to re-purchase them. That's not to say you can't have an iPhone and an Android tablet or vice versa. Just be prepared to buy your apps twice, once for each platform.

If you want a tablet, but don't want to shell out the roughly \$500 price that most tablets sell for, you may want to give very serious consideration to the newest Barnes and Noble Nook Tablet or Kindle Fire from Amazon. Both are traditional eReaders that have matured into very capable tablet platforms. Both are based on the Android operating system, but are not as open as a traditional tablet. Both Amazon and Barnes and Noble have put a layer on top of the operating system that somewhat limit what you are able to do with the tablet, but if you want to be

able to read books, magazines and newspapers, surf the Web and check your e-mail, these tablets — priced from \$199 to \$250 — are an affordable and attractive option.

With all these battery-powered gadgets around, a great gift idea or add-on gift is a portable charger that will power all your devices so you don't have to carry around a special bag just for all your chargers. There are also some very small portable battery packs, to help keep your smartphone or tablet going when you are running low on power. Many of these are solar as well, which brings a nice green element to them.

I could fill a few pages with gift recommendations, but space is limited. While I don't have time to give these their just review, also think about touch screen all-in-one PC's like the Lenovo IdeaCentre or HP TouchSmart, or a digital camera. Canon has an impressive line of digital cameras from compact point-and-shoot models to fully equipped digital SLRs. If a flat screen TV is on your list, consider one with Google TV and WiFi built in to take your TV watching to the next level with Internet-enabled apps and streaming video.

My very best wishes to you and your family for a very Happy Thanksgiving and a truly joyous holiday season. Thanks for reading.

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