



gift ideas

When the first day of school or work rolls around after the holiday, the second question (after the obligatory “how was your holiday?”) is “What did you get?” No one wants to list off the socks and nose hair clippers, so people usually succinctly reply with either the most expensive gift they got or the most impactful.

For those interested in the most expensive gift, we have some truly terrific big gift ideas, like how to help someone buy their new home, or how to give their current home a facelift. Next week we will guide you through the wonderful world of high tech gifts, including game systems, advice on buying the best television and how to navigate those big box stores.

For those less interested in material possessions, we’ve also outlined some charitable gift ideas to give back. You may just be interested in fulfilling your White Elephant obligations at work, and for you we have included some great gag gift ideas. For those in between (and maybe a little underpaid) there are also some good alternatives at area thrift stores.

To help you navigate your little (sic) letters to Santa, we’ve found the best of the best and provided some insider tips on how to make the most of your shopping experience.

big gifts

by erin thursby

There are gifts you just can’t fit under the tree, big gifts that will make somebody’s holiday really special.

buying a car as a gift

If you’re in the market for a new car, December is a great time to buy, since there are fewer customers on the lot and dealers want to sell ’07 models before the end of ’07.

According to carbuyingtips.com: “Everyone is out buying XMAS gifts, leaving new car dealer lots void of customers, motivating dealers to cut prices, and break year end sales records.”

While new cars have a little more panache than used, take a look at the used car market during the holidays. You can get lower prices than you might expect around the holidays, especially from private owners. Many private sellers are looking for extra holiday cash, so they end up accepting a lower price than they normally would. Christmas is a great time to buy that first car for your teen. You’ll want to check craigslist.com, autotrader.com and the local newspapers.

all new kitchen or bathroom

Refurbishing or replacing kitchen cabinets and countertops, which is the best way to give an old kitchen a face lift, can cost the average homeowner anywhere from \$2,000 and up. When jewelry just won’t do, give

the person who spends the most time in the kitchen something they’ll really enjoy. A new kitchen is also perfect for a young couple that recently purchased a home.

For an affordable kitchen, personal service and excellent quality, Jax Bargain Plywood is one of the most cost-effective places to go to get a new kitchen.

Matt Geary, Director of Operations at Jax Bargain Plywood, cautions men who are shopping for women against picking out the refurbishments themselves, recommending gift certificates instead.

“She deserves it, especially if she’s the one that primarily does the cooking. It needs to be what she wants. The woman needs to make the call,” says Geary.

Plus if you put in materials that the lady doesn’t like, even if the man does all the cooking, you’ll never live it down. For more info go to jaxbargain.com.

piano

Just like the rest of the year, Piano emporiums such as Piano Expo have payment plans. From small uprights and baby grands to grand pianos, they’ve got everything you’d need. Costs range from about \$2500 and up. Folks often buy pianos as a surprise gift for the whole family. Piano Expo can also deliver on Christmas Eve or Christmas for an extra fee.

Visit Piano Expo at 4160 Southside Blvd. or call 642-1136.



a new house

Okay, so buying someone a house for Christmas is a little extreme. Plus people like to pick these things out for themselves. But you can start an account in someone’s name.

Sonny Downey of Exit Realty says that anyone can start an account for a start-up fee of just \$39. The fee takes care of the administrative fees and the personalized website that Exit will set up for you.

“In 1996 the FHA enacted a program...a mortgage registry...it’s just basically a savings plan you...or loved ones can make contributions to,” says Downey

If you’re saving for a house and you’d prefer cash instead of goodies for the holidays, you can start an account yourself. Exit Realty will actually send out cards with the info about donating to your account to designated friends and relatives. That way, you never have to ask. Go to realtyregistry.com for more info.

charitable gifts

by kellie abrahamson

The holidays are a time of giving and most people do just that in spades. This year shoppers plan on spending an average of \$859 according to American Research Group, Inc. While that number is down from last year’s, it’s still a lot of green for most folks. With that much money heading to the pockets of retailers, it’s difficult for the average Joe to earmark some funds to go toward charitable causes. Thankfully, many charities have found ways for people to give a cool gift and help a good cause at the same time.

gifts for a cause

We just celebrated Breast Cancer Awareness month in October so the cause is still fresh in most of our minds. For the past 13 years Susan G. Komen for the Cure and Ford have teamed up for the **Warriors in Pink** campaign. Through their website (shopwarriorsinpink.com), you can purchase all kinds of pink Warrior gear. The site has everything from shirts to hats to scarves (my personal favorite). They even have a limited edition customized Warriors in Pink 30GB Zune. Best of all 100% of the net proceeds goes to Komen for the Cure.

From pink to RED, **(PRODUCT)RED** is an incredibly popular “business model” (their words) that allows people to buy products or services that will in turn help buy and distribute anti-retroviral medicine to people in Africa dying of AIDS. The Gap has really embraced the project, but other companies like Converse, Apple and even Emporio Armani have RED products available. These items are sold at no additional cost to you, so there’s no reason to buy a regular iPod when you can buy a RED one and help save a life.

Invisible Children is a non-profit organization whose goal is to spread awareness about the unending war in Northern Uganda, where rebel forces abducted children and made them soldiers. A temporary truce has been in effect since 2003 but the kids who lived through this atrocity still need help. Half of Invisible Children’s programming budget to bring awareness to the issue while the rest goes toward educational programs to help the affected families. Through invisiblechildren.com, you can purchase cool shirts, unique bracelets, and DVDs to bring awareness to this great cause and the plight of these kids.

Of course there are a wide variety of wonderful causes that have merchandise available. If you don’t see your favorite organizations listed here, head to the web and find their sites. Chances are they all have T-shirts, jewelry and other goodies perfect for putting under the tree.

charitable shopping

There are some organizations that don’t necessarily provide “stuff,” but they do provide an opportunity to buy “stuff” and help a worthy cause at the same time. This Friday Prudential Network Realty’s San Marco office is hosting **a special shopping event to raise money for the Children’s Home Society**. For just \$50, guests will go to various stores in San Marco square to pick up goodies for everyone on their list. Each venue will provide refreshments and goodie bag items and they all will donate 20% of the proceeds of the purchases to the Children’s Home Society. Additionally, shoppers can have their items gift-wrapped and delivered. The day ends with an upscale lunch at Matthew’s Restaurant. For more information please call (904) 739-0717.

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Palencia Holiday Showhomes will not only give you a lot of great decorating ideas, it will also give you a chance to shop for loved ones while helping four different charities. Tour four furnished model homes, all decorated for the holidays by the area's most popular decorators and designers, free of charge. Then head over to the garages to shop for a unique gift. Proceeds from your purchases will benefit the Humane Society, Builders Care, the St. Francis Shelter, and Trinity Rescue. Donations such as cash, new unwrapped toys, or non-perishable food items will be collected for all four charities as well.

helping others

Still feel like doing more? The **Salvation Army's annual Angel Tree project** benefits more than 13,500 children in Northeast Florida each holiday season. Simply track down an Angel Tree, choose an "Angel," and fill up the accompanying bag with new toys, clothes and other gifts. Be sure to return your Angel Tree gifts to one of the official drop-off locations by December 8th.

There are plenty of other gift drives taking place all around the city. The **Jacksonville Association of Firefighters and the Junior League of Jacksonville are collecting gifts for local foster children** and Family Support Services of North Florida. To learn more visit fssjax.org or call (904) 421-5800. **Adventure Landing's Teddy Bear Toy Drive** is another great option. For every stuffed animal purchased from Adventure Landing's Teddy Bear Factory, Adventure Landing will donate a brand new stuffed animal to Toys for Tots. Barnes & Noble stores in Mandarin, Regency and the St. Johns Town Center are currently hosting a **book drive benefiting Wolfson's Children's Hospital**. All books will be personally delivered and placed in one of the hospital's eight libraries and into the hands of children in need.

Finally, most local charities and organizations wish for one thing this Christmas: **the gift of your time**. Choose a cause you believe in and inquire about volunteering for an afternoon or a weekend. You'll be amazed at how much a couple of hours of work can make a difference.

from seejanetwork.com



online gifts

by hilary johnson

Holiday shopping. Probably everyone's favorite thing to do in the entire world. Not.

That isn't to say that giving gifts to the people we love isn't the best feeling ever. We love seeing their joyous faces upon gift opening, or at least the awkward grins from a gift unappreciated. Some way or another there is a kind of joy in gift giving. But the holidays... the lines, the cars, the people, the picked-over selections, or the fighting for the last item on the shelf (okay, that's never happened to me, but it totally could); it's a nightmare, plain and simple. In fact, they should just make holiday shopping an extension of Halloween for all the terrors it can bring. It practically already is, with the holidays coming earlier and earlier each year. Next year they will probably come mid-September, making this Halloween shopping spree a little more in season.

But there is a solution. For all you people who grind your teeth against the mayhem. For all those who don't find the merry Christmas lights and holiday cheer so cheery, there is a solution. The Internet.



from winknyc.com



Online shopping. Sure, we've all been warned against its trials and tribulations. Back orders, credit card fraud, will it fit, won't it fit? Will it actually be as big as it looks on the screen or will it be made of plastic instead of silver? I mean, sure, there are some questions and some insecurities that come with online shopping, but hey, nothing is perfect. At least it's not the mall.

There are your obvious choices. **eBay.com**, what everyone thinks of when they think of online shopping, has new and used electronics, cars, apparel, collectibles, sporting goods and more at low prices. That's what they advertise. For novice eBay-ers the experience can be somewhat daunting. How to bid? When to bid? How much is something really worth? Well, the truth is, bid late, bid low, and it's only worth as little as you can get it for. That's the beauty of eBay. That, and you can find just about anything on there. Literally. Someone once sold the highest bidders name written in pee in the snow. People actually bid on that. Someone actually paid someone else to write their name in pee in the snow.



Overstock.com is another great obvious source. You know, the catchy commercials with the big O's all over the place. They sell mostly store-related items, like home furnishings and décor, clothing, jewel-

ry, electronics. The kinds of things you might actually find and purchase from the mall, but without the hassle! And, as an added bonus, they come at discounted prices. Hence the overstock bit. It's all the stuff they had too much of, so you can get it for cheap(er).

Bluefly.com is another mallish type website, but this time it's a little more upscale. Focusing on high end, name brand designers, Bluefly is a great source for marked down Prada, Gucci, Dolce and Gabana, Fendi, and the likes. For anything from Kashmere gloves to Coach handbags to a glamorous pair of Jimmy Choo stilettos, this is your (virtual) place.

If boutique shopping is the name of your... game, then **shopbop.com** is a great website to stroll through. It offers over a hundred different top, name-brand, boutique designer fashions, from shoes to clothes to accessories. If you are looking for something funky, or a little high end, but that can't be found on the rack at your local department store, this is a great virtual visit! The chances are, in order to find these kinds of items, you would have to look online anyway. Shopbop is your one-stop shop for anything boutique.

If your loved one is slightly disorganized, or their office needs a little flare, then make sure to check out the website **seejanework.com**. Revolving around a fictional character, Jane, this site offers today's woman everything her office or work life could ever desire. From funky mouse pads to feng shui diffusers (delicious scented oils), this site promotes workable function through remarkable fashions.



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from bluefly.com

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fans etsy.com

If you're feeling creative and if you like an interactive shopping experience check out **fred-dyandma.com**. This innovative website allows the shopper to actually design their own purses and pillows. By choosing from different available shapes and sizes, the designer (ahem, you) can then also choose the fabric, colors and patterns. It is a wonderful way to give a gift a personal touch, without having to personally touch it at all.

For the hip and young, check out **winknyc.com**. This site, as seen in Lucky magazine, offers beauty supplies, jewelry, handbags, apparel, footwear, and even something called winkwear (a little self promotion for ya). But, the image is young and fashion-forward, while the cost ranges from fashion affordable to fashion smashin' your bank account.

Another Lucky magazine recommendation is the website **greenergrassdesign**.



from freddyandma.com

com. This site offers pretty much anything from home and office products to gadgets, pets (products), and wearable designs. There is even a section with gift ideas, sorted by prices ranging from \$25 to \$100, for those who still don't know what they're looking for. You might find a multiplug USB port is just the thing you were thinking of. Or perhaps a \$90 Stella the Squirrel stuffed animal will do the trick. But, you are bound to be amused and get your creative gift giving juices a'flowing.

Taking a trip down the handmade lane, there is always **etsy.com**. This website is a place for independent artists to sell their own handmade pieces, and a place for the rest of us to buy them. Check out the time machine, a slowly spiraling group of items that allows you to "grab and throw" the little dots you find most appealing. I don't know. That probably doesn't make sense, but perhaps it has intrigued you. It's very hands on, it's very creative, and way more fun than standing in line at Target.

The website **20x200.com** follows a similar form, with a slightly different function. They offer a venue for different visual artists to promote their work and sell it online in one big virtual marketplace. But, they only allow two new pieces a week, one



from flight001.com

photo and one work on paper. Each piece of art is re-printed 200 times and can be purchased in three different sizes, the smallest costing \$20. Hence the name. It is a great place to find innovative, unique pieces of art. Think of it as a virtual walk through an art gallery. With some affordable pricing as well.

And finally, for those jet setters flying to and fro for the holidays, **flight001.com** offers traveler-friendly gifts with just a dash of kitsch and a sprinkle of sarcasm. It's the perfect way to make those long holiday travels enjoyable, or even survivable. As well all know, holiday traveling runs a close second to being lost in the desert. But either way, this store will help to ease those pains, and probably grant a smile along the way.

Holiday shopping no longer has to be the line-filled, screaming baby, sore back nightmare it has always been. Now you can do it from the comfort of your own home. And sure, you will miss the carolers and the Christmas lights, but I'm certain even that can be found online, if you only Google hard enough.

gag gifts

by donald dusinberre

Your dreaded office party is coming up soon, complete with that most tedious holiday tradition, the Secret Santa or White Elephant gift exchange. Your family get-together will be chock full of people you love but can't stand to be near, and they're all bringing gifts.

So how do you buy gifts for people you either don't know or don't especially care about? Well, those of us with a sense of humor and a taste for mischief always have plenty of ideas. I'd take a Chia Pet over a snowman tree ornament any day. Wouldn't you rather give a box of Bertie Botts Every Flavor Beans than another cute teddy bear with a Santa hat? Nothing beats seeing someone eat a vomit-flavored jellybean.

There are a few general rules to keep in mind when giving gag gifts. If your gift is going to someone specific (as opposed to a Secret Santa gift), be mindful of their attitude and sense of humor. Don't be mean and don't draw negative attention to sensitive topics. In other words, giving Grandma running shoes after knee surgery is funny, but giving her running shoes after a leg amputation is definitely not funny.

When giving gag gifts to a specific person, there are a few tips to remember. The best ones are specific to the recipient while showing them that you care about them. People love to get thoughtful gifts, even when they're funny. Exerting a little independent creative thinking will mean the difference between a courtesy laugh and a hearty guffaw.

Giving gag gifts at Secret Santa exchanges is way easier. Preposterous gifts are a cinch, like deodorizing shoe insoles or a jumbo pack of Slim Jims. Or, you could get an oh-so subversive gift for the unidentified co-worker, like a small pillow or a flask.

There are many places to find gag gifts, and there is no more comprehensive place to look than the Internet. For an easy Internet search, you can visit quite a few gift websites and get a huge variety of items. Try **prankplace.com** or the gag gifts page at **findgift.com**. The items on these sites are usually what you might call ready-made, but they're an easy (if pricey) way to get a laugh. Ready-made gifts are pretty funny and



from prankplace.com



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often cheesy, but giving them is not the most shining example of the giver's creativity.

Another easy place to find ready-made gags are those What on Earth catalogs that seem to show up in the mail even though no one ever asks for them. In reality, though, those catalogs are full of things that will make the giver laugh harder than the receiver.

The best ideas are usually ad-libbed and found in unexpected places. Dollar stores are a great place to start, and gift certificates to unusual establishments are also a funny idea (think Golden Corral or Buchanan Sign & Flag). I'd now like to take this opportunity to lament the passing of Einstein's Kitch-Inn, my all-time favorite place for gag gifts.

Giving a gag gift is a liberating experience because it allows you to make the transaction about both the giver and the receiver. At first, that might sound more complicated, but it opens the door for a wider range of ideas. Instead of focusing on the gift's lasting impression, you can focus on its immediate impact, which will undoubtedly endear the recipient to the item and color its place in their life forever.

thrift gifts

by donald dusinberre

Who can say their vinyl collection isn't padded with scratched-up records from a thrift store? Who hasn't passed over umpteen Herb Alpert and Boz Scaggs records to find that precious copy of Neil Young's *Harvest*? Who hasn't fished through miles of slacks, trousers, chinos, and ratty jeans to be the one who discovers and wears the most ugly plaid pants ever sewn? And remember when cardigans were cool?

When I was in high school and college, some of my favorite articles of clothing were purchased from thrift stores. I was an independent kid with no interest in trends and no money, so thrift stores were a double jackpot. At first I felt guilty for taking snazzy clothes away from folks less fortunate than me, but somebody had to pay a dollar for them, and it happened to be me.

With thrift stores, the hunt for the perfect treasure is just as important as finding it and paying less than a buck for it. You're not going to find exactly what you're looking for, but you might find something equally as special. You can't expect to find items suitable as gifts, but sometimes you get lucky. I was never in the market for a catcher's mitt, but I found and bought a nearly new Rawlings mitt for \$4 and gave it to my Little League age nephews.

When searching for clothes, you have to keep an open mind about your search. Don't just look for your size, look for what strikes your eye first, then see if you can squeeze into the garment. You can always cinch your new corduroy pants or fill out those new wingtip shoes by wearing two pairs of socks.


Folks with a little electronics knowledge can assemble a Franken-stereo with an inexpensive cartful of old hi-fis and speakers. It might get some snickers from your techie friends, but no one on your block will be able to replicate the way you make Kanye sound.

One of the most promising sections of any thrift store is housewares. If you're not at all picky, you can outfit your entire kitchen with almost every utensil and appliance you'll ever need. Microwaves, toasters, coffeemakers and can openers are aplenty, and they offer an endless supply of dishes, glasses, silverware, and coffee mugs. In fact, getting your boss a Garfield coffee mug from 1984 is nothing short of hilarious, and your roommate will love the bowling pin-shaped beer stein you found.

I just can't pretend to know which thrift store has got the coolest stuff. Everyone has their own opinion, and besides, if we all know where the best ones are, then all the good stuff will get snapped up. Neither am I going to list every one of them here. There are thrift stores all over the place. I know of at least five stores within a few miles of my house, and one of them has my next favorite pair of slacks.



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