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FIRM MANAGEMENT

Top 10 Tech Gifts For The Holidays

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Dave McClure • Nov. 26, 2013

From the [Bleeding Edge Blog](#).

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The panic is this: retail forecasts say this will be one of the worst holiday sales seasons in the past five years. This will be a catastrophe for the job market, and won't be very kind to manufacturers of tech hardware and software. But in a strange twist of fate, it may be very good for consumers.

As manufacturers move to dump expensive inventory, and retailers scramble to eke out whatever revenues are to be had, consumers will see some of the best prices ever for tech gifts between now and the end of the year. Note that this will not be true for the top-of-the-line models. But for the high-middle range of products, bargains will abound.

Here are my top 10 categories of gifts, with recommendations.

- 1. GPS units.** I know, I was critical of the future of GPS devices in an earlier post, given the rise of GPS receivers in cell phones. But that is the point. That may make this year the very best time to buy a GPS navigation system, particularly if you do not use of like a smartphone. I favor Garmin's lines of 5" GPS receivers with lifetime map support. For less than \$90. There are things I don't like about Garmin's maps, but I won't quibble over the quality of what they offer.
- 2. Flat-Screen TVs.** I plan to buy a couple of small units for family gifts, and will likely upgrade my ancient, four-year-old 55 inch model for something in the 60-inch range. Visio still reigns as the best of the inexpensive models, but remember not to go too cheap and not to go with the biggest models in the line. Sony and Samsung are also offering discounted prices at some retailers. My current favorite is the [VIZIO E601i-A3 60-inch 1080p 120Hz Razor LED Smart HDTV](#) for less than \$1,000. But bide your time until closer to the holidays. Or better yet, wait until the week before the Super Bowl. (Bonus forecast from the Bleeding Edge: The Super Bowl will be held on February 2, 2014. Carolina Panthers will take on the Kansas City Chiefs. Kansas City wins).
- 3. Sound Bars For Flat Screen TVs.** The early models of sound bars were an unmitigated disaster, but these units have improved vastly in the years since. I love the sound of the Bose units, but not their price tags. I generally like Visio products, but their sound bars feature generic code sets for the remote and problems with changing the volume from side angles. So I will go with the Sony HTCT260H Sound Bar with Wireless Subwoofer, currently about \$250 but lower by the holidays.
- 4. RAM Memory.** No matter what computer you have, the chances are good that it was sold to you with less RAM memory than you really need. Two lessons here. First, don't buy any computer that doesn't allow you to upgrade to more RAM. Second, add more RAM as soon as you can. Kingston has 4GB of its value ram for around \$35 on Amazon. Shop around and you can do better.
- 5. Dual Monitors.** Or one honking big one. Either way, you get the ability to look at the client's current year files and last year's files at the same time. People like to pretend that all CPAs have already got dual monitors, but I have yet to see them in most small accounting offices. Monitors are cheap, but if you go the dual route you will have to spend \$50 or so for a side-by-side hardware mount. As for the monitors that display two pages side-by-side, the ASUS VS228H-P 22-Inch Full-HD 5ms LED-Lit LCD Monitor currently runs about \$130.
- 6. Terabyte Drives for Backup.** These drives are large, fast, and prone to failure if you buy the ones for less than \$100. I would go for something in the 3 TB range, but would avoid Seagate or Western Digital – my experience with both is that they fail

far too frequently, with few options to recover data. So look for a drive in the \$175 range, like the Buffalo Drivestation DDR, which was also a favorite pick of the editors at CNet.

7. **Laser Printers.** Still believe it's cheaper to print the draft on an inkjet printer and the final on the laser printer? Not even close to true. Inkjet printers today are sold by giving away the hardware and killing you on the replacement cartridges. Get a good black ink laser printer for business use, and an inexpensive color laser to do the fun and school work. I like Canon and Brother laser printers for \$100 or so in black and double that for color lasers.
8. **Dragon Naturally Speaking.** Nuance is still at the top of the pyramid for voice-to-text software, and the latest version of their PC software is half price today. I would be surprised if it doesn't drop lower in the next month, but regardless of price this is a technology every professional should start working to learn. It is the future.
9. **LED light bulbs.** I know, you bought the CFL light bulbs that the US EPA said you should use in place of your fluorescent bulbs. Only now you find the CFLs are dim, don't last as long as you were promised and can't be disposed of without a full hazmat crew. Check out LED bulbs instead, which are brighter and more environmentally friendly. I will let you know in 20 years if they live up to their longevity claims. Meanwhile, don't pay more than \$20 a bulb for the LEDs.
0. **Backlit Keyboards.** For some reason I cannot fathom, hardware manufacturers think that backlit keyboards, which have a light behind the keys to go online in the middle of the night without lighting the whole room, are only for pubescent gamers. Truth is that many of us professionals go online when we can't sleep, and could use one of these \$50 backlit keyboards as well. Trust me, you will love them come April 10th...

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