

Consider new techie toys for the holidays

By Bruce A. Love

*F*ome offices and computers have a way of creating a never-ending demand for even more new gadgetry. As a result, many of us develop wish lists of things we need to satisfy this seemingly insatiable appetite for technology. For those who are preparing for Chanukah, I've assembled eight gift ideas for the technophile in your life so that you can address his or her technology needs, and celebrate the "festival of lights" in 21st century fashion. Of course, if you are waiting for Christmas, some of these ideas will make great stocking stuffers too!

Floppy diskettes have become virtually obsolete due to their relatively limited storage capacity (1.44MB). Several new medias have emerged to replace the diskette in uses involving file backup and transport. These new storage devices provide capacities many times greater than that of the floppy.

If your computer still relies solely on diskettes for portability and file backup, you may want to consider purchasing a CD-RW, DVD+/-R, or one of each. If you have unused bays in your computer, adding these drives is usually a simple procedure. For those who would prefer not to perform minor surgery, external drives are available which connect to computers through the PC's USB port. Rewritable CDs hold about 700MB of data, and are also great for copying music CDs. Internal CD-RW drives are available for under \$50. Like CD-RW drives, DVD+/-R drives are great for backing up old files. The typical DVD holds 4.7GB, and starts at about \$70. In addition to holding an incredible amount of data, these drives also will enable you to watch DVD movies on your computer.

Flash drives are the latest form of portable storage. These devices typically measure about 3" by one half inch and plug into any computer with a USB port. They are primarily used for transporting files and not for long-term storage. When evaluating flash drives, important specifications to consider are speed and capacity. The USB version number specified will tell you how fast the drive is. At 480MB/sec, the USB 2.0 transfers data about 40 times faster than USB 1.1 flash drives. The smallest

capacity flash drives hold 16MB, and cost about \$10. If your needs require greater capacities, you can find drives as big as 1GB for about \$60.

If you haven't purchased a computer in the last two years, your mouse is probably over the hill. Mice no longer roll on rubber balls and require a mouse pad. Nor do they require minor operations to remove dust bunnies from their internal workings when they are stubborn. Some new mice don't even have tails! The cordless optical mice available today give you carefree flexibility for a very reasonable price. In fact, if you want true freedom, Logitech offers a cordless keyboard and mouse set for about \$40 – no strings attached!

Speaking of dust bunnies, if you find that your keyboard, mouse, or computer is infested with them, there are kits that include canned pressurized air to blow them away. Alternatively, some kits have tiny vacuums so that you can lift the dust out rather than risk blowing it deeper into the device you are trying to clean. These kits range in price from under \$10 to about \$30. Another useful maintenance item is a scratch removal kit for CDs and DVDs. You can find these for under \$25.

If you are like me, you probably get "brilliant ideas" at times when it is inconvenient to write them down. New digital voice recorders, measuring just 1" by 4", can hold about 10 hours of dictation. Some digital recorders can be connected to your computer to copy audio to your PC. They run about \$80. If you have no need to copy audio files to a PC, you can purchase a digital recorder without PC connectivity for about \$40.

One piece of software you might want to consider is PrintShop Deluxe. It's a nice program for anyone new to desktop publishing. With it, you can create your own greeting cards, business cards, posters, and other custom designed stationary. PrintShop is available at Staples for just under \$50.

After purchasing enough gifts to last 8 festive nights (a modern miracle), be sure to wish your technophile friends a Happy Chanukah!

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