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Holiday SHOPPING GUIDE

November 6, 2010



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worth the price?**

**The hottest
video games
of 2010**

Thinner, lighter laptops and tablets

**Tips for
holiday travel**

**Popular toys
that won't break
the bank**

An Advertising Supplement to Stars and Stripes

2010 Holiday Shopping Guide

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Stores ready to roll out the deals

NEW YORK — The Christmas shopping season is just kicking off, but retailers already are signaling they're prepared to discount aggressively to entice shoppers still skittish about spending.

Gift buyers are likely to scrutinize every purchase, from \$20 toys to \$1,000 designer jackets, do their homework before they buy, and limit how many stores they visit.

That could put stores in a jam this year because for many, deadlines for holiday orders were in spring when the economic recovery looked more solid. Since then several indicators and consumers' collective mood have darkened.

Retailers aren't expecting a flashback to 2008, when they were stung by shoppers who drastically cut spending after

the financial meltdown. Stores had to mark down items as much as 90 percent to clear them out. That left an imprint on 2009, when retailers managed to stay profitable amid sluggish sales by stocking fewer items, creating shortages in certain standbys like strands of Christmas lights. This year, erratic spending has made it hard to strike the right balance of how much to stock as the recovery has lost steam.

Most forecasters don't expect shoppers to spend much more this year than they did during last year's tepid season. Sales rose only 0.4 percent over 2008, when they slumped 3.9 percent, according to the National Retail Federation's calculations.

"The consumer is being very restrained. They're closely planning their spending and continue to reduce their shopping

trips," said James Russo, vice president of global consumer insights at The Nielsen Co.

Many retailers say they're ready to tweak orders where they still can or sharpen discounts to adjust to erratic spending. It's tricky because many holiday orders are usually made six months to a year in advance.

A lot is riding on holiday sales because they account for up to 40 percent of annual revenue for many retailers. For toy merchants, it's up to 50 percent.

J.C. Penney Co.'s Chairman and CEO Mike Ullman told investors in September that the department store chain was prepared to discount this Christmas season to bring shoppers in, after holding back a little last year.

Retailers reported surprisingly strong September sales, fu-

eled by a better back-to-school shopping season. That's particularly encouraging because the gains are being compared with the return of positive revenue figures that started a year ago. That's likely to boost stores' holiday spirits a bit. But those sales were spurred by aggressive discounting, and so worries remain until Christmas shopping hits high gear.

The spending patterns for the back-to-school season underscore the purposeful buying that has defined shoppers since the Great Recession. They came out to buy back-to-school items for the first two weeks of September, resulting in strong sales, but pulled back the last two weeks of the month after they bought what they needed.

Similarly, stores expect many shoppers will stick to their Christmas lists and hold out

until the last minute for the best deal.

John Long, retail strategist at Kurt Salmon Associates, says shoppers will be looking for gifts that "exude practicality and smarts." He and others predict smart phones and e-readers, particularly Apple Inc.'s iPad and iPhone, will be hot. So will Sony Corp.'s Playstation3 Move controller and Microsoft Corp.'s Kinect, which both let video-game players control characters in a game with body movements, similar to the Nintendo Wii.

Russo expects merchants may see surprisingly strong sales of discretionary items such as clothing, toys, books and even vacations, fueled by shoppers with household incomes of \$100,000 or more. Still while luxury shoppers are holding up much better, Neiman Marcus and several other upscale stores have reported erratic sales amid wild swings in the stock market.

The NRF expects a 2.3 percent increase to \$447.1 billion. That would fall short of the 10-year historic average of 2.5 percent, according to National Retail Federation calculations.

The forecast is in line with other economists who predict holiday sales growth of about 2 percent to 3 percent. A 4 percent sales gain is considered healthy if inflation is low, as it is now.

"It's not optimistic, it's not pessimistic, but very realistic," said Matthew Shay, NRF's president.

At Wal-Mart, whose blue-collar shoppers are having a harder time stretching their dollars to the next payday, the world's largest discounter is going for the extremely practical: holiday shoppers will find big piles of practical basics such as socks, sleepwear and underwear, and fewer trendy jeans and holiday sweaters.

—The Associated Press



Apple rolls out new MacBook Air, other treats



Apple CEO Steve Jobs talks about the new Apple Macbook Air laptop at Apple headquarters in Cupertino, Calif.

Image courtesy of AP

Apple, basking in the success of the iPhone and iPad, is bringing the look of those mobile devices to its computers.

Apple CEO Steve Jobs recently introduced a MacBook Air notebook, which — like its popular iPad — has no hard drive. It relies instead on flash memory, which is pricey but more durable if dropped or bumped. It also has a much longer battery life.

The computers are available now and cost \$999 to \$1,599, depending upon the size of the screen and the amount of stor-

age. The first MacBook Air sold for more than \$2,000.

"I think it's a smart move," says Van Baker, an analyst with Gartner. He thinks consumers may opt for the new MacBook Air instead of an iPad or entry-level MacBook laptop, which will hurt some of the other lines, but the overall effect will be greater sales. "Apple's being very aggressive."

Additionally, Apple said it will add the popular App Store, now available on the iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad, to Macintosh computers.

"We've been inspired by the work we've done on the iPad, and we want to bring it back to the Mac," Jobs said.

As with the iPad and iPhone, Jobs says he will split revenue with outside software developers, keeping 30 percent of the fees. Apple will begin accepting submissions from developers in November.

The App Store will be added to Macs, as a download, at some point in the next few months. It will also be featured as part of Apple's upcoming operating system

update, Lion, which is expected in summer 2011.

Apple also added its "FaceTime" video chat service, available now for the iPhone and iPod Touch, to Macs. It's out Thursday as a beta download at apple.com.

And it introduced a new version of its iLife software suite, with new versions of the iPhoto, iMovie and Garage Band programs.

The new iPhoto has added templates for slide shows, while iMovie has 15 different ways to turn your video clips into movie trailers accompanied by music from the

London Symphony Orchestra. The iMovie video-editing program also added sophisticated audio editing tools not seen before in iMovie.

Garage Band offers new lessons on how to play piano and the guitar.

The new iLife suite, released Wednesday, is free with new Macs, or \$49 for upgrades.

Apple said it sold 13.7 million Macintosh computers, worth \$22 billion, last year, and that nearly 50 million Macs are in use worldwide.

—USA Today

iPad leads rise of the tablets

First it was the smart phone. Then it was the netbook. Now the tablet is trying to be the must-have, ultraportable, Web-connected gadget.

This holiday season, the consumer electronics industry is positioning tablets as the next wave of mobile Internet devices that meld the best characteristics of smart phones and computers. Their larger screen size is better suited than smart phones for activities such as reading and watching videos, while their weight makes them easier than laptops to tote. Their computing power can handle many tasks.

Yet, because the gadget falls somewhere between a phone and a laptop, its usefulness remains unproven for many consumers. And the tablet's affordability remains an obstacle for many consumers in the wake of recession. Apple Inc.'s iPad, which was introduced in April and is arguably the most recognizable tablet device, starts at \$499 and still is far from being a mainstream product. Apple sold a few mil-

lion iPads in its first quarter, according to ABI Research.

A report from market research firm Gartner predicted that tablets — slate devices that support touch technology and run a lightweight operating system — will reach sales of 19.5 million units worldwide this year. Gartner also predicted that sales would reach almost 55 million units next year and 150 million units in 2013.

If the tablet takes off, it likely will push dedicated e-readers and netbooks to the fringes, said Shahid Khan, chairman and chief strategist at MediaMorph Inc., a New York-based digital media tracking company.

But e-readers and netbooks are unlikely to disappear entirely. Avid readers or students may prefer a device like Amazon's Kindle, whose black and white display is designed to mimic the look of reading a book and can be seen in direct sunlight. Other consumers may want a netbook's physical keyboard.

"It would be fantastic if I could flip a

switch and go back and forth" between a Kindle-like display and the full color of the iPad screen, said Willie Morris of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., who owns both a first-generation Kindle and an iPad. He bought the Apple device because he wanted a more portable replacement for his laptop.

"It was a little hard getting used to typing on the screen because it's touch instead of the haptic feedback with the (physical) keyboard," said Morris, who

works in Web-presence consulting and online reputation management. "But I got used to it pretty quick."

Morris also has adjusted to keeping all of his information in the cloud, since the iPad (like other tablets) doesn't have the same kind of storage capacity as a traditional laptop. Cloud computing is an increasingly popular technology that enables computer users to access data and software over the Internet.

—McClatchy Newspapers

WHAT'S OUT THERE:

Tablet fever is running high. Here's a look at the landscape:

Apple's iPad. Available now, and comes in six varieties starting at \$499.

Dell's Streak. Available now for \$549.99 or \$299.99 with a two-year contract at AT&T.

Archos. The company makes tablets in varying sizes, with a 5-inch display starting at \$199.99.



Today's popular toys that won't break the bank

For the toy industry this Christmas, good things could come in small packages, retailers, manufacturers and industry experts said recently

Tiny, collectible toys with names such as Squinkies and Zoobles, and with prices less than \$10, are selling out already and will drive parents to make multiple trips to toy stores in search of them. Those extra trips are likely to boost sales of all toys, said Jim Silver and Chris Byrne, editors of the online toy magazine Time to Play.

This year, like last year, Silver and Byrne said, the name of the game when parents go to the stores will be value. "Parents want to buy a toy that the kids are going to play with," Silver said. An \$80 toy that a child plays with will be considered a good value, while a \$10 toy that the child tosses aside would be considered a waste of money.

But some of Silver and Byrne's picks for this year's hottest toys fall in the \$10 and under category, and those are the toys that stores can't keep in stock. Squinkies, by Blip Toys, are rubber figures sized to fit on the tops of pencils that sell for \$6.99 for a set of 12. Slightly larger, but selling out as fast, are Zoobles by Spin Master (\$4.99). Those are plastic balls that transform into creatures when they are placed on magnetic platforms. Spin Master Vice President Harold Chizick said the toys are in such demand that the company is talking to retailers about having them air-shipped from the factory in China.

Another toy on Silver and Byrne's list that's selling out is the Monster High dolls by Mattel Inc., fashion dolls that tap into the current tween craze for vampires



Image courtesy of Mattel

Monster High

and werewolves. Neil Friedman, president of Mattel Brands, said his company built the Monster High phenomenon on the Internet, launching a website even before the dolls were in the store. Webisodes featuring the dolls have racked up more than 2 million downloads and online music videos with the dolls have posted 1.7 million downloads.

Friedman said he expects the company to have a banner year because of the level of innovation in its products. "It's probably the best line we've presented" in terms of innovation, he said. Friedman said Toys "R" Us' strong performance last Christmas was good

for retailers. "When they have a good year, we usually do, too," he said. Sales at Toys "R" Us stores open at least a year increased 4.6 percent last December, topping rivals Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Target Corp.

Sean McGowan, toy industry analyst and managing director at Needham & Co., said 2010 is shaping up to be Mattel's "strongest growth year for revenue that they've had in a long time," McGowan said.

McGowan said 2010 also could be another year when small toy companies create the most hot-toy excitement – similar to 2009, when a little-known company, Cepia LLC, produced the runaway hit Zhu Zhu Pets.

"The lesson of Zhu Zhu Pets was there aren't just five toy companies," he said. Newcomers such as Blip with Squinkies, and The Bridge, which is selling Justin Bieber dolls, could prove to be winning players, McGowan said.

The top job for Wayne-based Toys "R" Us this year will be to beat the competition when it comes to being in stock on the hottest toys. Last year, Toys scored big when it was the only retailer to have the best-selling Zhu Zhu Pets robotic hamsters in the final weeks before Christmas.

Toys Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Jerry Storch was at the Time to Play event this year, but would not tip his hand on whether he thought there was another Zhu Zhu Pets situation this year. "It's a little early" to say if one toy will be this year's Zhu Zhu Pet, Storch said, adding that he expects that there will be multiple high-demand toys. He also said he didn't want to tip off the competition about the toys that are selling out.

—McClatchy Newspapers

Christmas Treats From Workman



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IAVA
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Company makes customized gifts for servicemembers

As U.S. forces continue to pull out of Iraq, our country is seeing an influx of men and women in uniform facing their own battles at home.

Responding to the increased need for aid, organizations and businesses are joining the fight to ensure that our veterans receive the support they deserve.

In the spirit of gratitude and charity, philanthropic retailer Products for Good has partnered with Cleveland Vocational Industries (CVI) to aid our heroes returning home while also serving our community through the employment of disabled workers.

Products for Good, www.productsforgood.com, makes commemorative gifts for members of the armed services, firefighters and law enforcement officers.

The customizable gifts honor the sacrifices our heroes make and thank their loved ones at home. Products for Good donates 20 percent of each purchase, before any other business expenses are paid, to charities that support those who have served the United States.

"Our mission at Products for Good is to give voice to feelings of appreciation and gratitude," said Lane Ostrow, co-founder of Products for Good. "Recognition of the issues facing those who have

served and the obligation we have to assist them require that businesses like ours partner with others to support those who have protected our freedoms."

Already, the Products for Good story of gratitude is being told through its recipients. "I'm ordering (a product) for



Image courtesy of productsforgood.com

my father, a Vietnam War veteran," said Sammie Smith of Wichita Falls, Texas. "He still suffers from post-traumatic stress syndrome ... it is the least I can do for one who has served this country and is still suffering from it."

Sgt. Clay Hahl wrote from Tallil, Iraq that he found Products for Good while on leave.

"I am pleased to say that I have ordered my shadowbox as a keepsake and memory of my time serving this wonderful country we all call home," Hahr said. "Thank you for doing this for our fallen servicemen and women and their families."

—PR Web

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A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE
WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE R.R. MARTIN
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DC COMICS PUBLISHING, 505 L ST. N.W., WASHINGTON, DC 20001
Retailer, \$39.95

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2010 is the 25th Anniversary of Berkeley Breathed's Bloom County. Celebrate in style with Bloom County: The Complete Library Volume 3, which collects every strip from July 1984 through February 1985. Vols. 1 and 2 were both bestsellers!
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What's the best fit for your home audio needs?

NEW YORK - Can you put a price tag on mystique? When it comes to wirelessly accessing the music on your computer around your home, the answer is: \$150.95.

That's the approximate difference between the ZonePlayer S5 from Sonos Inc. and the SoundLink Wireless Music System from Bose Corp., known for its pricy Wave radios and CD players. Both Sonos and Bose give you rich sound from a single box, with no receiver, amplifier, stereo cables or iPod dock required. Both are easy to set up and use. While the Sonos costs \$399, the Bose comes in at \$549.95.

To be fair, price isn't the only difference, and your choice may come down to what's more important to you. If it's expandability, Sonos is the way to go; if it's portability and simplicity, the Bose may be worth the higher price.

The basic SoundLink system consists of the speaker and a small transmitter -- Bose calls it a key -- that plugs into a USB port of the computer where you store your music or access Internet radio. There's no software to install: All you do is change a setting on your computer. Nor do you need a home Wi-Fi network; the transmitter and speaker create their own, independent connection.

The entire set-up process me took less than 20 minutes, and only that long because I placed the speaker upstairs from the computer, and had to run the steps a few times. Bose estimates the transmitter's range at 60 feet: I did better than that, even with the floor in between.

The SoundLink comes with a chunky power adapter, but it is really made for mobility. The unit has an internal, rechargeable lithium-ion battery that can last for three hours or more between charges; an extra one costs \$89.95. And it weighs only 4-1/2 pounds, making it easy to move from room to room. The SoundLink comes with a minimalist remote control; if you're an iTunes user with an Apple Inc. mobile device and a Wi-Fi network, you can use Apple's free Remote app instead.

As an added benefit, the SoundLink has an auxiliary port allowing you to directly connect an mp3 or CD player.

And while no all-in-one system can offer the kind of stereo separation you get in a multi-speaker set-up, the Bose provides remarkably good sound.

If the SoundLink has a weakness, it's that you're limited to one remote speaker per computer. Want music in the living room but the SoundLink is in the den? You'll have to pick up the speaker and take it with you.

The Sonos, by contrast, is considerably less transportable -- it's twice as heavy, and requires a power outlet -- but it allows you to build a system throughout your home for much less than a conventional hard-wired set-up.

The ZonePlayer is also a little more complicated than the Bose. There's software to install, and if the room you want music in doesn't happen to be the one where your wireless router lives, you'll also need a \$99 device called a ZoneBridge that connects to the router and spreads the signal throughout your home.

On the other hand, you can have ZonePlayers in many rooms. Even better, each one can be playing something different -- John Mayer in the bedroom, the Beatles in the kitchen and Cee Lo Green in the basement. And if you've got the dough, you can even put two ZonePlayers in the same room and program one to act as the left stereo channel, and the other as the right.

To control all that, Sonos will sell you a dedicated controller for \$349, but you'd be nuts to buy it. That's because the company makes free, awesome apps for the iPhone and iPod Touch, and the iPad. It's so good that if you don't have an Apple mobile device, it's worth your while -- to say nothing of more cost-effective -- to buy a \$229 iPod Touch in order to run it. And of course, when you aren't using it to control your ZonePlayer, you can use the device for many other things.

Both companies offer options if you want to use audio equipment you already own. Sonos's \$349 ZonePlayer 90 connects to any existing amplified audio source, such as a home theater; the \$499 ZonePlayer 120 provides its own amplification. And Bose sells \$150 upgrade kits that allow some of its Wave music sys-

tems to access music on the computer as well.

Between the ZoneBridge, extra rooms and controller, the Sonos price tag can escalate rapidly. And as near as I can tell, no

one will ever mistake a Bose product for a budget solution. But while true audiophiles may sniff in disdain, if what you're after is lush sound from your digital music library

where and when you want it, both Bose and Sonos deliver.

—Bloomberg News

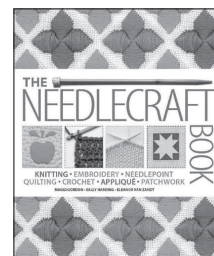


Courtesy of Sonos
Sonos ZonePlayer S5

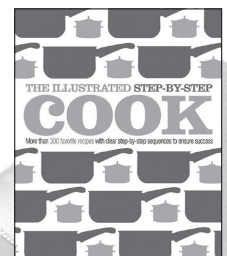
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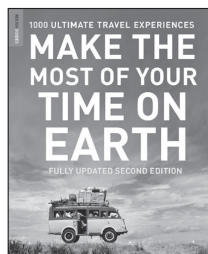
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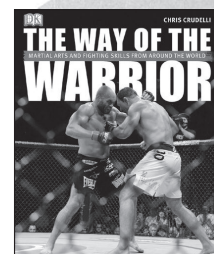
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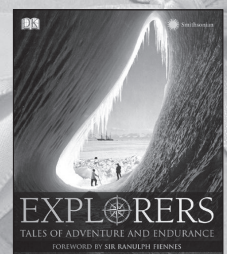
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Tips for safe and successful holiday travel

The holidays might still seem a way off, but for anyone planning to travel, now is the time to make plans. For those who have braved an airport during the holidays, the specter of overbooked flights, long check-in delays and lost luggage is all too familiar. So what's a hopeful holiday traveler to do? Check out TravelSense.org, a consumer Web site chock full of helpful travel advice and tips and contact a local ASTA travel agent.

“Working with a travel agent well in advance of your trip is always sage advice and gives you that little extra peace of mind, something we all need when the stresses of the holidays hit,” said ASTA President and Chair Chris Russo. “With so many things to plan and worry about over the holidays, your travel needn’t be one of them.”

Tips for air travel include:

Book your ticket ASAP. If you must book last minute, remember, you have options. The key to securing the best deal is flexibility in travel dates – ask your travel agent to check into holiday fares; the slow week between Christmas and the new year; or consider flying into an alternate airport and renting a car. If your holiday vacation includes international travel, make sure you have a valid passport. Your travel agent can advise you on the new rules and how to apply.

Arrive early. Airport parking, long lines at security checkpoints and the possibility of the airline overselling the flight and bumping passengers should all be considered when deciding what time to arrive at the airport. Give yourself plenty of extra time. Need some incentive? Keep in mind that those who arrive earliest for an overbooked flight stand the greatest chance of staying onboard.

Keep a close eye on all your belongings. Just as airports are extremely crowded during the peak holiday period with travelers, they can also be fraught with thieves working the airports. Be aware of your surroundings and maintain a close watch over tickets, wallets, purses, and other belongings at all times.

Avoid getting bumped. Get an advance seat assignment: Passengers with seat assignments are typically only bumped if they arrive late and their seat assignment is released. Check-in online: Most airlines allow you to do so within 24 hours of departure. Seat assignments that were not available at the time of ticketing may be available when checking in online. Don't be late: If all else fails, get to the airport early. Some airlines reserve a portion of their seat assignment inventory for airport check-in. If you are denied a seat assignment at check-in, put your name on the “standby” seat assignment list.

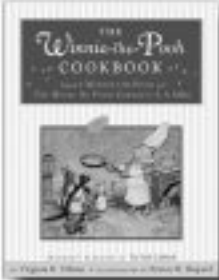

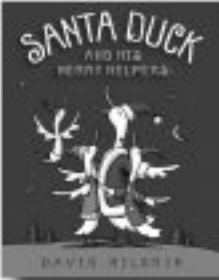
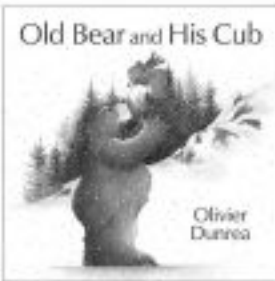


Remember 3-1-1. New regulations limit the amount of gels and liquids passengers can take through security in their carry-on luggage to travel-size toiletries of 3 ounces or less that fit comfortably in one quart-size, clear plastic zip-top bag and the one bag per passenger must be placed in the screening bin.

Pack light and know baggage limits. Some airlines now allow only one carry-on and charge for your first and second checked bags. Ship your gifts to your destination ahead of time. If you choose to travel with your gifts, leave them unwrapped. With safety a priority for all airlines, security personnel will need access to all items. Pack collapsible gift bags to be used as wrapping upon arrival.

— American Society of Travel Agents



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Latest Halo provides plenty of action



Image courtesy of Handout/MCT

Very few video games have pop culture crossover appeal.

Recent games like "Grand Theft Auto" and "Guitar Hero" have resonated with both hardcore and casual gamers while drawing attention from non-gamers.

"Halo" certainly belongs in that category. The game essentially launched the Xbox, and helped Microsoft grab a foothold in console sales and legitimately compete with Sony and Nintendo. The game became a huge hit and the series became

a household name.

The game's impact on society should be credited to developer Bungie, which helped bring online multiplayer gaming to the forefront with the "Halo" series.

Well, Bungie's run with "Halo" is now over with the release of "Halo: Reach" the final game in the series from the Seattle-area developer.

Microsoft will reportedly continue on with the series with another developer, while Bungie is working on an unnamed game with Activision.

Bungie has indeed gone out with a bang here.

The final outing for Bungie is actually a prequel to the original "Halo" game, set before series protagonist Master Chief took up the fight against the alien Covenant forces. In this new game, the protagonist is a Spartan soldier - sort of like a gun-toting Jedi - who is part of a crew trying to defend the planet Reach during a Covenant invasion.

The campaign mode is stellar, but I wouldn't expect anything else. Every game in the series

(except maybe "Halo: ODST") delivers a solid campaign with an engaging storyline. Even without Master Chief, "Halo: Reach" continues the tradition of building a strong campaign mode around a good story.

This game also ties together nicely with the original "Halo," with the timelines of both games coming close to each other.

From a story mode perspective, I'm not sure "Halo: Reach" is as good as "Halo 2" or "Halo 3." Both previous games benefited from the inclusion of Master Chief, with whom gamers have built up an emotional attachment through three games.

Your character in "Halo: Reach" is little more than a number.

But where "Halo: Reach" sets itself apart is in its multiplayer mode, which is the best so far in the series.

It makes sense that the franchise, which helped define multiplayer gaming for this generation, has its best effort yet in online gaming.

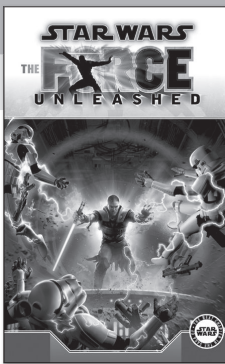
The options are robust, as always. Firefight, a mode from "Halo: ODST," is back and pits you against as many enemies as you can handle.

One of the online options includes a level editor. You can customize just about anything, and the developers took everything that has worked in four games and tweaked it for the better.

"Halo: Reach" may sell more than any other game this year. The game grossed \$200 million on its first day in stores. The mark broke the franchise record, and deservedly so, as it's probably the most complete game in the series.

—McClatchy Newspapers

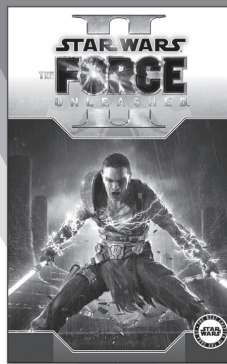
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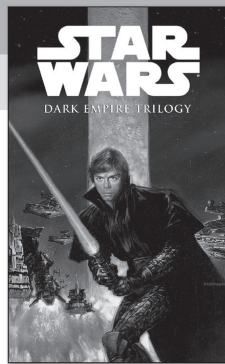
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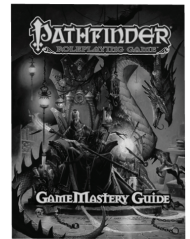
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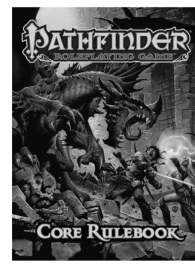
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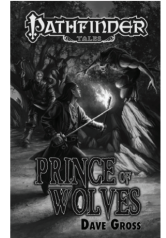
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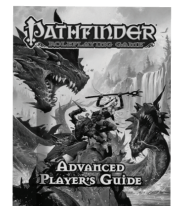
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Is 3-D TV technology worth the price?

While most TV buyers are still reluctant to dip into 3-D, David Cullers took the plunge in April, spending about \$3,000 for a 55-inch Samsung LED LCD, with a 3-D Blu-ray player.

The Dallas resident is also gaming in 3-D with his PlayStation 3 console. And he's loving every minute of it. "I've been blown away how good the quality was for gaming," Cullers said.

But Cullers and other local 3-D early adopters say that while the technology is as amazing as advertised, there just isn't much 3-D video worth watching yet.

"The product is just not out there," Cullers said. "I would love to (watch more). I'd love some nature shows. That would be pretty cool."

In some ways, it's a repeat of the launch of high-definition video, when HD content was limited, boring and repetitive (if you've seen one high-def sunrise, you've seen enough), but it's now used for everything from the Super Bowl to CNN.

3-D also has its own particular challenges, though, including some that could make the tech-

nology a deal-breaker for certain viewers.

Industry analysts are confident 3-D will take off.

DisplaySearch predicts that shipments of 3-D televisions will rise from 3.4 million in 2010, or 5 percent of flat-panel TV sales, to 42.9 million, or 37 percent of sales, in 2014.

Some are more cautious, though, such as Jeff Weber, vice president of U-verse and video products at Dallas-based AT&T Inc. "Clearly, 3-D is going to happen and a lot of what we're doing on U-verse is making sure we're positioned regardless of how quickly or slowly 3-D develops in the marketplace," Weber said.

But "I'm probably one of those whose opinion is that it's going to be a little bit slower than the real optimistic predictions suggest."

Most TV makers have 3-D models in stores now.

Finding something to watch on those new sets can be tricky, though.

There are only a few 3-D channels airing anywhere, with ESPN 3D by far the biggest. 3-D movies



Image courtesy of MCT

David Cullers, left, and his roommate, Ryan Stoudt, play a three-dimensional video game, "Super Stardust," on a 55-inch 3-D LED television.

on Blu-ray discs are also few and far between.

Making the shortage worse, many movie studios are only selling their 3-D discs to buyers of specific TV brands.

For example, the 3-D Blu-ray version of *Avatar* coming in December will be sold, at least initially, only as a pack-in for buyers of Panasonic 3-D sets.

The early adopters who have bought 3-D sets are tech-savvy folks who knew going in they'd have to deal with the growing pains of a new technology.

North Richland Hills, Texas, resident Bob Childress bought a 46-inch Samsung earlier this

year, and he's pleased with his purchase.

"I'm enjoying it," he said. "My wife said she wouldn't wear the stupid glasses, but after we put them on and start watching the movie, we just get wrapped up in it."

Bryan Burns, the vice president of business strategy and development at ESPN who heads up the sports broadcaster's 3-D efforts, said most viewers have similar experiences once they watch a 3-D video.

"It's rolling out the same way as HD rolled out," he said. "Consumers have to see this. We've got to put it in front of them. But once we do, you hear them gasp

and go, 'Oh my goodness. I have to have this.'"

Some might just be gasping at the price tag, though.

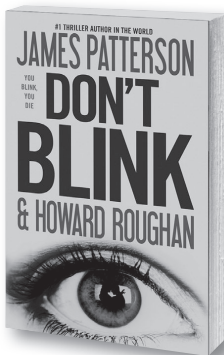
3-D TVs are still generally several hundred dollars more expensive than their 2-D-only counterparts.

While some Mitsubishi DLP sets using an older 3-D technology start at under \$1,000, newer LCD and plasma 3-D sets generally start at around \$1,300 in the 40- to 46-inch range.

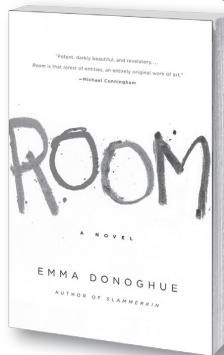
Also, the current crop of 3-D goggles is not cheap, often costing \$100 or more per pair.

—McClatchy Newspapers

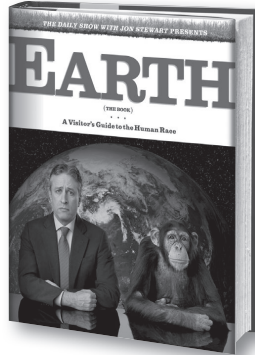
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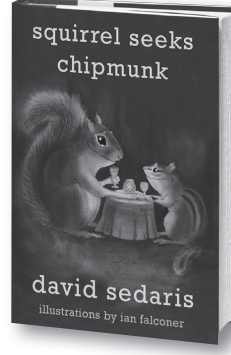
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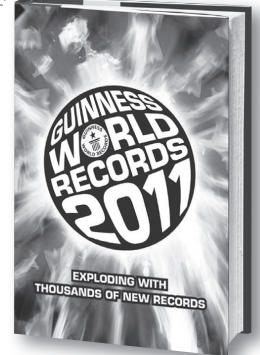
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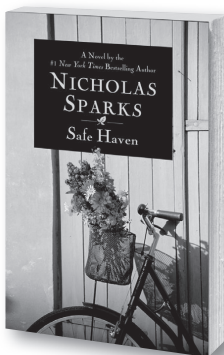
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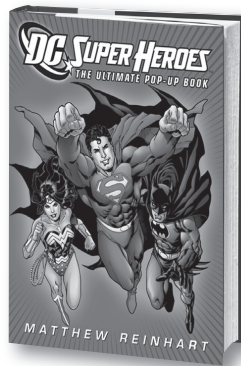
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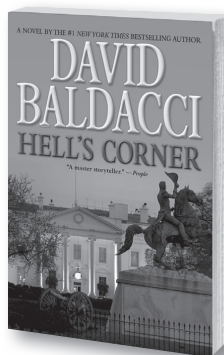
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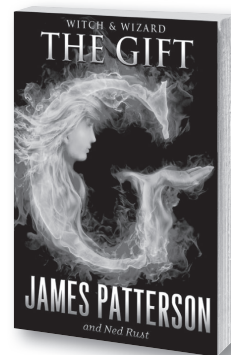
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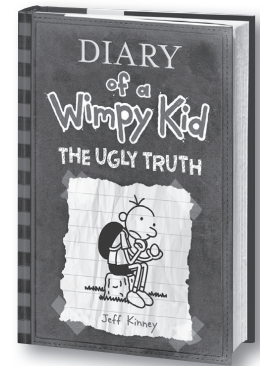
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How does 'Medal of Honor' stack up to 'Call of Duty'



Courtesy of Electronic Arts/MCT

Before the "Call of Duty" series became an 800-pound video game gorilla, one of the premier first-person shooters was "Medal of Honor."

Since it's been three years since the last "Medal of Honor" game and since both franchises now feature more contemporary theaters of war, it's natural to compare this new release to the reigning top dog.

The verdict here is that although "Medal of Honor" is pretty good, it's not quite as good as "Call of Duty."

What they're selling: From Electronic Arts – "Operating directly under the National Command Authority, a relatively unknown entity of handpicked warriors are called on when the mission must not fail. They are the Tier 1 Operators."

What we're telling: The game obviously goes for a "ripped-from-today's-headlines" vibe. The action takes place in the early days of the war in Afghanistan, before there were significant amounts of American troops on the ground and special forces were leading the charge.

The nut graph: The game has its moments. There are a couple of fantastic levels where you can really feel the desperate pressure of being a soldier mired in a tough spot. It controls well and looks great (apart from a few moments when the framerate dips severely), although the enemy AI can be awfully predictable (just wait a second, they'll stick their heads up every time).

You play as three different soldiers, a Tier 1 operator, a sniper and a young Army Ranger. "Tier 1" refers to the soldiers who are elite even among the special forces, and this game is a tribute to them, the best and baddest America can send forth. The action gets a little earnest in points, but you can appreciate

the effort.

A minor controversy over the multiplayer – you can play online as the Taliban, but the name has been changed in the game to "Opposing Force" – resulted in "Medal of Honor" not being sold on military bases, but anybody who thinks this game is unpatriotic just hasn't played it.

The multiplayer plays a lot like the "Battlefield" games, and goes at a much quicker pace from the single-player. It's not bad if you stay on the move and the competition feels pretty well-balanced.

It's a good return to the series for EA, and offers some hope for the future. With a few refinements and a beefier experience, "Medal of Honor" could easily return to the top levels of gaming. It's just not there this time around.

Reason to smile: On one of the Ranger levels you have to fight your way to a hut at the base of a mountain and hold off hordes of Taliban fighters until Apache helicopters arrive to finish the fight. It's several minutes of screaming, hectic fun.

Reason to growl: Single-player story is pretty short, about five hours. You can go back and replay it on "Tier 1" settings to try and make it on the leaderboards, but there's less action that with most first-person shooters.

—McClatchy Newspapers



Courtesy of Electronic Arts/MCT

NBA Jam to bust backboards online

NBA Jam is back.

The classic has been given an HD twist by Electronic Arts, and should be on store shelves by mid-November in the PlayStation3 and Xbox 360 and will feature online play.

Described by Gamesradar.com as "virtually perfect" – NBA Jam will take advantage of the online communities playing on the Xbox 360 and PlayStation3 to bring all the action into your own virtual arcade.

Featuring gameplay that is true to the original, NBA Jam will have players spinning with ankle breaking moves to the basket and on

the way to high-flying, backboard-smashing dunks. With two distinct game modes – Classic Campaign and Remix Tour – plus online modes, NBA Jam offers something for everyone.

At launch, gamers will be able to take on all rivals playing classic 2-on-2 online for the first time ever, measuring their success on Friends and Global Leaderboards. The online features will expand significantly with several major online features being delivered through a free title update for connected gamers. Connected fans will be able to team up locally and online to compete

in Remix Games, including classic arcade hoop games like Backboard Smash, Domination Free-for-All, Elimination, and 21. Fans will also be able to make it a Jam Party online by inviting up to 3 friends to play.

"We have listened to our NBA Jam fans and appreciate their desire to play this game online, so we are going to deliver the online feature set they expect and deserve," said Trey Smith, Creative Director of NBA Jam. "Fans will be able to play Classic Jam online right out of the box."

In Classic Campaign, players can take a trip down memory lane, individually or with a friend, as they play all 30 teams in the NBA in a worst to first ladder tournament. In Remix Tour, players will be faced with a new twist on the traditional NBA Jam experience. From boss battles against some of the NBA's greatest legends, to half-court game modes with distinct challenges and winning conditions, players will be taken through an NBA Jam experience completely unique to the basketball videogame genre while demonstrating classic arcade hoops at its best.

—Business Wire

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APO/FPO mail deadlines fast approaching this holiday season

Shopping online with an APO or FPO address is often a challenging endeavor, but it is especially true during the holiday season. Veteran military shoppers know that to ensure items ordered online make it overseas in time for the holidays, it pays to give the APO/FPO system a little extra time during the months of November and December.

a special service that provides air transportation for parcels on a space available basis. PAL is available for Parcel Post not exceeding 30 pounds or 60 inches in length and girth combined. The applicable PAL fee must be paid in addition to the regular surface rate of postage for each addressed piece sent by PAL service. SAM packages are parcels paid at

pounds and 60 inches in length and girth combined.

Express Military Mail (EMM) service is also an option for overseas shoppers, although it is only available at a limited number of military post offices and can be fairly expensive. EMM shipments are similar to Domestic Express Mail shipments in pricing and delivery times.

about shopping online during the holiday season. "As long as shoppers place their orders by the first week of December, they usually aren't going to be disappointed. Of course if the service member is deployed, the earlier a package can be sent, the better. This year's deadlines are a day earlier than most of the 2009 deadlines, so it appears the USPS is taking the extra time needed for deployed personnel into account this holiday season."

site this year – many provided specifically for overseas military families."

Latvala cautions that stateside family members should be aware of the shipping restrictions for APO/FPO locations if they are sending gifts to loved ones at APO/FPO addresses this holiday season. "Each APO or FPO zip code has a set of restrictions on it that family members should be aware of. We have an online database of APO/FPO zip codes on our site that is updated every two weeks for military service members and their families to use. Packages that violate the size, weight or content restrictions of the system may not make it to their intended destination or may disappear entirely."

Montana based Oconus.com has been a popular online destination for overseas military families since 1999. For over 700 merchants shipping to military address, information on shipping to APO/FPOs and a large selection of online coupons for APO/FPO shoppers, visit www.oconus.com for more information.

Dan Latvala, founder of the overseas military web portal Oconus.com (and a frequent consultant to online businesses seeking advice on the APO/FPO market) had this to say

Although it is slightly more difficult for merchants to ship to overseas military addresses given the increased security concerns and restrictions on APO/FPO shipments, Latvala hasn't seen merchants pulling out of the APO/FPO market completely. "Merchants have been very supportive of our overseas families even though it takes extra time and effort for most of them to send items to APO/FPO addresses. We ask our merchant partners to show their support by providing special discounts, coupons and other offers to APO/FPO shoppers for the holiday season, and they have never disappointed us." He also thinks that merchants will be offering lots of incentives to move merchandise in this year's tight economy. "We'll have over 400 special coupons on the

—Special to the Stars & Stripes by F. Homer Strobolitch

The U.S. Postal Service publishes official guidance for overseas families each Fall in the Postal Service Bulletin. This year, to ensure delivery of Christmas cards and packages to military APO/FPO addresses, the USPS suggests that mail be sent by the recommended mailing dates listed below.

Military Mail Addressed To	Express Mail Military Service (EMMS)	First-Class Mail Letters/ Cards	Priority Mail	Parcel Airlift Mail (PAL)	Space Available Mail (SAM)	Parcel Post
APO/FPO AE ZIPs 090-092	Dec 18	Dec 10	Dec 10	Dec 3	Nov 26	Nov 12
APO/FPO AE ZIPs 093	N/A	Dec 4	Dec 4	Dec 1	Nov 20	Nov 12
APO/FPO AE ZIPs 094 - 098	Dec 18	Dec 10	Dec 10	Dec 3	Nov 26	Nov 12
APO/FPO AA ZIPs 340	Dec 18	Dec 10	Dec 10	Dec 3	Nov 26	Nov 12
APO/FPO AP ZIPs 962-966	Dec 18	Dec 10	Dec 10	Dec 3	Nov 26	Nov 12

While Priority Mail is the recommended shipping method for APO/FPO mail, Parcel Airlift Mail (PAL) and Space Available Mail (SAM) are also available alternatives. PAL is

Parcel Post postage rates that are first transported domestically by surface and then to overseas destinations by air on a space-available basis. The maximum weight and size limits are 15

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On the Move: Playstation rolls out motion control

It took four years since the PlayStation 3 and Wii launched, but Sony's response to the motion-control craze Nintendo started is finally on the market.

I spent a week-and-a-half trying out Sony's new Move control system for the PS3 and came away impressed.

If you haven't seen it, the technology works a bit differently from what you're used to seeing on the Wii. While the Wii uses an infrared sensor bar to track motion, Move uses the PlayStation Eye (\$40), a video camera that both opens up new gameplay possibilities and requires a bit more set-up on the part of the user.

So the camera can see it better, the Move controller (\$50) is topped by a light-up sphere that makes it look like what Kotaku's writers have described as a "robot ice cream cone." It has a few more buttons than the minimalist Wii remote, but most of the action is controlled by just two.

The shining jewel of the launch lineup is easily "Sports Champions" (rated E10+, \$40), which is available in a \$100 bundle with one Move controller and one camera. (If you don't own a PS3, you can also buy a box that includes a console, plus all the stuff in the Move bundle for \$400. A separate "navigation controller" is \$30, though none of the games I've played so far have used it.)

"Sports Champions" should be familiar to anyone who's played "Wii Sports." The collection of sports-based games includes table tennis, bocce, beach volleyball, disc golf, archery and gladiator-style fighting with a sword and shield.

Sony couldn't have picked a better pack-in game than "Sports Champions." Though its roster of preset, realistic-looking characters lacks some of the charm of Nintendo's Mii avatars, the gameplay and controls feel more sophisticated. With "Wii Sports," it's quite common to feel like you screwed up though no fault of your own. On "Champions," the lone glitch I encountered occurred when I'd accidentally moved out of the camera's optimal range and my bocce

player short-armed a key throw.

If "Sports Champions" is the Move's "Wii Sports," "Start the Party!" (rated E, \$40) is its "Mario Party." It's a competition in which players take part in a bunch of goofy minigames such as squishing insects or brushing a crocodile's teeth, with higher scores awarded for better performance.

There are a couple dozen minigames, the best of which requires players use a fan to blow falling baby chicks into nests, with unexpectedly comic results when a chick hits the fan blades.

Though the zany presentation and roster of activities would likely start to wear on older gamers' patience after a couple of sessions, "Start the Party!" is clearly aimed at families with preteen kids.

While "Start the Party," uses the camera to take players' photos and record introductory audio, pet simulator "EyePet" (rated E, \$40) creates an experience unlike anything you'll find on the Wii. The camera films you in front of your console, puts you on the screen and adds the EyePet into the mix.

You can interact with the cute little fella, who looks like a cross between a monkey and a cat, with your hands and the Move controller. You'll give him a name, play with him, feed him, bathe him and style his fur. You can use the Eye to take photos and post them online for other players to see.

I felt a little weird playing "EyePet" because my two cats wanted in on the proceedings, and it felt weird ignoring real pets to play with a virtual one. "EyePet" might best suit people who can't have pets, or parents who want to teach their kids a little bit about responsibility before getting a real animal.

"KungFu Rider" (rated E10+, \$40) is terrible. In action reminiscent of a skateboarding game, you use one of two characters to ride wheeled objects (office chair, vacuum cleaner, etc.) through city streets, dodging obstacles or fighting off the Mafia with kung-fu moves. It's as crazy as

it sounds, and the first few times it's surreal fun. But the controls need work, the dialogue is repetitive and the skimpy outfit worn by the jiggly female character seems oddly out of place.

In kitsch value, "KungFu Rider" is on par with that "Sneak King" Xbox 360 game that was sold at Burger King for \$4 and featured the restaurant chain's creepy mascot sneaking up on people and surprising them with fast food. But this is 10 times as expensive. You'll feel cool four years from now when you pick this up from a GameStop clearance bin for \$5 and throw it in during a game night with friends. Until then, pass.

Though its launch lineup is lacking in depth, the Move is a promising piece of technology. Everything seems to work just about as you expect it to, which means we probably won't be getting an upgrade two years down the road like we did with Nintendo's Wii MotionPlus.

Other than an obviously smaller lineup of games, the only drawback Move suffers compared with the Wii is its setup. With a lot of



Image courtesy of AP

A show attendee plays a video game using Playstation Move motion controllers at the Sony booth at the E3 Expo in Los Angeles.


the games, you'll want to move the coffee table to clear floor space, and various games seem to want the camera in a slightly different spot.

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—McClatchy Newspapers




Courtesy of Sony/MCT



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What's hot this holiday season

As Americans scrutinize every purchase, merchants are making sure to stock up on holiday gifts that are either practical or offer an affordable way to splurge. Here are some of the hot trends for Christmas 2010:



Courtesy of WowWee

FASHION: Fur vests — real or fake — and sweaters with Nordic patterns around the neckline should be hot sellers, according to Catherine Moellering, executive vice president of Tobe, a fashion trend consultancy. Military-inspired clothing like cadet-style jackets and cargo pants should remain hot.

CONSUMER GADGETS: Smart phones and e-readers, particularly Apple Inc.'s iPad and iPhone, will be popular. So will Sony Corp.'s Playstation3 Move controller and Microsoft Corp.'s Kinect, which both let video-game players control characters in a game with body movements, similar to the Nintendo Wii.

GADGET ACCESSORIES:

With consumers already armed with trendy covers for their cellphones, a bevy of companies are pushing covers for the iPad. (For the big spenders, Chanel offers a \$1,555 leather version in its classic quilted design.) Stores are also pushing fingerless gloves — for those who will be texting in the cold, according to Moellering.



THE VERY PRACTICAL:

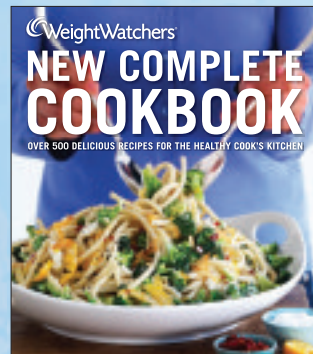
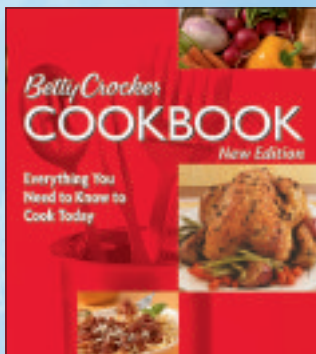
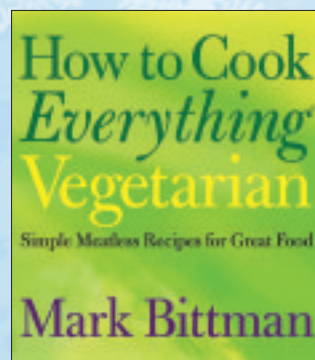
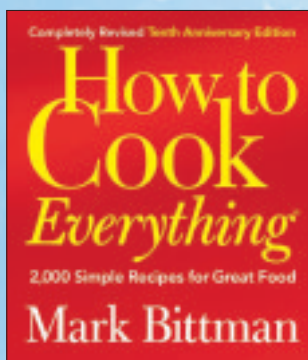
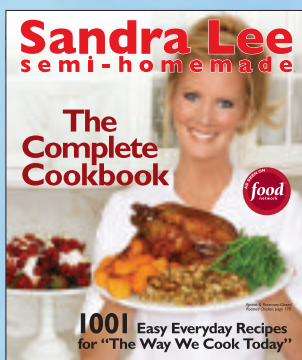
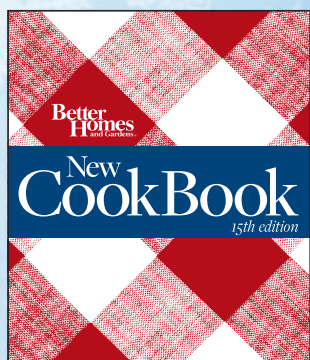
For those looking for underwear and socks, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. will have plenty. And home improvement leader Home Depot is pushing gadgets that will help shoppers cut the costs of operating a home, such as eco-friendly lightbulbs. So don't be surprised if you see some bulbs or socks in your stocking.

TECH-PACKED TOYS: Certain toys, which started to hit store shelves in August, are seeing strong sales already. Blip Toys' Squinkies, tiny collectible figures that come with toy vending machines that open out into playsets, are already hard to find. They come in 16 packs for \$10.

So are Spin Master's \$5.99 Zoobles, colorful creatures that pop open when placed on stands. Hasbro's \$54.99 Nerf foam dart blaster and perennial favorite Legos are already hot. Another popular toy is Wow-Wee Toys' Paper Jamz, a collection of paper-thin electronic guitars and drums that sell for \$24.99. Walgreen's spokesman Jim Cohn says that Paper Jamz is the top seller among the 400 toys it sells.



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Spending big? Neiman Marcus has ideas

For those looking to splurge a bit this holiday season, luxury retailer Neiman Marcus unveiled its annual Christmas Book with gifts including a \$15,000 edible gingerbread playhouse and a \$125,000 private party organized by celebrity event planner Colin Cowie.

The annual catalog, known for expensive and often outrageous items, was revealed at Neiman Marcus' downtown Dallas store, where some of the offerings were on display. Cowie even stood in a store window drinking tequila with two models to preview the party he'll throw.

Neiman Marcus is celebrating the 50th anniversary of its "his and hers" gifts like a \$250,000 houseboat for two. Over the decades, the series has included everything from airplanes to camels, and die-hard fans might like a \$248,000 bracelet of diamond and gold charms representing past "his and hers" gifts.

Other items in the Christmas

Book's 84th edition: A \$4,500 adult-size tricycle for three with seat and canopy fabrics by Tory Burch and a \$1.5 million glass creation from artist Dale Chihuly for the bottom of a swimming pool. Danny Ferington, who has made instruments for rock stars George Harrison and Keith Richards, is offering ukuleles made from gourds for \$6,000.

With continuing respect for those on smaller budgets, Neiman has priced about half the of the catalog's offerings under \$250, as it did in 2009, said Ginger Reeder, vice president of public relations for Neiman Marcus.

That includes tweezers adorned with crystals for \$100 or a scented candle for \$95.

Reeder said the extravagant offerings not only satisfy a tradition but offer a bit of fantasy, even to those who can't afford them. It's fun, she said, to think about which 75 people you'd invite to Cowie's party featuring cocktails with Tequila Avion mixed by Yusef Aus-



Image courtesy of AP
People are reflected on a glass window as they look at a special edition Camaro Convertible during the unveiling of the Neiman Marcus 2010 Christmas Book in Dallas, TX. The luxury retailer is offering the car for \$75,000 in 84th edition of the holiday gift book.

tin, dinner by chef Todd English and music by disc jockey Donna d'Cruz.

"I do think if there's ever a time of year to fantasize about 'What in the world would I do if I won the lottery,' this is it. That's part of our tradition," Reeder said. "If you want something, you can get it at Neiman Marcus. If you want a houseboat for two that you can escape on, you can get it at Neiman Marcus. Or you can

dream about it from Neiman Marcus."

For those who want power in their gifts, there's a Neiman Marcus edition Chevrolet Camaro convertible with an interior of amber leather with red accents for \$75,000.

If personal attention is your thing, \$9,500 buys the services of a concierge in the arty outpost of Marfa, Texas, who will create a four-night vacation for two. Need a camera to

take along? A Neiman Marcus edition Leica M9 with ostrich leather trim and a matching strap goes for \$17,500.

Stepping away from the festivities in the store window, Cowie said his party will be easy to host: "All you have to do is invite the guests. We'll show up as a team and give you this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

—The Associated Press

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