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# Holiday Shopping Guide

November 10, 2011



VIDEO GAMES

Stuff your gamer's stocking with one of these promising titles



HOLIDAY MAILING

Postal officials cautions that holiday mailing may be busier than usual



HOLIDAY GIVING

With holiday giving, it's truly the thought that counts

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An Advertising Supplement to Stars and Stripes

## 2011 Holiday Shopping Guide

# Stuff your gamer's stocking with one of these promising titles



Video game developers know that Americans – at least the men among them – love to find a good game in their Christmas stockings. That's why they hold most of their best releases for this time of year.

The problem is that the flood of good titles hitting the stores makes it difficult to determine which are the best bets for gifts. Here's a quick list of some of the most promising titles. Perhaps it can help you choose the right game for the gamer in your life.



## Assassin's Creed: Revelations

Ezio moves from Rome to Istanbul, Turkey. Expect to climb famous buildings, backstab countless foes and learn more about the mysteries surrounding the battle between Ezio's Assassins and the evil Templars. Due Nov. 30 from Ubisoft.

Online: <http://assassinscreed.ubi.com/revelations/>



## Batman: Arkham City

The Caped Crusader takes on a slew of supervillains and their henchmen in a criminal enclave carved out of the heart of Gotham City. You get a chance to pull off some new acrobatic moves and to bash a few heads as Cat Woman. It's an excellent follow-up to "Batman: Arkham Asylum." From Warner Bros.

Online: <http://community.batmanarkhamcity.com>



## Battlefield 3

This game delivers the same kind of action that "Battlefield" fans love: multiplayer matches featuring team-based combat on sprawling maps filled with destructible buildings — and plenty of vehicles. The campaign takes players into Iran to fight a terrorist coup and Paris to foil a nuclear plot. It's intense and a lot of fun. From Electronic Arts.

Online: [www.battlefield.com/battlefield3](http://www.battlefield.com/battlefield3)



## Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3

"COD" is always considered the shooter to beat. Although glimpses of the game have been sparse in the run-up to release, it's certain to be popular with shooter fans. That alone makes it a much for gamers who enjoying battling their friends online. Due Nov. 8 from Activision.

Online: [www.callofduty.com/mw3](http://www.callofduty.com/mw3)



## Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Return to the medieval fantasy land of Tamriel, where you can create your own character – human and otherwise – and explore a huge open world filled with all sorts of menacing creatures and unusual people. From Bethesda Softworks.

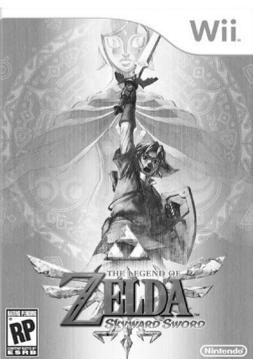
Online: [www.elderscrolls.com/skyrim](http://www.elderscrolls.com/skyrim)



## Gears of War 3

Marcus Fenix and friends wrap up their quest to defeat the Locust horde. This science-fiction shooter offers an exceptionally good campaign and terrific multiplayer and co-op survival modes. From Microsoft.

Online: <http://gearsofwar.xbox.com>



## The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

What might be the last huge game for the Wii features the return of the elf Link to the fantasy kingdom of Hyrule. It might not look life much compared to its high-resolution competitors, but the story and game play are certain to be good. Due Nov. 20 from Nintendo.

Online: <http://legendzelda.net/skyward-sword/>



## Rage

Take on a host of baddies in a wasteland created by an enormous asteroid strike. Great graphics and fun game play make this one a winner. The game feels a lot like the sci-fi shooter "Borderlands" – only with a better story line. From Bethesda Softworks.

Online: <http://rage.com>



## Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

Fortune hunter Nathan Drake's seeks the "Atlantis of the Sands." As usual for "Uncharted" games, the game play is fun, the story is engaging and the graphics are terrific. From Sony.

Online: [www.naughtydog.com/games/uncharted](http://www.naughtydog.com/games/uncharted)

## 2011 Holiday Shopping Guide

# Postal officials cautions that holiday mailing may be busier than usual



Grant Okubo/Stars and Stripes

U.S. Army Master Sgt. Eunice Haynes, of the 374th Contracting Squadron, prepares her packages at the Yokota Air Base, Japan, post office to send to friends and family in Texas.

By David Hodge  
Stars and Stripes

RAF MILDENHALL, England — The deadlines for sending gifts for the holidays may still be weeks away, but postal officials caution that mail service could be busier than usual this year with U.S. troops withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan and shipping their belongings home by mail.

To help those mailing packages to the U.S. ensure they are delivered in time, the Military Postal Service Agency has released its annual mail-by dates, which take into account the expected increase in mail during peak season.

The dates are merely a guideline, said William Hossack at U.S. Air Forces in Europe's Postal Operations Branch, and they vary slightly from the Pacific to the Middle East to Europe. But postal service officials say the earlier, the better.

"We're saying, if you use these dates for the particular class (of mail), they'll almost assuredly get there by Christmas," Hossack said. "The only thing I recommend is to mail early and avoid the rush."

Packages coming from the Middle East have the earliest dates due to the logistical challenges of moving mail from far-flung outposts and the unpredictable nature of a war zone.

This holiday season could see more delays due to the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops in Iraq and continuing troop reductions in Afghanistan. Many of the returning troops will ship personal belongings home through the mail, said Army Lt. Col. Edward Bayouth, Postal Operations Division chief of the 14th Human Resources Sustainment Center in Kuwait.

"There will be an exceptionally heavy volume of mail for those two locations this holiday season," Bayouth said.

The U.S. and military postal

services will stop processing mail to and from military post offices in Iraq starting Nov. 17 in light of the withdrawal there.

In general, there are four classes of mail to choose from when sending packages internationally. Space-Available Mail is the cheapest option, but it takes longer to get to its destination. SAM is followed in price by First Class, then Priority, up to the most expensive option, Express Mail. Military post offices in Iraq and Afghanistan do not offer Express-Mail service.

Priority is the most commonly used service among troops, according to Lionel Rivera, USAFE's postal public affairs representative. Priority offers various sizes of envelopes and boxes at a fixed price, as long as the packages meet weight and size restrictions of 70 pounds and 108 inches. Measurements are calculated by adding the object's length to its girth.

There are more than 500 military post offices in the world, and many overseas locations may extend business hours or open additional days during the holidays. Check with your installation post office for information on holiday hours.

## Mail classes

- **Express Mail Military Service:** expedited delivery service. Not available from military post offices in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- **First Class:** used for items weighing less than or equal to 13 ounces. Flat-rate packaging available.
- **Priority:** weight limit of 70 pounds, length-girth limit of 108 inches. Flat-rate packaging available.
- **Space-Available:** weight limit of 70 pounds, length-girth limit of 130 inches on mail to the U.S. Packages sent low priority take longer to reach destination.
- **Parcel Airlift Service:** limited to 30 pounds and a length-girth limit of 60 inches.

## Extra services

- **Certified mail:** provides proof of mailing along with date and time of delivery or attempted delivery.
- **Insured:** coverage against loss or damage up to \$5,000. Fee based on value of item.
- **Registered:** most secure service offered. Monitors movement of mail from beginning to end. Insurable up to \$25,000. Fee based on value of item.
- **Delivery confirmation:** provides tracking number to see when item was delivered to address. Nominal fee of 70 cents.
- **Other services:** return receipt, signature confirmation, certificate of mailing, restricted delivery and others.

## Hints and tips

- Take the time to wrap items correctly.
- Choose a sturdy box that's appropriate for the size and weight of the item.
- Allow room for ample cushioning; use foam peanuts, Bubble Wrap, newspaper or shredded paper.
- Print names and addresses clearly on the package.
- Place an extra label with the shipping and return addresses inside the package in case the original labels get damaged. Also include an itemized list of contents.
- Use adequate amounts of tape to secure the opening and seams of the box.
- Write "fragile" or "perishable" on boxes, if appropriate.

## Suggested mail-by dates from European Theater to U.S.:

**Space-Available:** Nov. 25  
**Parcel Airlift:** Dec. 2  
**First Class/Priority:** Dec. 9  
**Express Military Mail Service:** Dec. 16

## Suggested mail-by dates from Middle East Theater to U.S.:

**Space-Available:** Nov. 26  
**First Class/Priority:** Dec. 3

## MPSA mail-by recommendations from U.S. to overseas:

U.S. to Middle East (APO/FPO/DPO AE 093...)

**Parcel Post:** Nov. 12  
**Space-Available Mail:** Nov. 26  
**Parcel Airlift:** Dec. 1  
**First Class/Priority:** Dec. 3

## U.S. to all other military post offices

**Parcel Post:** Nov. 12  
**Space-Available:** Nov. 26  
**Parcel Airlift:** Dec. 3  
**First Class/Priority:** Dec. 10  
**Express:** Dec. 17

## Suggested mail-by dates from Pacific Theater to U.S.:

**Korea**  
**Space-Available:** Dec. 3

**Parcel Airlift:** Dec. 3  
**First Class/Priority:** Dec. 10  
**Express Military Mail Service:** Dec. 17

## Mainland Japan

**Space-Available:** Dec. 2  
**Parcel Airlift:** Dec. 2  
**First Class/Priority:** Dec. 9  
**Express Military Mail Service:** 16 Dec.

## Okinawa and Thailand

**Space-Available Mail:** Nov. 29  
**Parcel Airlift:** Nov. 29  
**First Class/Priority:** Dec. 6  
**Express Military Mail Service:** Dec. 13

## Australia

**Space-Available:** Nov. 25  
**Parcel Airlift:** Dec. 2  
**First Class/Priority:** Dec. 9  
**Express Military Mail Service:** Dec. 16

— Source: Military Postal Service Agency and U.S. Postal System

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2011 Holiday Shopping Guide

# With holiday giving, it's truly the thought that counts

By Charlie Reed  
Stars and Stripes

There's a big difference between getting your loved one the gift you know they want and a last-minute present purchased on the fly.

Thoughtfulness and consideration says a lot more than most high-dollar gifts. So put a little thought into your gifts this holiday season.

If you're stationed overseas and sending gifts back home, you'll need to factor in the additional cost and time associated with mailing fees and customs forms. Most military post offices have set 2011 holiday shipping deadlines, which vary from base to base. Check your local post office for the most accurate and up-to-date information.

If you want to make your holiday shopping hassle-free, make a list ... and set a budget. Spending beyond your means during the holidays is the worst. If you prefer relaxing with your family over worrying about bills, only spend what you can afford this holiday season.

Once you get the finances out of the way, it's time to hit the shops.

Take advantage of your cool as-

signment abroad and buy something locally made for someone special back home. Whether it's at the Japanese "100 yen shop" or at a German Christmas market stall, make time for an off-base shopping trip this holiday season. You don't have to spend a lot to impress.

Or contemplate a home-made gift this year. Many bases have arts and crafts centers where you could make a present. It probably won't be free, but it's sure to be more personal than anything you can buy.

And don't forget about the power of holiday cookies and other treats you can make at home. They are always warmly received and a great gift idea for colleagues and schoolmates.

### SHOP AND SAVE

If you choose the retail route, there are still ways to impress without busting your budget.

With the growing popularity of online shopping, Americans overseas are no longer limited to the ubiquitous exchange stores on bases throughout the world.

"We have to stay competitive because we realize our customers

have other options," said Jessica Provan, an Army and Air Force Exchange Service marketing specialist based in Okinawa, Japan.

Good deals can be found in places like AAFES' "toy book" (good through Dec. 4), which includes \$450 in coupons on toys, instruments and sporting goods for children. And the Naval Exchange is offering zero-interest financing on all purchases more than \$399 using the Military Star Card, the Defense Department sanctioned line of private credit offered through most exchange stores.

Some military exchange stores offer pack-and-wrap services to help speed up the holiday buying boogie, and customers can also buy some merchandise online and have it shipped directly to the States. Inquire at your local exchange store for more details.

AAFES and NEX officials encourage shopping with them because profits are invested back into the military community. They also suggest taking advantage of their deals and coupons, offered on their Facebook pages and on flyers and shopping circulars distributed in the stores.

Just remember, plan ahead and think before you buy.

After all, it's really the thought that counts.

## Top Sellers for 2011

**iEverything** With the recent death of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs adding to the brand's household-name status, Apple products are hotter than ever this year, especially the new iPhone and iPad.

**Smart TVs** These hybrid television sets combine the features and functions of TV with the Internet. Wasting time has never been more convenient.

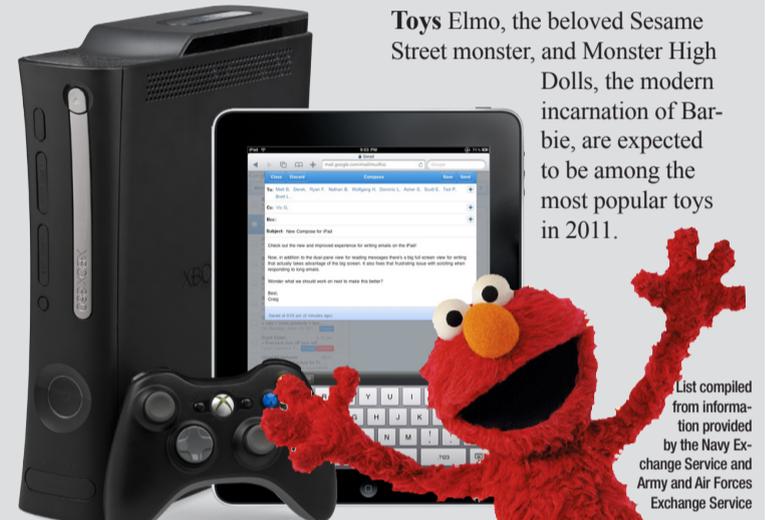
**Bikes** The classic present for kids. What child doesn't dream of seeing a shiny new bike under the tree Christmas morning at some point? Parents also seem to delight in the process of putting one together in Santa's workshop the night before.

**Designer handbags clothes** Popular brands include Coach and Juicy Couture. Military exchange stores often have great deals on selected designer merchandise.

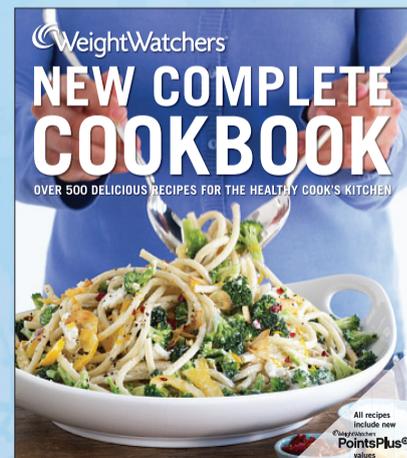
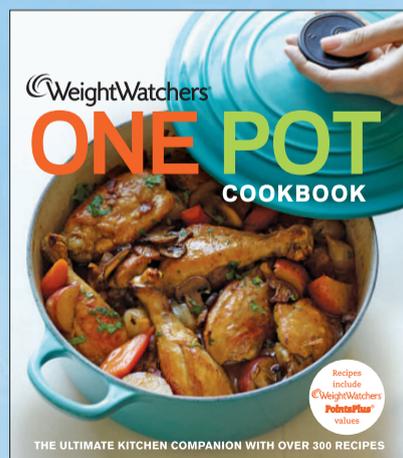
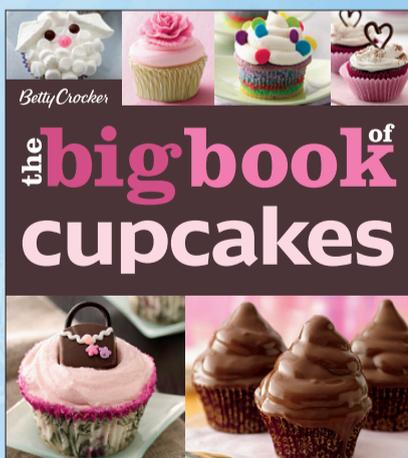
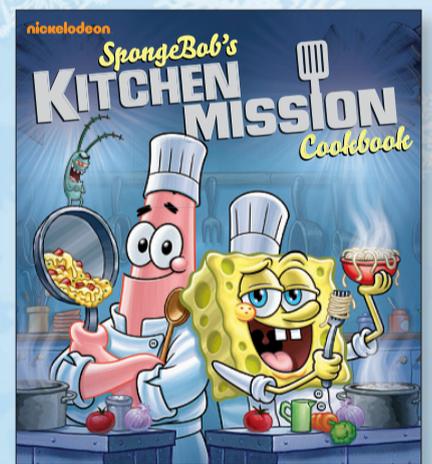
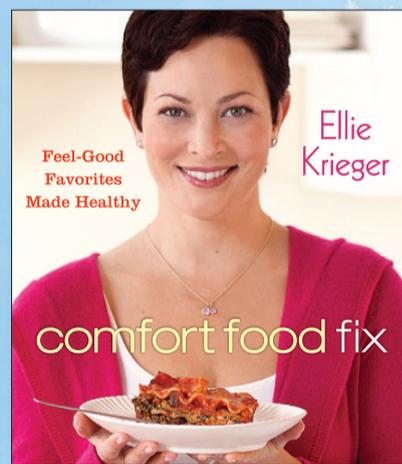
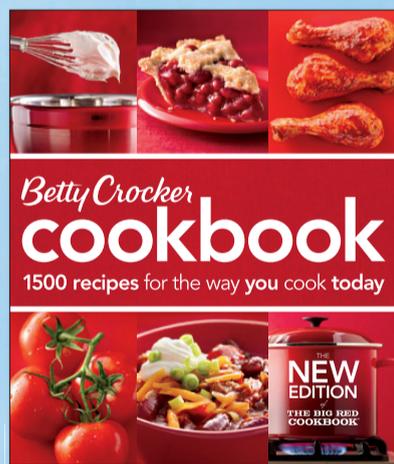
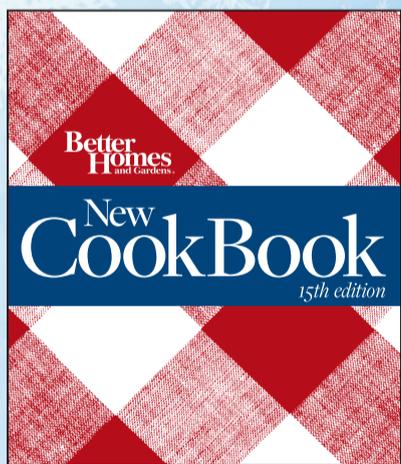
**Gaming systems** Determining "the best" gaming console to buy probably seems to boil down to a matter of preference. While some are die-hard Xbox fans, others stick to PS3.

**Small electronics** Believe it or not, vacuum cleaners and kitchen appliances are always popular sellers during the holiday shopping season. Hipper items include bread machines, one-cup coffee makers and Beats by Dr. Dre headphones.

**Toys** Elmo, the beloved Sesame Street monster, and Monster High Dolls, the modern incarnation of Barbie, are expected to be among the most popular toys in 2011.



## Get cooking this holiday season!

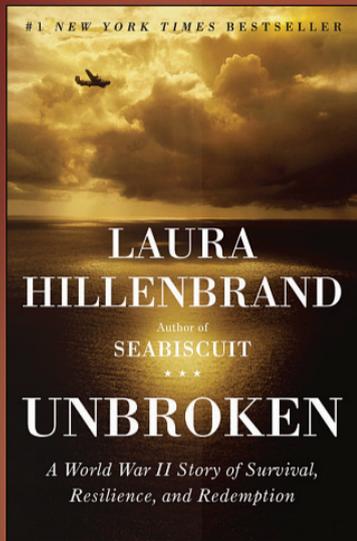


These cookbooks are available at military bookstores.

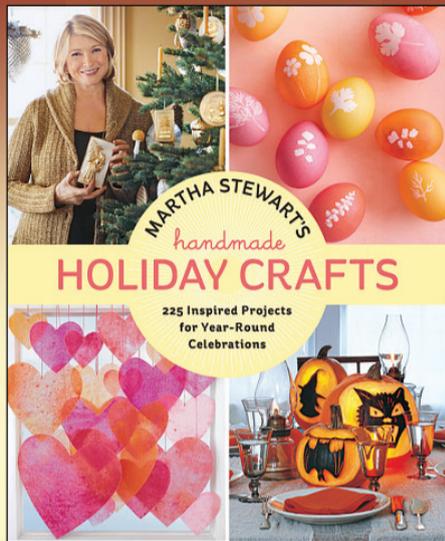
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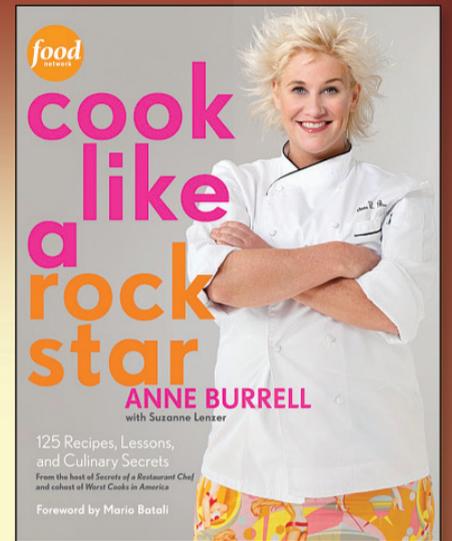
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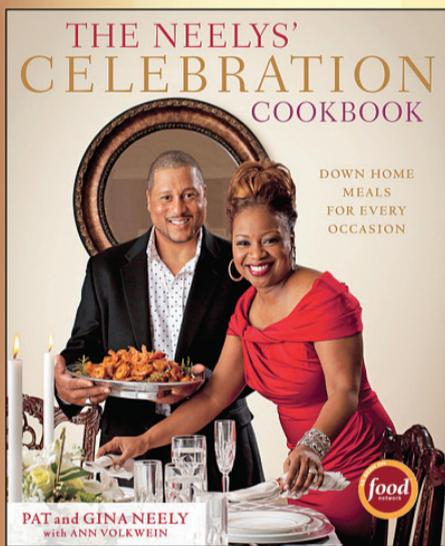
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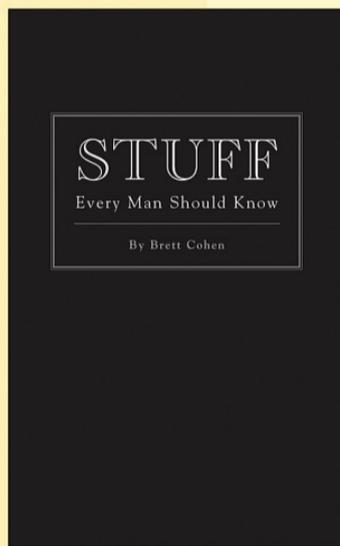
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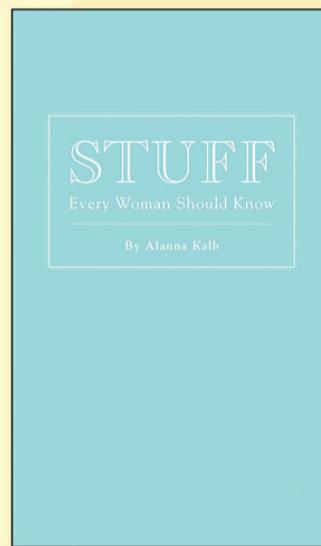
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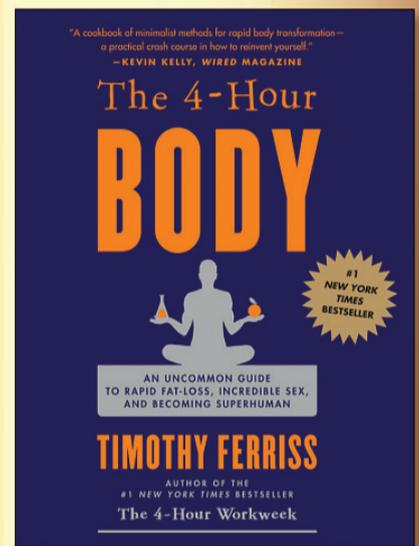
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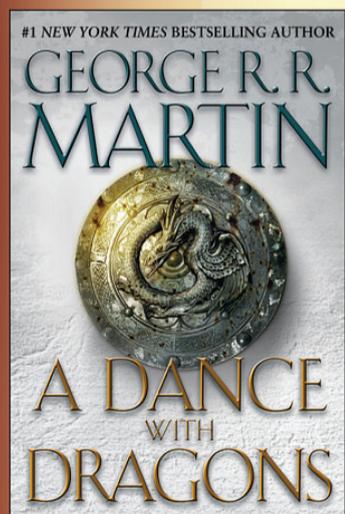
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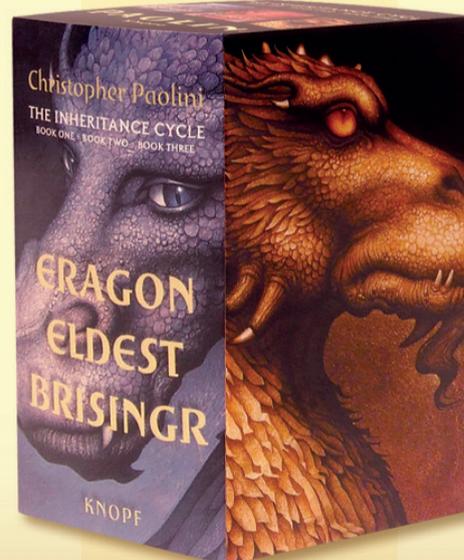
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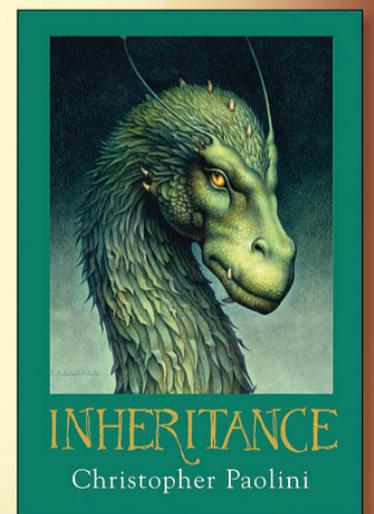
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## 2011 Holiday Shopping Guide

# After long search, AP reviewer buys iPhone



AP Photo/Eric Risberg

People line up to purchase an Apple iPhone 4S at a Sprint store in San Francisco.

**By Rachel Metz**  
AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — I felt nervous and a little giddy sidling up to the counter at the Apple Store on the first day the new iPhone went on sale last month.

I'd just given the iPhone 4S a rave review, and I was going to buy one for myself. It was about to be my first iPhone and only my second smartphone.

I was a little freaked out.

I hadn't bought a cellphone since October 2008, when I got

the first phone running Google's Android software, the G1, on its first day on sale. Since then, I've reviewed scores of phones for The Associated Press, and I've given personal recommendations to friends and family.

When it came to opening my own wallet, though, it got a lot harder: There were so many great phones out there, but none that had it all. I'm sure I'm not the only person who's had trouble deciding.

I really liked the G1 at first and because it never died, I kept using it. But over the years, smartphones have moved light years ahead. I

granted it a new lease on life in January by replacing its battery, but with sluggish performance, tired features and an inability to run many newer apps, I knew time was running out.

It wasn't just the phone. It was also the phone's service plan with T-Mobile.

I've been a loyal T-Mobile customer for years. I've stuck with it when my first apartment in New York lacked coverage and again when I moved to a San Francisco apartment where I have to practically stick my head out the window to get a signal. But that was

getting tiring.

I wanted a hot, new phone and reliable service to go with it.

As a gadget reviewer, you'd think it would be easy for me to pick out a new cellphone. I know what's out there, and I have access to the top devices. At any given time, I have a disturbing number of "loaner" smartphones crowding my desk, waiting to be reviewed or sent back to a handset maker or wireless carrier.

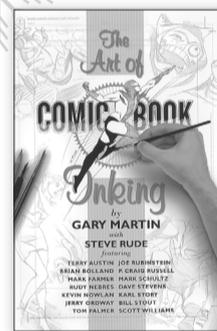
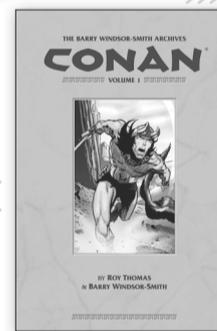
As it turns out, this made it even harder to make a decision. Part of me felt paralyzed by choice, while

another part of me felt no existing phone had everything on my wish list of features. I also hesitated knowing that anything I bought would soon be replaced by a newer model.

On top of all that, I felt anxious about signing a new two-year service contract. I'd been going month to month with the G1 for almost a year. I was fearful that if I committed now, I'd miss out on a better phone over the next two years — one packed with more goodies from my wish list.

*Continues on next page*

**I wanted it all. I wanted design and ease of use like the iPhone, but with an operating system that's more flexible, like Android.**



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AP Photo/Eric Risberg

Shown at left is an HTC G1 smartphone offered by T-Mobile and at right is an Apple iPhone 4S smartphone.

2011 Holiday Shopping Guide

*Continued from previous page*

I wanted it all. I wanted design and ease of use like the iPhone, but with an operating system that's more flexible, like Android. I didn't want a physical keyboard, but I longed for a good on-screen keyboard. I wanted the ability to use third-party keyboard software like Swype for fast typing, something I couldn't do with an iPhone. I also desired an awesome touch screen and a built-in camera that could take the place of my trusty, yet older-model digital camera.

Also, it had to work well in my home and office.

When the iPhone 4 came out last June, it had much of what I wanted, but I wasn't completely swayed. I also held off because it was still only available with AT&T's network, so it would barely work in my apartment.

When the iPhone came to Verizon Wireless this February, I was more tempted by that network's reliability. But I figured I could hold out until June, when Apple typically announces a new iPhone. I figured a new iPhone would have an even better camera and processor and other features besides those. So I waited.

When it became clear a new iPhone wouldn't be coming until the fall, I waited some more.

By the summer, my G1 was looking sadder and sadder. After reviewing the excellent T-Mobile myTouch 4G Slide, I almost gave in and bought one for myself, but I didn't want a physical keyboard or two more years of being tied to my service provider.

Finally, the iPhone 4S was announced in October. I reviewed it and was impressed enough with the hardware and new software to brave the launch day crowds and get a white 16-gigabyte model that runs on Verizon Wireless' network. It cost me \$199 and will tie me up with the carrier for two years.

Now, several weeks later, I'm happy with my decision.

The iPhone 4S isn't perfect. I really wish, for example, that Apple would let outside developers offer keyboard apps for the device. Yet it's a fast, fantastic smartphone. Despite complaints from other users that they've been experiencing poor battery life, I haven't noticed any problems so far. And Verizon's service, while costlier than what I had with T-Mobile, is reliable for calls and transferring data.

One of my favorite parts of the device is Siri, the built-in "personal assistant" that responds to your voice in a soothing, robotic female tone. It can do everything from scheduling meetings to texting friends to telling you how many calories you'll burn if you bike 100 miles (4,455, assuming you're a 159-pound male).

Most impressive to me are the little things. For instance, if I ask

her midday to set an alarm for 7 o'clock, Siri knows I mean 7 p.m. (she'd set it for 7 a.m. if I issued the same order in the evening). I've used voice-recognition software before, but never anything like this.

Weirdly, I often find myself saying "thank you" after Siri completes a task, almost as if she were a friend doing me a favor (her responses range from "that's nice of you to say" to "your wish is my command.")

I'm digging the organizational features, such as the Notification Center, which gives me a quick glance at missed calls, appointments, weather and more when I swipe down on the screen.

Also, the camera is great. At a recent Portishead concert, I was able to snap plenty of detailed shots very quickly, even in the low light of an outdoor evening show.

Not long after I switched, I got a tempting offer in the mail from T-Mobile. Come back to us, it

pleaded, and we'll give you any smartphone for free.

For a moment, I imagined returning to T-Mobile's welcoming arms and snagging a new Android smartphone. I'd pick an expensive one, naturally, as the letter said I could have any one I wanted. The iPhone's not for everyone, I reminded myself, and there are plenty of people who are happy with other handsets.

Then I remembered why I switched to Apple's gadget — and

changed networks — in the first place.

Most people won't get their hands on as many phones as I have as a gadget reviewer, but chances are they share my desire for getting the best product at the best price.

For my money, the iPhone 4S gives me the right combination of brains, beauty and reliable service.

And so, I set the letter aside and got back to playing around with my new iPhone.

# The Perfect Gift for Everyone

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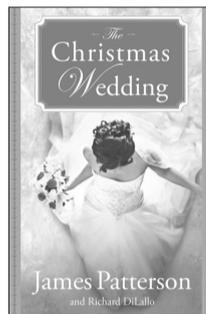
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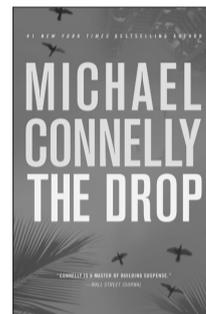
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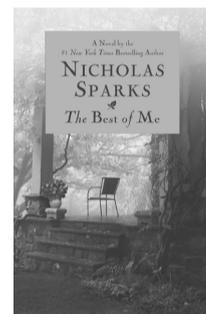
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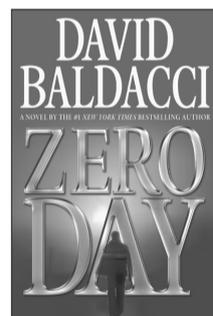
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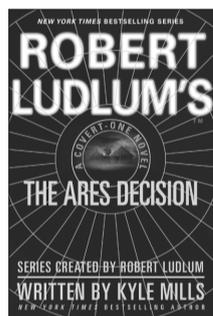
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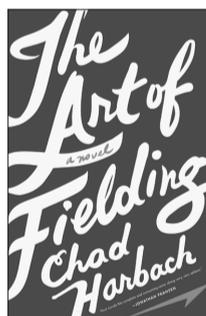
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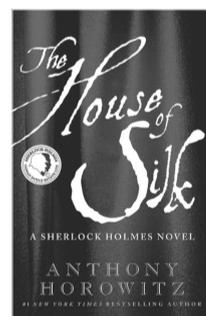
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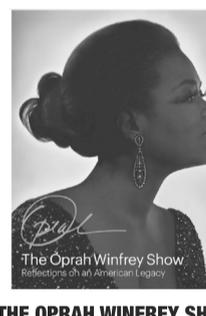
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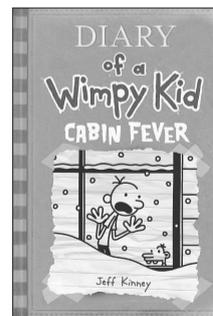
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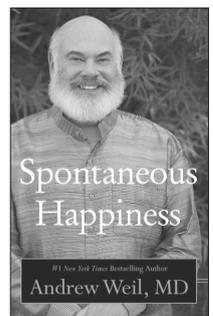
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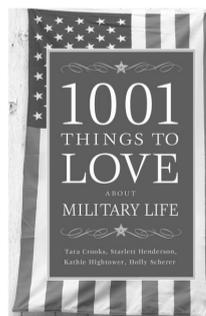
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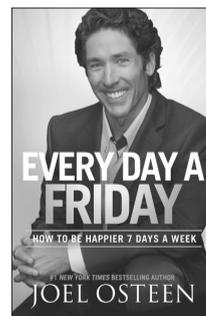
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# APO/FPO/DPO Mail Deadlines Released by the USPS for 2011

**F. Homer Strobolitch**  
Special to Stars and Stripes

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

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) publishes official guidance for overseas families each Fall in the Postal Service Bulletin.

While Priority Mail is the typically the recommended shipping method for APO/FPO/DPO mail, Parcel Airlift Mail (PAL) and Space Available Mail (SAM) are also available alternatives. PAL is 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 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 pounds and 60 inches in length and girth combined.

Express Military Mail (EMM) service is an excellent 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.

Dan Latvala, founder of the overseas military web portal Oconus.com (and a frequent consultant to online businesses seeking advice on the APO/FPO/DPO market) had this to say 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. To be on the safe side we always recommend Priority Mail to those who ask our opinion. USPS Priority Mail is typically your best dollar value for speed and service."

Although it is can be more diffi-

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/DPO AE ZIPs 090-092	Dec 17	Dec 10	Dec 10	Dec 3	Nov 26	Nov 12
APO/FPO/DPO AE ZIPs 093	N/A	Dec 3	Dec 3	Dec 1	Nov 26	Nov 12
APO/FPO/DPO AE ZIPs 094 - 098	Dec 17	Dec 10	Dec 10	Dec 3	Nov 26	Nov 12
APO/FPO/DPO AA ZIPs 340	Dec 17	Dec 10	Dec 10	Dec 3	Nov 26	Nov 12
APO/FPO/DPO AP ZIPs 962-966	Dec 17	Dec 10	Dec 10	Dec 3	Nov 26	Nov 12

To ensure delivery of Christmas cards and packages to military APO/FPO/DPO addresses, the USPS suggests that mail be sent by the recommended mailing dates listed.

cult for merchants to ship to overseas military addresses given the USPS requirements and restrictions on APO/FPO/DPO shipments, Latvala hasn't seen merchants pulling out of the APO/FPO/DPO 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/DPO addresses. We ask our merchant partners to show their support by providing special discounts, coupons and other offers to APO/FPO/DPO 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 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/DPO locations if they are sending gifts to loved ones at APO/FPO/DPO addresses this holiday season. "Each APO, FPO or DPO zip code has a set of restrictions on it that family members should be aware of. We have an online database of APO/FPO/DPO 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/FPO/DPOs and a large selection of online coupons for APO/FPO/DPO shoppers, visit [www.oconus.com](http://www.oconus.com) for more information.

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