

Tech gifts getting cheaper

Another year almost gone and another Christmas is now upon us. Even though most people's finances are getting tight, gifts will be bought this season and many of them will be high tech.



John Deans

Some people want a new computer from Santa because their old ones do not run as fast or they are tired of fighting PC problems. Since laptops are now out selling desktops, odds are that is what your significant someone wishes will be under the tree.

Prices have pretty much bottomed out with base model laptops going for around \$500 but be careful with those cut rate deals. Most of them come with low end processors and insufficient memory (RAM).

Remember since all new computers will come with Microsoft Vista rather than XP, you will definitely want at least 2 GB of RAM to run Vista smoothly.

It is far better to buy the fully configured PC with ample RAM rather than buying later. This is because the lower end laptops usually only install 1 GB of RAM but with two 512 MB SIMM cards taking up all the slots leaving you with no open ones.

That means you have to removal all the memory and replace all the memory to get the 2 GB level, not to mention the labor cost if you cannot do it yourself.

Toshiba, Acer, Sony and even Dell make some good laptops. Apple has lowered its laptop prices significantly so you may want to check those technical wonders out also.

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Besides the memory, also make sure you avoid the entry level version of MS Windows called MS Vista Home Basic. This starter version will really limit you later on and upgrading gets expensive quickly.

Opt for MS Vista Home Premium for the house and Vista Business for the office since it can connect to corporate Domains and Active Directory networks.

If you have some extra cash look for the laptops that have the built-in Web camera at the top of the screen. These are very handy with free video conferencing programs like Skype.

While you have the checkbook out and hopefully the credit card put away, go ahead and pick up

some good laptop accessories that are critical to safeguarding the computer. It sounds simple but be sure to purchase a good laptop bag with plenty of padding inside to physically protect your investment.

Speaking of protecting things, do not forget the future data that will be residing on the new laptop. Harper at Computer Helpers has some new external hard drives with a 250 GB capacity that are connected and powered through a single USB cable.

These data backup devices are small enough to fit into your shirt pocket but large enough to hold many copies of most people's data.

With a price of \$110 for the 250 GB drive, it is well worth the money if you add up how much your data is worth. Remember that Vista has a new and easy to use data backup software application that paired with one of those small external USB hard drives provides a solid file preservation platform.

As far as purchasing new desktop computers, the same rule applies of at least 2 GB of RAM to satisfy Vista's memory appetite.

After you have met the other basic requirements like the right version of Windows, spend the rest of your funds on a large LCD monitor. The bigger the better! If you want to make your husband's Christmas then buy him a huge 22-inch monitor to go with the new computer.

For smaller gifts you still cannot go wrong with thumb drives. My current one is an Imation 16 GB with a write lock switch on it. After my day of death last month with that virus outbreak which contaminated my previous thumb drive, I now make darn sure my new one has the go with the new computer.

For smaller gifts you still cannot go wrong with thumb drives. My current one is an Imation 16 GB with a write lock switch on it. After my day of death last month with that virus outbreak which contaminated my previous thumb drive, I now make darn sure my new one has the write protect enabled when I'm at possibly compromised sites.

The 16 GB memory sticks are going for around \$50, but the lower ones at 8 GB and 4 GB should be widely available for \$25 and \$15. My flash drive's lanyard has become my dress tie around my neck nowadays.

Another favorite high tech Christmas gift is still the digital picture frame. They are getting bigger and cheaper every year.

We now have a 15-inch one playing over 1,300 pictures on our family room wall. I got it new over e-Bay for around \$150 about six months ago and now they are hovering around \$120.

One good thing to know with these is to buy a large memory SD card to make sure you have enough space for hundreds of pictures. As the months go by I

add more images to the SD card in our digital picture frame and then swap it out for my mom's card who has had 12-inch frame for over three years now.

Every three months or so, I add more pictures to it which makes her day.

A couple of weeks ago, our 60-inch Sony WEGA LCD projection TV went out and I thought I was going to have to purchase a new large screen for our family this Christmas.

The best deal I found was the Sharp Aquos 65-inch LCD HDTV from Amazon.com for \$2,899. Three years ago when I first bought my Sony, a 65-inch LCD HDTV like the Sharp Aquos was over \$15,000 and now it is less than one fifth of the price.

Before I took my purchase proposal to the wife, I thought I should at least try to fix the

Sony WEGA. It turned out to be just the primary lamp that was burned out.

I removed the lamp assembly and took it to Lin's TV Service in College Station. Lin replaced the bulb for \$200 while I waited and my Sony WEGA was back to being bright and beautiful later that evening.

Oh well, so much for buying the new 65-inch Sharp Aquos HDTV.

Bottom line: The good thing with tech gifts is they get better and cheaper every year, so expect some more tech for old Saint Nick!

Next week's column: Google Adwords.

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