It's the thought that counts, however twisted

Worst High-Tech Gifts for 2016

It's that gift-giving time of year again, and so everywhere you turn, there are wonderful, new shiny things to delight the nerd or small child in all of us. As ever more products get connected to the internet, this year is especially bountiful.

However, among all the neat new gizmos lurk some real turkeys. Many are overpriced and unnecessary "smart" enhancements to products that work perfectly well already, jacking prices with dubious benefits and security risks. So this month's newsletter lists some of the silliest and costliest geek gifts that we could find online.

Keyboards galore

These are something everybody uses and the wide range of products to enter text shows just how far manufacturers will go to find a unique niche. Let's start with the **Half Keyboard**, which is exactly what it is. Why waste all that desk space and tie up both hands with typing? For *$575*, a techie can keep one hand on the mouse at all times, no doubt speeding productivity.

Coffeehouse posers and old-style folks who miss the klackety-klack of typewriter keys may enjoy mechanical keyboards that work with their computer or iPad. The **USB Typewriter** uses a real, refurbished 1930s typewriter, while the **Qwerty-writer** is basically a keyboard/iPad stand. Neither are cheap: *$1,270* and *$300*, respectively.

At the other extreme, there's the **Keyless Keyboard**, which basically looks like a big game controller with twin trackballs, for *$375*.

Maybe something simple and elegant, like the Windows **Bamboo Keyboard and Mouse** for eco-friendly folks starting at *$70*, might be better. But if you like typing enough to eat, there's always the **Keyboard Waffle Iron**, for under *$60*.

Tech pitfalls and other weirdness

Beware of obsolete or outdated technology. A **car GPS system** would have been a great present several years ago, but now there are smartphone apps that do a better job and are far cheaper. And remember the **Google Glass**? This once futuristic but now retro eyewear is still around but pricey (*$1,255*) – and unsupported. But for a mere fraction at *$130*, Snapchat sells **Spectacles**, sunglasses that shoot brief videos.

Really inexpensive gifts might not be supported either. There are very good reasons why refurbished electronics, such as a used **RCA Android tablet** for only *$30* are that cheap. Watch out for knockoffs, too. Apple products are premium, and so it's no surprise that they **claim** that 90% of the Mac chargers and cables sold on Amazon are fakes. Be sure to check out the reviews first.

But for the true Apple snob in your life, there's no need to search out accessories or upgrades. To shamelessly celebrate its own futuristic designs, Apple's gone retro with a coffee-table book, ***Designed by Apple in California***. This can't be found on Amazon but is only sold through Apple itself, featuring 450 pages of pictures of their products the recipient would have rather gotten instead, blissfully uncluttered by any distracting text and in two sizes, for *$199* and *$299*.

Health and fitness-measuring gadgets are all the rage, but why stop at monitoring? Show you care by helping your loved ones break bad habits.

The **Pavlok** is an electronic bracelet that looks court-ordered, but zaps wearers with a harmless electric shock to help eliminate any undesireable behavior for *$199*. And there's a handy app, too.

For dog-lovers, wouldn't a collar that allowed them to speak like in *Up* be wonderful? It's still not available but to help decipher the mysteries of canine emotional states, there's **Inupathy**. This collar flashes colored lights depending on the pup's heart rate. Never be fooled by wagging tails and happy barks again; for only *$199*. Arff!

Other relationships can be tested with remote sensing, too. **Smartress** is a bed with built-in motion sensors to determine when it's being used for lovemaking (or the kids are just bouncing around on it). And it sends out notifications via mobile app. Ruining lives has never been easier or more certain, and all for *$1,350*.

Giving people nightmares has never been easier, either. There's **Mushion**, which prints faces on pillows, one for *$19.49*, or a set of three for *$39*.

But plenty of people these days don't want to be seen. Celebrities, political activists, and vandals may appreciate a **scarf** which blinds flash and video cameras. In red or black prints, a steal for *$368*. **Hoodies** that do the same are only *$228*.

Nothing shows just how serious true audiophiles are about music like classy speakers. So why not give the ultimate – **Waterfall Diamond Glass Standing Speakers**? At *$38,000* each, these clear boxy glass stands with visible speakers fit anywhere with built-in acoustic dampening.

The Internet of Unnecessary Things

In the mad rush to connect everything to the internet, manufacturers are sticking chips in all kinds of products, most of which work perfectly well without them and are only complicated by their presence. Take water bottles for instance. Amazon lists nearly *30,000* products as "**smart bottles**," most for over *$50*, that monitor use and issue reminders or even sound alarms.

But that's just the beginning. There are **smart dental floss dispensers**, **digital picture canvases**, **egg trays** that keep count, **smart wall-outlets** for some reason, and even **remote dog treat dispensers** with cameras, and on and on.

These things are all probably easily hackable too. **Find out** how vulnerable your gifts are and what you can do – aside from never plugging them in.

SWCP's Other Endeavors

Southwest Cyberport is justly proud of being the leading local ISP in Albuquerque. Over the years, we've grown from dial-up being offered from the owner's bedroom to a full-service state-of-the-art internet facility. But even that's not all we do.

In recent years, SWCP has embarked on several exciting new ventures. Realizing that the growing numbers of entrepreneurs and freelancers needed better internet and meeting spaces than coffeeshops allow, we turned the extra space across the hall into **Ideas & Coffee**.

Ideas & Coffee is a **coworking space**. This is a growing urban trend for today's mobile workers. Run by our Vice President, Jamii Corley, it provides a quiet and comfortable area where people can work on their own projects, get great highspeed internet, print or scan documents and grab a quick cup of coffee, or simply chat with clients and friends. **Meetings** demonstrating techniques as well as collaboratively working on various projects are held there frequently, and fees are quite modest.

Another venture is **SnackReads,** headed by Josh Gentry. This began as a means to republish short, neglected works by local authors, such as our own Daniel Abraham, in ebook form. We've since issued a few previously-unseen works, too, all with gorgeous covers by local artist Jae Drummond. All are available for downloading on the site, and you can pay via your Amazon account.

We're now expanding the effort with **Snack-Writes**, which presents essays as well as tips and exercises for budding authors by pros. Membership is required to fully participate in the exercises, but is free. Our hope is to help promote the craft of short-story writing, especially in science fiction and fantasy, among new writers.