

Out of Bounds

■ SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

hi-tech toys



When humans willingly pay cash for the opportunity to e-mail a lousy picture

taken with a wireless phone to an equally lousy, tiny screen on a similar phone, one can safely speculate that the holiday shopping season has officially begun.

Even though retailers seem to staple up their tinsel and tie their garland on Labor Day, we still hold to grandma's schedule, so we don't start shopping for Christmas until this month. With that in mind, here's our latest guide to some excellent gizmos to please the spouse, kids and yourself.

■ **TiVo (\$349.95-\$399.95, with a subscription of \$12.95 a month)** — We constantly hear superintendents complain that their work prohibits them from keeping up with their daytime soaps. Thank goodness, then, for TiVo, arguably the best use of technology in the history of the idiot box. Now you can record shows at the touch of a button, pause live television and watch the referee's blown call again and again with little effort.

Over the last year, several friends hyperbolically gushed that the TiVo had changed their lives. I investigated and determined their claims were not exaggerated. Owning the TiVo (and paying the monthly fee for the on-screen programming guide) is akin to retaining a personal assistant in your television that knows and anticipates

THESE HIGH-TECH HOLIDAY GIFTS WILL ENTERTAIN YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FOR YEARS TO COME **BY MARK LUCE**



your tastes and tendencies. The TiVo is basically a digital VCR, but stores up to 80 hours of programming, easily hooks to all your other electronic gadgets and allows you to watch television smarter and faster.

■ **X-Box (\$199) and PlayStation2 (\$199)** — No longer the sole province of kids, home video game systems remain the holiday gift most likely to keep on giving. While dads and moms may find all those buttons to be light years away from the simplistic elegance of Pong, an hour with a game like "Bust-A-Move" will leave parents telling the little ones, "Hang on. Hang on. I'm not to level 27 yet."

The price of the two units dropped by \$100 earlier this fall, and while the graphics may be a smidgen better on

the X-Box, Playstation2 has more titles. Superintendents will either laugh or recoil in horror at the X-Box title "Outlaw Golf" (\$49.95), a links game which allows you to wrap your driver around the heads of hecklers, your caddy or fellow golfers. It's not for the faint of heart, but it's extremely entertaining.

■ **Garmin Street Pilot III (\$999) or GPS V (\$499)** — Although expensive, these wonders will ensure that you never get lost, nor have to rely on your child's map reading abilities. Unlike many Global Positioning Satellite car navigation devices, the StreetPilot is portable, which gives you flexibility. The StreetPilot features a color screen and a voice tells you when to turn. Although not as snazzy, the GPS V is a bit more rugged, easily converting to a hand-held unit for all things outdoors. While I find it frightening when GPS enthusiasts talk of giving every nook and cranny of the world an address, these gizmos certainly eliminate the holiday travel headaches of the directionally challenged.

Mark Luce, who begs his grandmother to get him something OTHER than blue socks this year, is a free-lance writer based in Kansas City, Mo.

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