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# Life

SECTION D

Wednesday, November 30, 2005

## Five days of holiday shopping

Want to stuff those stockings with entertaining presents? The Life section guides shoppers to the best gifts every day this week.

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See the series online at [giftguide.usatoday.com](http://giftguide.usatoday.com).

USA TODAY



## Holiday gift guide

A weeklong look at what's hot this season

MONDAY  
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# Big gifts for the little ones

## They want phones, cameras, choppers, kitchens . . .

By Olivia Barker  
USA TODAY

Junior's toy box is looking more like Dad's entertainment center.

This season, toy manufacturers are trotting out scads of kiddified versions of grown-up gadgets: animatronic MP3 speakers, cellphone-style walkie-talkies, digital camcorders (in kid-friendly shades of blue and orange). And parked in the garage? Mini choppers, Escalades, ATVs and Vespa-like scooters to rival Mom's and Dad's.

It's all part of the aspirational trend. "Kids want what parents have: They want your cellphone, they want your camcorder, they want your digital camera, they even want your car," says Jim Silver, co-publisher of *Toy Wishes* magazine. This year's collective wish list seems to be less about fantasy — fairies and superheroes — than parental reality.

"That's what role play is, mimicking what the big people are doing," says Reyne Rice, a trend analyst for the Toy Industry Association. And today's role play is so much more sophisticated — and expensive — than even a couple of years ago, thanks to technology.

Kids, particularly tweens, have been "walking away from traditional toys for a few years now," says Hasbro's Sharon John. So when the company figures out how to

bring their money back to the toy aisle, "we look for ways to bring entertainment to life for them." And a major inspiration is what's on the shelves at stores such as Circuit City and Sharper Image.

It has gotten so that toy-makers these days are more like "family entertainment companies" than doll and plush purveyors, Silver says.

Parents will purchase, say, Mattel's \$79.99 Vidster video camera for their 8-year-old "to test out their kids' passions" for filmmaking and photography before shelling out for the real thing, says Rice. It helps that the kid-engineered electronics are uncomplicated, easy to operate and designed with small hands in mind.

Even traditional categories, though, feature an adult twist. Two hotly anticipated items for Christmas are a Dora the Explorer kitchen that emits music, bilingual phrases and cooking-related sound effects, and a karate home studio, complete with accompanying workout video.

"It's a play pattern that's typically for an adult," Silver says. "Adults have their Tae Bo tapes, their yoga tapes," and kids want to roundhouse kick and downward dog right along with them.

Here are the products the toy industry expects will sell well over the holidays — and which echo what Mom or Dad may have on their own wish lists.



### ▲ Dora's Talking Kitchen

Fisher-Price, \$79.99; ages 2 and up

Kitchen sets have been around for generations, but what's new is that toy retailers and trend trackers predict it's going to be one of the season's must-haves. Insert a recipe card and hear the ingredients — what parent wouldn't want that kind of cooking help?

### American Idol Digital Camcorder ►

Digital Blue, \$99.99; 8 and up

Aspiring music video directors can shoot, record and edit rec-room talent with this camcorder, plus their own home computer. Mil Cannon, who has directed Usher, Pink and TLC, offers pointers in an accompanying 6-minute video.

### Black Belts Karate Home Studio ►

Spin Master, \$24.99; 3 and up

Youngsters can ape their older sibling's martial arts antics — learning blocks, punches, stances and kicks — with this set, which includes a mat, kicking/punching bag and 30-minute instructional DVD or video.





## ▼ ChatNow

Hasbro's Tiger Electronics, \$74.99; 8 and up

With a range of two miles, these training cellphones (really a set of two walkie-talkies) allow kids to gab and text with friends — without sending the family cellphone bill soaring. Kids also can snap pictures, personalize ring-tones and customize screensavers.



## ► VuGo

Hasbro's Tiger Electronics, \$119.99; 8 and up

It's a tween version of the video iPod. VuGo is a multi-media player that stores up to 60 minutes of video, six hours of music or 1,200 digital photos through 128MB of memory. Content is purchased at vugo.com.



## ▲ iZ

Abco's Zizzle, \$39.99; 5 and up

In a way, iZ is an iPod accessory — a Bose SoundDock for youngsters. Kids can hook up any music source — a CD player, a radio, an MP3 player — to listen to music through iZ's speaker. Move iZ's various appendages and kids create their own music: Press a literal bellybutton to hear one of seven beats, then twist the left ear to change the melody, and the right ear to adjust the rhythm. Flick the antenna on top and iZ emits a DJ-like scratch.



## ▲ 3-D Pool Table

Zocker Toys, \$129.99; 8 and up

A tweaked version of typical billiards, this tri-level table allows for both horizontal and vertical play. No doubt Mom and Dad will want to muscle in on the action.

## ▼ Twist Trike

Radio Flyer, \$59.99; 2 and up

Of course, even toddlers want a ride that capitalizes on the chopper craze. This bike transforms from a tricycle to an ape-hanger in seconds, allowing the tiniest of kids to channel Jesse James.



## ▼ Rebellion Electric Chopper

Razor, \$299.99; 14 and up

This is what teens graduate to after they outgrow their boring old foot-powered scooter — and are eyeing Uncle Jimmy's custom Orange County rig parked in the driveway. It cruises up to only 17 mph, though, preventing kids from growing up too fast.

