

Tips, Tricks and Advice from your local “IT Guru”

This month I want to talk to you about Christmas. Yes, it's that time of year again: time to plan what to buy for the gadget lover in your life. Let's start at the expensive end of the spectrum! Apple has just announced a Retina display iMac computer. This is a 27-inch iMac with a truly amazing screen that has the equivalent resolution of over 5 HD TVs. In addition to this, it's probably one of the most powerful computers you can buy off the shelf at its top configuration. At over £2000, it is a bit expensive though! If that's a bit too high end then the Apple Mac Mini, starting at £399, is a good way to get into the Apple ecosystem at a more sensible price. If you're looking for something else in the same price region, then there have been a few desirable smartphones released in the last month or two that any true gadget lover will be lusting after. If they're in the Apple camp, then either of the two iPhone 6's will be high on their list and start at around £450. If they're into Android devices, the Google Nexus 6 should be top of the list (no firm price yet, but expect it to be around £500). If this is still too pricey, Microsoft has a bargain Windows phone, the Lumia 830, at under £300. This offers most of the functions of the other smartphones at a much more reasonable price. If you want to talk true bargains though, have a look at the Motorola Moto G: a brilliant Android smartphone with a big 5-inch screen for around £140. Or, at even less, the Microsoft Lumia 520/530 at around £60, which is one of the best ways to get into smartphones at an affordable price. In the tablet world, there's now a whole range of cheap Windows 8 tablets starting from around £200 that can easily double as home computers. The Dell Venue Pro is my favourite, but there's plenty of choice. If you want a premium device that can double as a high-end portable PC, then the Microsoft Surface 3 is an amazing device. But, starting at £600, it's not a cheap option! At the bargain end of the market, the Tesco Hudl is still a good buy at £79. The Amazon Fire 6 from £79 is another good bet, although I would go for the bigger version unless you really need the portability or have a really constrained budget.

Moving away from computers, another good present is one of the many streaming devices available. These are normally either sticks or little square boxes that plug into the HDMI port on your TV and give you the ability to stream movies, TV, and music from the Internet. Not only that, but they allow you to mirror things from your smartphone. They effectively turn you Standard TV into a Smart TV. The major companies all have devices in this market. Apple has the Apple TV at £79, Google has the Chromecast at around £30, and Amazon has just released the Fire TV for £79. The Chromecast is the odd one out here, as it needs an Android smartphone or Tablet to work with, but Google have just announced Nexus Player which will be much more like the Apple and Amazon offerings. Another company that I have heard good things about is Roku, but I've yet to try any of their products. They make a range of streaming devices, and offer the same functionality as the others. Games consoles will again be at the top of many people's lists this year, and the choice has really come down to two: the Xbox One or the Playstation 4. Both are something like £400, but Microsoft are still selling the Xbox 360 for roughly half the price. It's still a brilliant console with all of the new-released games available for it, so if you fancy a cheaper option then that's definitely the way to go.

At the stocking filler end of the market, novelty USB sticks are always a good bet. They can be useful, whilst being fun! Or, how about a case for that expensive smartphone or tablet? Battery powered phone chargers are always useful, or just an extra charging cable to stick in a bag or car can be a simple but well appreciated gift. Another good idea is a skin for an ageing laptop. At under £20 a skin, which is basically a set of stickers designed for a specific laptop model, can restore a battered laptop to looking like new, and personalises it at the same time.

For a true gadget lover though, there really is only one device to buy, and that's a Smartwatch. In my opinion there is only one worth buying at the moment: the Pebble. This is currently at around £100. In the next few months, though, Microsoft and Apple will be releasing new devices which may change my opinion. For this Christmas, though, I would stick with a Pebble and see what happens in the coming year.

If you have any questions or anything you would like me to cover in this column, email me at look@4-11consultants.co.uk

David runs 4-11 Consultants, a local company specialising in home and small business computer problems and can be contacted on 01206736161