

The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)

Last minute gift tips: Be an island of Zen calm

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Illustrations: Photo: CanWest News Service, File / Gift cards are an easy pick for those who still have to buy presents this week

Somehow you've ended up here. It's the end of December and you haven't bought one thing -- not a bar of soap for your mother-in-law or a bottle of aftershave for your beau. And now you're sitting there paralyzed by the thought of heading out to the mall, wrestling your way through the crowds of single-minded shoppers and trying to find something decent amongst the detritus of rejected gifts.

Never fear! There is still hope. There are some never-fail standards that stores don't run out of and that you can easily get your mitts on with minimal fuss.

THE TRUSTED GIFT CARD

I am 100 per cent in favour of giving people gift cards, for a number of reasons. First, it gives them the chance to buy something themselves instead of you having to figure out what they need or want, or what size they are. Second, with sales starting two weeks from now, they'll probably get more bang for their buck buying after Christmas. The gift card enables that purchase during a time when most people are feeling a little pinched.

The major watch-out for buying gift cards is to make sure you buy from the right store. Don't buy an HBC gift card for a die-hard Holts girl, or a Starbucks card for a Tim Horton's aficionado. That is, don't abandon sense altogether -- you still need to think about your recipient and what they like or want.

GIFT CARD IDEAS:

- For Everybody: Chapters/Indigo, Amazon.ca, Starbucks
- For Him: Home Depot, Harry Rosen, Best Buy/Future Shop
- For Her: Holt Renfrew, Sephora, Her favourite spa
- For Teenage Girl: Aritzia, Amazon.ca, Roots
- For Teenage Boy: Mountain Equipment Co-op, iTunes Store

If you've been criminally negligent, the quickest, most-efficient rescue is the e-mail gift card. This is delivered to your recipient's e-mail account with a few simple clicks and surefire efficiency.

It's not the same as having something under the tree, but it's better than nothing.

BRAVE THE CROWDS

The gift card is truly acceptable, but you should really do a little bit of real shopping, too -- if only to get you angry enough to really feel like you're doing penance for not shopping earlier. Otherwise, how will you ever mend your ways?

For punishment, I strongly recommend you brave the beauty hall at a major department store. There's nothing like the rush of frantic females upset because their favourite Creme de Corps is sold out and the bewildered expressions on men trying to decipher the difference between Eau de Parfum and Eau de Toilette. That will teach you not to end up in this situation again next year.

But seriously, a quick shopping expedition can yield all kinds of easy stocking-fillers that will round out your gift card purchase. Because, let's face it, the gift card does not really have much physical substance when it comes to unwrapping.

Plan to hit three major stores to fill out the gift selection: A bookshop or music store will yield results for everybody in the form of DVDs, CDs and books. A department store will have lotions, potions and scented candles for women, swanky shaving cream, socks and jocks for men. And finally, an upscale grocery store or wine shop will get you tasty treats and booze to round off the selection.

Before you do brave the crowds, make a shopping list of all the people you need to buy for and what you're going to get them. Don't stray from your list. Be single-minded. Don't let the other shoppers get to you: Be an island of Zen calm amidst all the confusion. And finally, don't forget everything you'll need to wrap the gifts!