

Holiday Gift Ideas for the Techie

By Shawn Conaway

George Jetson is lazy. The society he lives in is so technologically advanced that his whole life has been automated. His three-day workweek starts with Rosie the Robot dragging him from his bed to the automatic shower where he is washed, brushed, and dressed in seconds. He makes a quick stop at the food dispenser for some food pills before taking the travel tube to his job at Spacely Sprockets. Cosmo Spacely blows a sprocket every morning yelling "JETSON!" because, even with all the progressive technology, George always manages to be late. Pushing that single red button must be very tiring.

The Jetsons are engaging because they have amazing gadgets that make life effortless and uncomplicated: A flying car that folds up into a suitcase when you're not piloting it to Venus. A jet pack to use when the flying car is in the shop. A food dispenser that heats up food in seconds. A VisaPhone that lets you see the person you are talking to. George even had a wristwatch VisaPhone!

These tech toys must have seemed like pure fantasy in 1962. However, little more than 40 years later, they have moved from dream to reality. VisaPhones have been replaced by webcams and video enabled cell phones. The food dispenser doesn't have to heat food now that everyone has a microwave. Color televisions are now so small, you can watch Jetsons reruns on your wristwatch TV. Moller International even has a flying car! The only difference is that it doesn't fold up into a suitcase...yet.

There are still a few fantasies here. The first one is that Mr. Spacely kept rehiring his young apprentice after telling him "Ya Fi-yed!" instead of outsourcing his job to the Venusians. The other fantasy is that advances in technology will somehow leave us with vast amounts of leisure time. Jane relied on Rosie to vacuum her spacepad so she could have time to take Judy and Elroy out shopping for a new pair of space boots. We on the other hand can rely on the Roomba to vacuum our 'pad', but somehow that doesn't free up more time.

Professor Cyril Northcote Parkinson was quoted saying "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion". Herein lies the great paradox: We use technology to automate tedious, repetitive, and labor intensive tasks, supposedly freeing ourselves to pursue the sublime. Unfortunately, our increased efficiency inevitably leads not to a life of leisure, but instead to more work.

Hopefully, you will be able to take advantage of the technology featured in this article. Take a break from the tedium of work and have some fun with these gadgets. If you do it right, you might become more efficient and free up some of your time. Just make sure to fill it up with something other than work.



With a svelte form factor and miniscule size, the NOMAD MuVo digital audio player holds up to 4 hours of MP3s and 8 hours WMAs, or other data files. The MuVo is a USB 2.0 Flash Drive with battery cradle capable of up to 15 hours of MP3 play on one AAA battery. It includes an FM radio player/recorder, a voice recorder, 5-band equalizer with 4 presets (Jazz, Rock, Pop and Classical). The backlit LDC displays ID3 tags for song titles.

Manufacturer: Creative Labs—www.creative.com
Model: NOMAD MuVo TX FM 256 MB MP3 Player (DAP-TD0004)
Street price: \$140



Good things come in small packages. The business card sized Rio Carbon plays up to 80 hours of MP3 or 160 hours of WMA music. The rechargeable battery lasts 20 hours and can be recharged using the power adapter or over USB. The USB 2.0 port lets you quickly download files

or 2500 songs on the 5 GB internal hard drive. The Carbon also features a Voice recorder and compatibility with Audible® format files from Audible.com.

Manufacturer: Digital Networks North America—www.rioaudio.com
Model: Rio Carbon 5 GB MP3 Player
Street price: \$249



Toshiba took a home entertainment center, squeezed it into a laptop, and ended up with the Qosmio AV notebook PC. The Qosmio features a built-in TV tuner, so you can watch TV without booting into Windows. DVR capability lets you watch or digitally record TV programs on the 80 GB drive, or onto the DVD SuperMulti drive which writes most popular DVD/CD formats (+/- RW and RAM).

The Qosmio feels like a home theater with SRS virtual surround sound technology and large harman/kardon® speakers. Connect the video in and out ports to your home system for large screen viewing.

Manufacturer: Toshiba
Model: Qosmio E15-AV101
Street price: \$2500



The Delphi XM SKYFi(tm) is a portable XM Satellite Radio receiver that lets you listen to over 120 digital channels from coast to coast. The receiver is usable when docked into the "bow tie" shaped SKYFi Audio System boombox, or when used with Delphi's home or vehicle adapter kit.

The boombox runs on 6 D batteries or with a 12-volt adapter. It comes with a remote and a detachable hi-gain antenna, which should be near a south-facing window for best reception. Delphi has two satellites and around 800 terrestrial repeaters in the continental United States. Basic service costs \$9.99 per month and is not available in Hawaii or Alaska.

Manufacturer: Delphi
Model: XM SKYFi(tm) radio receiver (SA10000)
Street price: \$68
Model: XM SKYFi Boombox (SA10001)
Street price: \$9



Archos' Pocket Video Recorder AV480 has to be one of the coolest DVRs ever made. It does just about everything. It can play 1,200 hours of music or 320 hours of video. It can store 80 GB of files. You can download 800,000 photos to it from a digital camera, then view the pictures on the 3.8" TFT LCD display. The AV480 can even be programmed to record TV, cable, or satellite programs like a VCR when docked in the TV Cradle. Feeling creative? Use it to digitize your old records and tapes using the audio in RCA jacks.

The AV480 can play 4.5 hours of video or 16 hours of music on its rechargeable Li-Ion batteries. It handles multiple video and audio formats like MPEG-4, DivX, XviD, MP3, WAV, and WMA. An optional FM Radio and Remote Control allows for listening to and recording from the radio as well as voice recording.

Manufacturer: Archos—www.archos.com
Model: AV480 Pocket Video Recorder and MP3 Player
Street price: \$700



The Garmin Forerunner 201 wristband with integrated GPS sensor lets you take the path less traveled without getting lost. The Forerunner

displays your precise speed, distance, pace data, and calories burned. Alerts notify you when you travel slower or faster than your desired pace or when you reach a specified duration or distance. The automated stopwatch provides auto-lap and auto-pause features.

The GPS sensor and electronic map provides latitude, longitude, and altitude so you can mark and navigate to specific locations. The free Garmin software lets you transfer two years of lap time, lap distance, and average pace data to your PC while the Forerunner is docked in the A/C desktop charger with serial interface.

Manufacturer: Garmin—www.garmin.com
 Model: Forerunner 201
 Street price: \$150



Casio's Color Wrist Camera Watch has a 20 x 20 mm color screen capable of displaying 78 x 80 pixels. The camera can acquire up to 100 JPEG pictures with a 176 x 144 pixel resolution. The watch offers a 2X zoom, a text editor to add notes to your images, and an IR port to transfer photos to your PC. A digital photo album application is also included.

Manufacturer: Casio—www.casio.com
 Model: WQV10D-2 Color Wrist Camera watch with Color LCD
 Street price: \$245



Can they get any smaller? Philips has created a camera and a camcorder that fits on a key ring. The 1.6 ounce 128MB Digital Camera can take up to 300 two Megapixel pictures. The 128MB digital camcorder can take up to 200 two Megapixel pictures, record 24 minutes of MPEG4 video, play 32 MP3 songs, or store 128MB of data. Both devices recharge over USB.

Manufacturer: Philips
 Model: KEY0010/17 128MB 2MP USB Key Ring Camera
 Street price: \$120
 Model: Key019 Key Ring Camcorder
 Street price: \$230



Secure storage is made easy with MEI's biometric storage media. The ClipDrive Bio flash drive and the Outbacker USB 2.0 hard drive both use fingerprint recognition to protect data. Data is automatically encrypted and hidden using AES 128 bit key. Authentication against 10 to 16 stored fingerprints unlocks the data.

Manufacturer: Memory Experts International
www.memoryexpertsinc.com
 Model: Clipdrive Biometric 2GB secure portable flash drive USB 2.0
 Street price: \$749
 Model: Outbacker Biometric Fingerprint 40GB USB 2.0 hard drive
 Street price: \$555



VICTORINOX, the manufacturer of the original Swiss Army Knife, has developed SWISSMEMORY®, a knife for the modern age. The SWISSMEMORY knife includes standard items like a stainless steel

blade, scissors, a nail file with screwdriver, a ballpoint pen and a red light as well as a 128 MB USB memory key.

Manufacturer: VICTORINOX
Model: SWISSMEMORY® USB Storage
Street price: \$69



What do you get for that hard-to-please person on your shopping list? Try alternative transportation. The Moller M400 Skycar International's Volantor is a bargain at only one million dollars. Take a break from driving 50 in the carpool lane and try 350 mph instead. The Skycar holds 4 passengers, has a cruise speed of 315 mph, a 750 mile range, and is capable of vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL).

If money is a little tight, try the Springtail EFV-4B Personal Air Vehicle (PAV) instead. The single engine powered vertical take-off and landing vehicle would make even George Jetson envious. The vehicle seats one, has a maximum Speed of 113 mph, and a cruising speed of 94 mph. Don't forget to buckle your seatbelt...and your parachute.

Manufacturer: Moller International—www.moller.com
Model: M400 Skycar
MSRP: \$995,000
Manufacturer: Trek Aerospace, Inc—www.trekaero.com
Model: Springtail EFV-4B Personal Air Vehicle
MSRP: Undisclosed



Gaming features like two-handed game controls and optional game cards make the Nokia N-Gage resemble the new Sony PlayStation Portable more than it does a standard phone. Nokia packed this phone with standard features like 3.4 MB internal memory, polyphonic ring tones, voice dialing, and a calendar and address book. Additional extraordinary features include Bluetooth for wireless gaming, a 4096-color screen, full email support (IMAP4, POP3, SMTP, MIME2), a voice recorder, Stereo FM radio, and an MP3 player. The N-Gage is sure to make you smile.

Manufacturer: Nokia—www.nokia.com
Model: N-Gage
Street price: \$200 with service agreement



Show your kids what old-school style is all about with retro arcade games from JAAKS Pacific. Ms. Pac-Man TV Games features the Namco classics Ms. Pac-Man, Galaga(tm), Pole Position(tm), Xevious(tm), and Mappy(tm). Feel your childhood days playing at the arcade come rushing back as you "Prepare to Qualify". When you grow tired of eating white dots and chasing Pinky, Blinky, Inky, and Clyde, let the kids have a turn playing one of the SpongeBob SquarePants adventure games.

Five 8-bit games are built into each joystick. Just plug it into the A/V jacks on your TV and relive the memories.

Manufacturer: JAAKS Pacific—www.jakkstvgames.com
Model: SpongeBob SquarePants TV Games, Ms. Pac-Man TV Games
Street price: \$19



Add some life to your desktop with an exotic rug mouse pad. The Mouse Rug combines traditional handmade rug patterns with a Lextra fiber coating.

Manufacturer: Mouse Rug—www.mouserug.com
Model: many varieties
Street price: \$20

The Iron Age. The Industrial Revolution. The Computer Age. The Internet Revolution. These radical technological advances are the result of some innovator dreaming a little dream, then making it come true. From Thomas Edison's light bulb to Nokia's new TV cell phone, practical technical inventions quickly evolve from novel gadget to necessity. George Jetson would be stunned by how the tech toys in this article could make his life more fun and more efficient. Although, even with the M400 Skycar, he still won't make it to work on time. ☹

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