

UNIQUE GIFT IDEAS

1. Airline Dollars: What better way to bring your loved ones closer to you...or to send them somewhere they've always dreamed about. With some airlines, you can establish an account in the recipient's name and deposit funds in any amount for use toward a trip within the next twelve months. Tip: Make sure the airline you choose flies to where the recipient might want to travel (if your sister lives in Lexington, KY and has always wanted to go to New Orleans, make sure the airline services both cities). And remember, you don't have to contribute the entire cost of a flight. Even the smallest amount in airfare credit could encourage someone to book that ticket now!

2. Language Courses: Alternatively, if your friend has always wanted to go to Italy, but does not have the funds to support a Tuscan excursion, you could help her keep that dream alive until that day comes with Italian lessons. From the extravagance of one-on-one sessions at your local language center to the ease of cassettes, CDs or CD-Roms, you friend will appreciate the very thoughtful and personal gift of language lessons. The audio lessons can even be listened to in the car or at the gym! In fact, you might want to buy a set for yourself, as well - you can help your friend get ready to fulfill her dream while enriching your own world, too!

3. Pre-Paid Phone Cards: Speaking of speaking to your loved ones, a great way to stay connected is by using the phone. Distance, and the long distance bills that go along with it, can be enough to keep you chained to your computer using email as your only method of communication. Break those chains with pre-paid phone cards. They are easy to find, inexpensive to buy and can help bring you closer to those who are far away. A great idea is to attach a picture of yourself to the calling card, along with your phone number and a friendly reminder that the phone card should *only* be used to call you!

4. Magazine Subscriptions: Out of sight, out of mind, they say. Well, an easy way to ensure that you are "in sight" at least once a month is to buy a magazine subscription for those on your gift-giving list. The great thing about this affordable and useful present is that it is completely personalized. Is your father a football fan? Does your mother love to shop? Is your college roommate a movie trivia fanatic? There is literally a magazine out there for every interest. Also, if you purchase through a publishing group or a publisher clearing house, you might even be able to get all your gift-giving done in one place - and at a steep discount! Then, when the occasion rolls around, just give them a note with a newsstand copy of the magazine and let them know they can enjoy it for the year to come. (And don't worry...renewals are completely up to them...)

5. PhotoDiscs: A picture says a thousand words...so that must mean that a photodisc is War & Peace! A great way to show how much you treasure someone is to compile all the photographs you have from your time together and put them on a photodisc. The recipient can then pop it into the computer and relive all of the memories. Additionally, most newer DVD players also play photodiscs in a slideshow on the television. PhotoDiscs can be made at most photo stores or if you are savvy enough, you can produce them at home by yourself. You can even create them at some online photo websites - you will have to scan and upload the photos yourself, but they will create the disc. Tip: For your family, you can create one photodisc with family memories and have it duplicated for every member of the clan!

6. Historic Newspapers: What happened on the day you were born? Do you remember what was happening in the world on your wedding day? Everyone wonders about these things, so why not solve the mystery for someone you love? There are a few companies that sell back-copies of newspapers, available for any day that the paper was in print. Hundreds of newspapers are available from all over the US, and you can even get them framed or placed in acid free containers. "Scoop" these up for happy gift-giving.

7. Spa Certificates: Show your friend you think they deserve to be pampered! Buy them a gift certificate from a day spa in their neighborhood. Again, you do not have to pay for the entire cost of a treatment...even a little will encourage your friend to book an appointment, all the while showing how much you care! And remember, spas are not just for women! These days many men retreat to spas for everything from manicures to massages. Do an Internet search to find a spa in your friend's neighborhood and give them a call...even if the spa does not typically sell gift certificates, you will be surprised how many will fall all over themselves to accommodate you!

8. Personalized Wine/Champagne: For gift giving en-masse, consider giving wine or champagne with personalized labels. While the drawbacks are that you can usually only personalize one message for the whole order and that some manufacturers have minimum quantities, overall, they are highly impactful and very special. Tip: Consider making the message personal to you, rather than to the recipient(s): "Happy Holidays from the Smith Family!" or "Birthday Wishes from Bob!" Then, buy a case and send them out as needed with a card that says - "Here's a toast to you!"

9. Name a Star/Plant a Tree: Want to give a gift that will last for a hundred years or more? Then name a star or plant a tree in the name of your loved one! There are many companies that do this, and this educational and thoughtful gift is relatively inexpensive. Playing on the belief that it's the thought that counts, this present always does well with children and is the perfect touch to a special occasion.

10. Property: Already have a star named after them? Don't want to plant a tree? Then buy them land! No, not what you're thinking! Did you know you can actually buy a square foot of Texas? Or an acre of the moon? And the list goes on and on. Sure, it's kind of kitschy, but it's different, and if your uncle is from Texas, but was transferred to Alaska on business, then he might really get a kick out of it!

11. Memorabilia: If your boyfriend loves Nirvana or if your cousin lives for Derek Jeter, then you might want to think about getting some memorabilia as a memorable gift. Not all memorabilia has to be from Christie's Auction House and cost thousands of dollars - these days memorabilia readily available all over the internet, as well as in specialty stores around the country. Whether it's an 8x10 autographed picture of Britney Spears, a framed pair of Muhammad Ali's boxing trunks, or a CD signed by Sheryl Crow, there is a lot to choose from in every price range. Collect away!