

Shop Smart

GiftGenius.com helps you figure out what to give

Some people enjoy the shopping aspect of Christmas. They revel in figuring out the perfect gift for everyone on their list, and then venturing out to the shopping centers for the hunt.

Part of me envies these people. Not that I have any desire to spend hours wandering through malls and standing in lines under the strains of Jingle Bells, but I do wish I had better insight into what my loved ones would like or need.

That's where www.giftgenius.com claims it can help. The website bills itself as "the ultimate online gift guide." The site's writers scour the retail universe for items they deem cool, or hot. They're not looking for necessities. They're looking for things you wouldn't necessarily buy for yourself, but would still love to have. Some of the gifts featured on the home page include "The Small Stakes," which is a book of posters featuring musicians for \$17,

over-the-knee, black-leather, stiletto boots for \$169 and toilet seats that look like guitars or pianos for \$179.

Refine your search

There are several ways on the site to tailor your search for the perfect gift. The "Gift Finder" allows you to select from a list of types of acquaintances, such as baby, coworker, grandmother, etc. You can then choose from a list of occasions, including anniversary, Bar Mitzvah or birthday. Finally, you can select a price range that goes from \$0 to \$500-plus. Hit the "Find" button and a range of gift suggestions is generated. Each suggestion consists of a photo, a brief description that can be expanded for more information, a price and buttons to buy the item, or save it to a list.

More options to customize your search are on the results page. You can choose from a list of categories ranging from "Accessories" to "Travel." Each of these categories has a fly-out menu with subcategories. There are also adjustable sliders for "Taste" (unique to mainstream), "Style" (trendy to classic), "Attitude" (lighthearted to serious) and "Relationships" (romantic to platonic).

I decided to try a search for a Christmas gift for my wife when I discovered what appears to be a couple of omissions by the site. There's no wife or husband in the list of recipients. I selected "her" from the list since the only other category that came close was "girlfriend." There's also no age category, which seems like it would be helpful to have. Next I selected Christmas for the occasion and \$100 for the price, then hit the "Find" button. I left most of the sliders in the middle, except for "Relationships," which I slid to romantic. Because I'm so clueless at figuring out what people want, I had the hardest time deciding which category and subcategory to pick. Finally I settled on "accessories" because it seemed like it would give me a wide variety of choices.

I was wrong. Only four suggestions came up, none of which would appeal to my wife (at least I don't think they would, but if I knew what she wanted, I wouldn't be on this site).

There was a leather cuff, a reproduction Waldorf Astoria necklace, an Italian horn necklace and a "Love Quotes" scarf. The cuff and Waldorf Astoria necklace didn't seem her style, and she's not Italian so the horn wouldn't make any sense. The scarf was nice enough, but she's too practical to wear an \$85 scarf, even if "Jessica Alba and Reese Witherspoon are covering up their gorgeous necks" with them.

Besides the "Gift Finder," the site allows you to browse by type of recipient, occasion, editors' picks or category. There's also a "Boutique" tab with him and her sections. The "hottest must-have items" are featured here. The him and her sections had an almost identical selection of gifts to choose from. In fact, as I browsed through the site I noticed a lot of the same items popping up in many different categories.

Shop with an attitude

The site has a quirky design aesthetic that features cartoonish icons for different sections. The gift descriptions are written in a tongue-in-cheek style that is fitting, since a lot of the items are fun, or even outrageous. There are also lots of adult-themed gifts on the site that are alcohol-related or sexual in nature.

In addition to browsing for gifts, the site offers a few other features. If you register with the site, which is free, you can set up a calendar to remind you of birthdays, holidays and other gift-giving occasions. You can also create a wishlist of gifts you would like that you can email to those that may be inclined to buy you gifts. Gift searches can be saved, and you can request regular emails from the site with featured gifts, reminders and newsletters.

The site navigation is easy to use, if a bit redundant. Overall, the site has a professional feel to it, although numerous typos detract from that feeling a bit. GiftGenius has a presence on the major social network sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as a blog. You may not find the perfect gift, but you may get some ideas, and it sure beats going shopping.

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