

Products to stay away from for the Holidays 2006

As *'Black Friday'* has come and gone, more and more companies begin announcing their lineups for the holiday season not to mention ALL of the commercials trying to attract you to buy their products... While you may not even be close to thinking about what you're going to buy and for whom, when that time does come, you'll want to know which products to avoid. And no one wants to make the mistake of giving a gift that, well, for lack of a better word, stinks.

So without further ado, here are some products I would shy away from for the holidays:

GQ-MX-3203

The GQ-MX-3203 is one laptop you want to steer clear of, despite its jaw-dropping cheap price.



Pros: Dirt cheap.

Cons: No wireless. No room for wireless expansion cards. Unit can get extremely hot. Battery life is nonexistent.

Bottom Line: If you only have \$350 to spend on a laptop, go for a refurbished model before you buy the GQ brand.

Motorola H500



Pros: Inexpensive. Good sound quality. Better-than-average range.

Cons: Headset flaps around your ear as you walk. Grows uncomfortable after extended wearing. Small volume controls.

Bottom Line: If you're looking for a bargain Bluetooth headset for use in the car or other locations less subject to motion, the Motorola H500 warrants consideration. Its design missteps, however, are tough to live with.

Samsung Digimax L85



Pros: Nice design. Some fun features. Decent color. Can connect via HDMI.

Cons: Significant shutter lag. Images are not sharp. Autofocus problems. Overpriced.

Bottom Line: Although not quite as bad as last year's Digimax, the new Samsung Digimax L85 comes pretty close.

ewido anti-spyware 4.0



Pros: Scans inside archives, compressed executables, and alternate data streams. Includes analysis of running processes and browser plug-ins as well as Windows security settings. Secure file deletion.

Cons: Failed to remove most threats it detected. Real-time protection limited to scanning memory and scanning files on execution. No protection against hijacks.

Bottom Line: Grisoft's ewido anti-spyware 4.0 costs the same as programs that do a much better job. Some recommend using the scan-only free version as a second opinion, but it flopped in my tests.

Chaperone Professional 5.0



Pros: Schedules overall computer use or use of specific programs. Blocks Web sites based on URL or keywords. Limits and logs IM use. Logs program use, Internet use, and keystrokes.

Cons: All time and usage limitations are easily broken. Web filtering requires administrator to build URL/keyword lists. User interface is old-fashioned and awkward.

Bottom Line: Chaperone Professional 5.0 combines an awkward and antiquated user interface with an unusually limited feature set. Even if you do manage to work through its configuration options, any computer-savvy teenager can disable it.

HP Scanjet 4890 Photo Scanner



Pros: Scans 35mm, medium-format, and 4- by 5-inch film, documents, and photographic prints. Fast performance, particularly for film.

Cons: Low scan quality. Good only for printing scans at snapshot quality.

Bottom Line: With HP Scanjet 4890 Photo Scanner, working with film and photographic prints is easy, but scan quality lacks. In fact, it's good only for printing scans at snapshot quality.