

The Sunday Telegraph

Timely tips for those facing a clear and present danger Three shopping experts give advice on gifts to people feeling terminally uninspired

**By ROYA NIKKHAH
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IT IS Christmas Eve and that crucial present has eluded you. Today, however, is not the day to panic.

Help is at hand from three shopping experts with advice on what to buy and, crucially, how to avert a Christmas Day disaster.

They gave their tips as a survey found that Britons are impressed by only 42 per cent of the gifts they receive.

Twenty-six per cent of men and 21 per cent of women said they spent too little time considering what gifts to buy, according to the YouGov study for www.parship.co.uk, an online dating service.

Dr Victoria Lukats, a psychiatrist who carried out the survey, said: "People simply don't have the time to consider what would make a great gift and they end up impulse buying, thinking little of the recipient and their instant disappointment as they unwrap their present on Christmas day."

The first of the shopping experts, Geraldine James, the buying manager for the home and Christmas gifts departments at Selfridges, said: "The hardest thing about Christmas shopping, especially the last-minute kind, is being inventive and keeping within a budget."

Being "inventive", she insisted, need not involve novelty socks with garish patterns that will be consigned to the back of the drawer.

"Just picking a certain colour motif for a present can show that you have really thought about it," she said. "Gold is a big theme this year and gold gives everything a bit of 'bling value', which makes a present stand out.

"We have a new range of Calvin Klein boxer shorts for men with a gold waistband that makes a fun present. Gold-coloured stationery, such as address books and diaries, look very smart.

"One of our top-10 selling gifts this year are Diptyque scented candles, which also come in gold. In fact, Diptyque candles are probably the best last-minute gift you could give. They are utterly acceptable to women, men, teenagers, grandparents.

"There is also a real return this year to traditional products. These include things like fountain pens and silver propelling pencils.

"Books are also a fantastic gift, but avoid those meaningless '100 things to do before you die' type books. They are unwrapped on Christmas Day but never looked at again."

For last-minute men, jewellery accessories are apparently a safe bet. "A leather jewellery box is always a winner," she said.

Hannah Sandling, a fashion stylist and television presenter, said: "If you are short of time and ideas, be sensible. Head for a department store where you can buy everything under one roof.

"Avoid anything boring like perfume or chocolates. Festive jumpers with snowflakes on them are also a no-no. Nobody will wear them."

Men who think that lingerie is a safe last-minute bet, should think again. "At this time of year, many women feel pasty and have overindulged in the Christmas spirit so the last thing they want to do is a fashion parade in their underwear," she said.

"Instead, a really thoughtful gift which could not be easier to assemble is a do-it-at-home spa basket, and throw in a mini bottle of champagne. Alternatively, if you are really pushed for time, go online, buy a voucher for a day at a spa and put it in a nice card."

Antoinette Hunter, the head of gifts at Quintessentially (0870 850 8585), the bespoke concierge service, said: "The biggest mistake most people make when last-minute Christmas shopping is to throw money at the problem.

"There are plenty of great luxury gifts out there, but the most expensive presents are not always the best ones.

"Gift certificates with a difference are very thoughtful and most can be bought online, but avoid boring gift vouchers from department stores.

"You can buy a gift certificate from Future Forests, a carbon-neutral scheme that measures how much carbon you give off into the atmosphere and then neutralises it by planting the exact number of trees necessary to reverse the effects.

"For men, gadgets are always a winner. The latest iPod Shuffle second generation is as small as a tie pin and can be clipped on to a T-shirt at the gym.

"A cashmere Dunhill jumper or one of the new Bamford & Sons sports watches are also good buys."

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