

Tech Tips from Mr G

The Gift of a Digital Device - 2015 Edition



The holiday season is here, and a lot of Santa's Helpers are thinking about buying eBook readers, smartphones, MP3 players, and tablets as gifts. And the good news is that in many cases, prices have dropped while devices have gotten better! This year's guide will try to walk you through some of the current crop of devices so that you can figure out which one is best for your person (or what to ask them to get you)...or whether you should get them one at all.

The Ghost of Christmas Presents

Did I really imply that digital device might not be the best gift to give someone? Yes I did.

Year after year, and more each year, we see people come to us in January, saying "My son bought me this thing because he thought I'd like it, and I don't. I was happy reading books the old way." I've even seen the woman whose boyfriend bought her an eBook reader three years ago, that she finally figured that she had better learn how to use, in order to make him happy. These are people who were definitely not happy with their gift. So before you make a similar mistake, we need to look at a few issues.

#1. Does this person even use email?

If the person you're thinking of doesn't even use email, then a digital device might not be the best gift to give. Think about it, if they don't have the patience and motivation to use email, then a digital device is likely to be one more thing that they don't want to learn how to use...especially since they'll need an email address in order to use it properly.

#2. Has this person even expressed an interest in a digital device?

If this person has oohed and aahed over a friend's **Nook, Kindle, tablet, iPod, or smartphone**, then a digital device is probably a good gift to give them. On the other hand, if you've shown them yours and they've been decidedly uninterested, don't assume that giving them one of their own would suddenly change things. It likely won't.

#3. Are they happy with what they're already using?

Really. If they're happy using their old laptop that you think is outdated, and they are comfortable and competent using that old laptop, then maybe buying them a tablet to replace it with is the worst thing you could do; because it would force them to learn a whole new set of skills with different software. Instead, consider buying them a newer laptop that works with the software and skills that they already have (especially if they're still running Windows XP).

#4. Are you one of those people who just has to have the latest gadget?

If so, you need to come to grips with the fact that most people aren't like that, and that the device that you couldn't possibly live without is something that the person you have in mind could easily walk away from...even after you demonstrate all the great things it can do.

Remember, the gift is not supposed to be all about you and what you want them to have, it's supposed to be about them and what they'd like. So before you surprise them with something that you think is cool, but that they think is pointless, do a little research. Find out if they'd like one in the first place. Yes, I know it spoils the surprise, but at least you'd get it right, and we wouldn't see so many unhappy people every January.

But what do you get for the friend who loves to read or listen to audiobooks, but who, despite your telling them all the advantages of digital devices, doesn't want one? I don't know a whole lot of people who would complain about an **Amazon** or **Barnes & Noble** gift card. Remember, it's about them, not about you.

But if You're Sure...

If you've done the research, if you know that your person really, really, really wants a digital device of some sort (or at least wouldn't throw it out the window), then which one should you get? It all depends on what your person wants to do and how much you want to spend. They come in all different sizes and categories, and I'll talk about each of them in the next few pages, but first I have something very important to say.

Don't cheap out! The old saying "you get what you pay for" really applies when it comes to purchasing digital devices. While it's true that you can probably get a bargain basement model, off-brand, device for under \$70, your friend won't be happy with it, and you won't be happy being called all the time for tech support. If you're going to buy someone a digital device, spend the money to do it right, and to buy one of the models that everyone knows about and are easy to use.

So with that out of the way, let's take a look at this year's crop of devices; all of which are compatible with either our **OverDrive** or **3M Cloud** digital media services, and some of which will also work with our **Zinio** service for borrowing magazines, as well as **Hoopla** and **Freegal** for other digital contents.

Pocket-Sized Devices

Why on earth would anyone want a pocket-sized device? How can your possibly read on something that small?

Well, the answer has to do with how I titled this handout. I didn't specifically say it was about **eBook Readers**, I said it was about **digital devices**, and some people merely want a digital device to listen to our many **digital audiobooks** with after having exhausted our supply of **CDs** and **PlayAways**. However, you can read eBooks on these; you'll just be turning the page after every paragraph. So don't count these devices out.

The two big choices here are between the **Kindle Fire HD6** or an **iPod Touch**.

Lighting a Small Fire

The **Kindle Fire** is perhaps one of the best-known names in tablets, and last year they came out with a smaller device to compete with the iPod Touch. However, there are two things to consider before purchasing the **Kindle Fire HD6**.

First of all, because this is technically an Android device (more on that later), if your friend has a lot of music and movies that they bought from Apple, it's not going to be a walk in the park to play those files here. But there's a bigger problem.

Even though this is technically an Android device, it's a "walled garden" of an Android device. By this I mean that Amazon has limited you to using their app store instead of **Google Play** for buying apps, and this means that they won't let you easily download certain things...like the **Nook** or **3M Cloud** apps, which compete with them.

If They're an Apple Person...

Which is to say that if your friend has a substantial amount of music, movies, and TV shows that they've bought through **Apple's iTunes Store**, then if they want to be able to easily play them on whatever device you get them, it needs to be an **iPod Touch**, the much cheaper little sibling to the iPhone.

What makes it so much cheaper than an iPhone? Two things. The first is that it's not a phone...which is to say that it doesn't have any of the additional electronics in it that allow you to make phone calls with it. The second is that since it's not a phone, it doesn't incur any of the additional monthly costs of operating it. If all you or your friend want to do is listen to music, watch movies and TV shows, and run a boatload of apps, this is your device.

The 16gb iPod Touch is still available for \$199, although, quite frankly, that's too small of a device to enter my house. I say this because a device with that little capacity means that I'll be buying a larger one within a year or two. With that in mind, the smallest capacity Apple device I'd allow to come into my house is a 32gb. That will set you back \$249...once. \$50 more for twice as much storage.

My Advice...

Because of limitations in the way that Amazon does things, if you have the money, and size is the issue, I would go for the **iPod Touch** over the **HD6**. Or...you could decide to look at a slightly larger tablet.

And By the Way...

If your friend already has a smartphone, they can probably use that...unless there's not enough room on it.



Kindle Fire HD6
\$100



iPod Touch
Starting at \$199

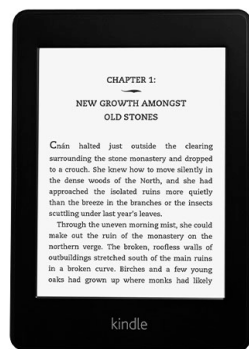
Simple Readers...It's Just Books

The heading says it all. These devices are just simple eBook readers...although they're not necessarily the simplest ones to use. They got that name from Barnes & Noble's original **SimpleTouch**. These devices don't try to show off by also letting you surf the web, watch movies, or anything fancy like that. These simple black and white devices were designed to just let you read books: you can't read magazines and newspapers, you can't listen to music or audiobooks. It's just books.

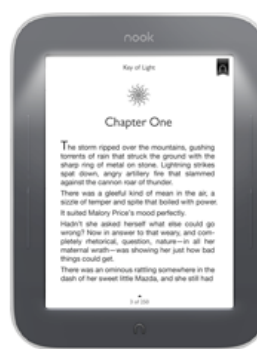
There are really only two names you hear about in this category: **Kindle** by Amazon and **Nook** by Barnes & Noble. Remember them, because you'll hear them again.

No matter which simple reader you get, you'll want to make sure that it has a **touchscreen**. There are still some old Kindles out there with the awkward five-way pointing device, and they're going at bargain basement prices, but do your friend a favor, and make sure that you get a reader with a touchscreen. It's what everyone's used to these days.

So with that in mind, you've got two basic mainstream choices: the **Kindle Paperwhite**, the **Nook GlowLight**. The important thing about these two devices is that they both have touchscreens. You may be able to find older models still available for less, but they won't have touchscreens, and let's face it, as I said before, everyone is used to touchscreens these days...especially you, the person who will likely end up doing the tech support on this device. So this is one of those cases where my advice to "not cheap out" is well worth listening to.



Kindle Paperwhite
Starting at \$119



Nook GlowLight
Starting at \$99

Amazon pretty much created the eReader market with the introduction of its Kindle in 2007. Their Kindle Paperwhite is their least expensive touchscreen model, and includes a built-in screen light.

One of the great things about the Kindles is how easy they are to use with our **Overdrive** eBook lending system. On the other hand, they don't work with our **3M Cloud** system, and there are a few publishers that don't allow OverDrive lending.

In addition, the books you borrow on a Kindle are clearly delivered to you by Amazon and not either OverDrive or our library system. While that makes it practically seamless, philosophically this is a problem for some people.

Barnes & Noble followed Amazon into the market two years later with the **Nook**. The GlowLight model is currently going for \$99.

But how do the Nooks work with our current Overdrive system? Well, unlike the Kindles, which allow you to download almost any borrowed book directly to the device through WiFi, the Nooks require you to download the books to your own computer and then **sideload** them to the device. The same applies to books borrowed through the 3M system. To me, this is a definite problem...especially if your friend doesn't have a computer in the first place.

My advice is that if you must buy someone a simple reader, make it the **Kindle Paperwhite**.

Tablets

What would you want a tablet for? Well, how about color books? How about children's books, or comic books? How about magazines? And how about watching movies, showing friends pictures of your most recent vacation, or playing a round of **Words with Friends**? How about catching up on your email, or checking out Facebook. Tablets do everything that the simple readers do, but they add color and a bit more functionality. There are two families of tablets to consider: **Android devices** and **iPads**. Let's take a look at them.

Androids

The Android operating system was created by Google in order to compete directly with Apple's iOS...and it does a pretty good job of it. Tablets like the **Kindle Fire**, **Samsung Galaxy**, and **Nook Tablet** are all Android devices; and if you're not locked into Apple's ecosystem, these can be pretty good alternatives to an iPad.

Probably the best-known of all the tablets, because of its reputation as an eBook reader, is Amazon's **Kindle Fire** series. I mentioned the **HD6** in the section on pocket devices. The **HD7** and **HDX** are both pretty good larger-sized devices, but they suffer from the same flaw of being a "walled garden" that the **HD6** suffers from. If you're going to get an Android tablet, you're better off getting one that's "agnostic," and doesn't care whose software you download.

With that in mind, I have two tablets to recommend...that are actually one: The **Samsung Galaxy Tab 4** and the **Nook Tablet from Barnes & Noble**.

What do I mean by saying that they're two tablets that are actually one? I mean that the Nook **Tablet** is really a **Samsung Galaxy Tab 4**...and they make absolutely no attempt to hide it. It's a **Galaxy Tab 4** that's co-branded with Barnes & Noble. And despite the way that Amazon chooses to play the game, the Nook version of the Galaxy Tab 4 is not a "walled garden." You can download and install Amazon's **Kindle** app on this with absolutely no problem, thus making this one device from Barnes & Noble capable of reading not only books you've purchased from them, but from Amazon too.

So then what's the difference between the plain Samsung version and the co-branded Nook version? Not a whole lot. When the Nook version fires up, it boldly declares that it's a Nook. It's also set up to look like a Nook when you go to the **home screen**. But those are the only two clear differences I can think of.

As far as tech support goes, you're pretty much covered either way. If you buy it as a Nook, there are over 600 Barnes & Noble locations across the country that can help you out. And if you buy it as a Samsung device, there are Samsung representatives in all of the over 1000 **Best Buy** stores in the US.



Samsung Nook Tablet
Starting at \$169

iPads

The iPad has become if not the most popular, the most well-known tablet out there; and if you're locked into Apple's ecosystem, this is the device for you.

The iPads have the same advantage as a "generic Android" device in that since they're not marketed by any one bookseller or media provider, they're "agnostic," and don't care whose eBook reader software you run. There are **Kindle**, **Nook**, **OverDrive**, and **3M** apps for the iPad, in addition to Apple's own **iBooks** app. There's also the **Zinio** app for borrowing magazines from us.

As with the iPod Touch, I wouldn't recommend anything smaller than a 32gb device.



32 iPad Air
\$449



32gb iPad Mini 2
\$319

Samsung or iPad?

Oh, you had to ask me that question, didn't you? The answer is, "It depends."

Android devices like the Samsung tablets generally cost less than the Apple devices, but the Apple devices are generally easier to use. A lot of people who are really tech-savvy dislike the fact that the Apple devices are "closed systems" that they can't fiddle with, but a lot of "regular users" like the fact that there's not a lot that they have to fiddle with.

And as I've alluded to before, if you've bought a lot of music on your computer through the iTunes Store, moving it to an Apple device like an iPod Touch or iPad is a piece of cake because of the iTunes interface. It is possible to play music downloaded from Apple on Android devices, but it's not as easy. Movies and TV shows, on the other hand, are a totally different story. Because of the **digital rights management** that the film and TV industry insists Apple put on all of the movies and shows, they can only be watched on Apple devices.

So my advice here is that it really depends on the person and what they plan to use the tablet for. If they're simply moving up from an older model Kindle or Nook, then the Samsung is fine. On the other hand, if you've got the money, you almost can't go wrong with an iPad.

A Few Final Words of Advice

When you get right down to it, although I don't favor any one particular device out of the three categories, there are two recommendations I want to remind you of:

1. When it comes to "simple readers", avoid any device that makes you fuss around with sideloading. Being able to download directly to the device through WiFi is so much simpler. This pretty much eliminates Nook's Glowlight model.
2. When it comes to tablets, avoid the Kindle family altogether, because they're "walled gardens." Instead, if you want to read Kindle books, use the free Kindle App that's available for all devices (including Barnes & Noble's Nook tablet).

Aside from that, whether you buy a simple reader, an Android, or an Apple device is a matter of personal taste and how much you want to spend. But feel free to come see me with any questions!

A Reminder of What We Have Here

It's important to know that these digital devices aren't just for buying things from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Apple, Audible, or watching movies with your Netflix account; we have plenty of digital content that you can access on some of these devices at no additional cost. Here's a quick guide:

LPL Service	Simple Readers	Pocket Devices and Tablets
OverDrive	Just eBooks	eBooks, audiobooks, magazines, music (minimal), video (minimal)
3M Cloud	Just eBooks	eBooks
Freegal		Music and music videos
Hoopla		eBooks, comic books, audiobooks, music, movies, TV shows
Zinio		Magazines
Flipster		Magazines

I hope that you, and your friend, have found this information helpful.

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