

## The Last Word on Last Minute Gifts Online

*Procrastinators can still find the perfect gift online — online shopping expert Diana Ratliff releases 5 tips for last-minute online shopping.*

December 5, 2006 (FPRC) -- It's December already and shoppers are scrambling for eleventh-hour gift ideas. To beat the crowds and the holiday shopping traffic, more and more consumers are turning to the Internet. If you're careful to check expected arrival dates posted on websites, are willing to pay more for fast delivery, and can be creative for truly last-minute shopping (say, Christmas morning), your gifts should still arrive in time to be packed on Santa's sleigh.

Online shopping expert Diana Ratliff, author of "The Insider's Guide to Shopping Online", offers the following advice for last-minute holiday shoppers.

1. Check holiday shipping schedules and make sure the product is available for immediate shipment. Online retailers usually post expected arrival dates and offer upgraded shipping options for an additional fee. Still, those are estimates, and there's no guarantee that Mother Nature won't dump 16" of snow somewhere along the delivery route. The sooner you order, the better.

2. Consider in-store pickup. Rather than wait for delivery, you can quickly browse a favorite shop online, pick the gift you want, and have it ready and waiting for you at the local customer service counter. That neatly eliminates delivery time, but if you have to wrap the gift and re-send it elsewhere, it may still arrive too late.

Faster yet is to order a gift online and have it picked up at the customer service desk of the store near the recipient. Maybe, if you ask nice, your Mom will pick up the gift, wrap it for you, and get it to Grandma in time. Just remember that whoever picks up the gift needs to bring some form of ID and a copy of the email order confirmation.

3. Order now, deliver later. Fortunately, there are many gifts that can be ordered online and scheduled to arrive later. A magazine subscription is a good idea – buy the current issue at the local newsstand, wrap it, and enclose a note about the gift subscription. Other ideas include scheduling a massage, a vacation weekend for two or an experience such as a hot air balloon ride, tickets to a concert, or a week's rental of a snazzy convertible.

4. Use online tools to create a gift. For example, burn a customized music CD or download tunes and videos straight to your kids' MP3 players while they're sleeping. Try Rhapsody.com or AllOfMp3.com. (Not free, but legal. And still a good deal.) Or download software or an e-book (just make sure it's compatible with the loved one's computer.)

5. Download (or send) an email gift certificate. Probably the most convenient option is to visit one of the many web vendors who offer gift certificates that can be emailed. You can email the certificate to yourself, print it out, and wrap it – it's a lot more fun to unwrap an actual, physical gift. Or simply email it directly to the recipient. Usually, the email contains a special claim code with instructions how to log into the website and use it to shop up to your predetermined limit.

Note that very few vendors allow you to redeem email gift certificates in brick-and-mortar stores, so

first make sure the recipient is comfortable with buying online.

Order e-gift certificates directly from a favorite merchant, or try GiftCertificates.com to order certificates from a huge selection of retailers.

Go learn more about "The Insider's Guide to Shopping Online", visit Ratliff's website at <http://www.InsidersGuideToShoppingOnline.com>. Also available is a free email course on "Savvy Online Shopping."

Diana Ratliff is an Internet Marketer, eBay seller and expert shopper who is passionate about helping others save time, money, and hassle while shopping safely on the Internet.

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