

From Santa's other workshop
This quirky Christmas list will help stumped shoppers see
there's gift potential everywhere

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People shop awfully hard each year to come up with "perfect" gifts for their friends, loved ones, work buddies and casual acquaintances. While sweating the choices, some shoppers forget one of the beauties of Christmas gifting: There's a little gift potential in just about anything.

At least, that's what product promoters tell us. As early as late swimsuit season, the press releases, e-mails and phone calls begin arriving in newsrooms everywhere. All manner of gadgets and geegaws are touted as "special," "unusual," "edgy," "funky" and "convenient" Christmas presents. Our minds reel, sometimes expand and explode, when pondering these possibilities.

We hate to keep all this gift insight to ourselves, so we proffer our services as impersonal shoppers, reminding you that shopping can be fun while also bringing you a stocking's worth of items that, left to your own devices, you might not identify as gift-worthy. Or you might. Remember — potential.

Away we go... in a clickety-clack of computer keys and the jinglejangle-jingle of a systemic caffeineand-sugar overload:

A more entertaining stocking stuffer can be found in the mini Etch-A-Sketch tree ornament. The

1 2-inch-by-1 1/2-inch version of the classic toy really works. It's toteable and low-tech, plus just plain cute. The Etch-A-Sketch is encased in a plastic bubble not unlike those you can get for 50 cents from the toy dispensers in grocery stores.

Available at Walgreen's, Target, Wal-Mart and Kroger; \$2.99.