

## eChristmas is Coming...

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This Christmas promises to be the biggest yet on the Internet with 3 million new online shoppers expected. The last year has seen an explosion in UK shoppers buying online with a ten fold increase in spending: £2 billion was spent in the last twelve months alone. With this in mind and Christmas looming on the horizon, here is a rough guide to eChristmas.

If, like me, you are working full-time (and 7 months pregnant to boot!), the last thing you feel like doing is braving the shops at the weekends or after work. The best thing about organising Christmas over the Internet is it can be done at any time on any day; you can sit in the comfort of your own home and spend as much time as you want browsing without having to compete with other shoppers. So, where do you start?

Buying presents can be difficult at the best of times. However, on the Internet you are spoilt for choice. Perhaps the best place to start are shopping directories which will guide you to a multitude of online stores. Shopping UK ([www.shoppinguk.co.uk](http://www.shoppinguk.co.uk)) and ShopGuide ([www.shopguide.co.uk](http://www.shopguide.co.uk)) are both excellent directories dedicated to online shops serving the UK. Shops are organised into categories such as Clothes & Fashion, Toys & Games, Gifts, and Health & Beauty. ShopGuide rates each site with one to five stars depending on ease of use, product display, and choice, and also has a Bargain Finder feature which allows you to search for a specific item such as a CD or book and receive a comparison of prices from different retailers.

Shopping malls are also a good place to browse. Both Shoppers Universe ([www.shoppersuniverse.com](http://www.shoppersuniverse.com)) and Barclay Square ([www.barclaysquare.com](http://www.barclaysquare.com)) have a good selection of stores and some well known names such as McCord, Innovations, Interflora, and Field & Trek. Other sites have been specifically set up for Christmas. Christmas UK ([www.christmas.uk.com](http://www.christmas.uk.com)) has a shopping mall linking you to shops such as Argos, Dixons, and Waterstones. Christmas Direct ([www.christmasdirect.co.uk](http://www.christmasdirect.co.uk)) has a variety of products from different participating retailers - some items can be bought direct through the site or you are directed to the retailers own site to complete your order or get more information.

Particularly good, well organised sites for gift ideas include Amazon ([www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)) for books, eToys ([www.etoys.co.uk](http://www.etoys.co.uk)) and Audio Street ([www.audiostreet.com](http://www.audiostreet.com)) for music. Amazon is best known for selling discounted books but it has also recently launched a music section. You can search for specific books or browse a category such as Children's Books, Biographies etc. The bestseller lists and reviews provided by Amazon customers are particularly useful in

choosing a book. Delivery is fast and efficient; every book has an estimated delivery time and you are emailed when your order is dispatched.

eToys was recently launched in the UK after huge success in the States. The store is separated into Toys, Software, Videos, and PC & Video Games. You can browse products by age group, brands, favourite characters or categories which is great if you need ideas of what to buy. There are also bestseller lists and recommendations of toys for under £20. The Gift Services section is particularly good with a fantastic gift registry feature; this is a bit like a wedding gift registry but for your children's Christmas list. Once set up, your friends and relatives can access the gift registry and see what has and hasn't been bought. For an extra £2 per item you can have the gift wrapped and delivered with your own personal message. There's even a reminder at the checkout stage for buying batteries if you have bought any items which need them!

For the person in your life who has everything, there a multitude of unusual product sites. Try [www.chiasmus.co.uk](http://www.chiasmus.co.uk) and [www.hotbox.co.uk](http://www.hotbox.co.uk) for fun & funky gift ideas and the latest gadgets, games and trends. What about something adventurous like parachuting or tank driving from [www.intotheblue.co.uk](http://www.intotheblue.co.uk) or you could even buy a weekend in a Porsche Boxter or hire your own desert island from [www.lastminute.com](http://www.lastminute.com).

What about the Christmas essentials such as the turkey and all the trimmings, and perhaps more importantly, the alcohol to go with it?! Naturally Yours ([www.naturally-yours.demon.co.uk](http://www.naturally-yours.demon.co.uk)) is a supplier of organic food including turkey which will be delivered by courier to your door for Christmas. You can even choose your breed - Norfolk Black, Bronze or Free Range White. There's also Christmas packs of chipolatas, bacon, and stuffings to go with the turkey. Alternatively, print an order form from Marks & Spencer ([www.marksandspencer.co.uk](http://www.marksandspencer.co.uk)) to order your turkey to be delivered to your local store on your chosen day; all you have to do is fill it in and hand it in in-store.

There is a huge selection of Wine & Spirit Merchants on the Internet to choose from. Supermarkets often have their own Internet wine store such as Waitrose ([www.waitrosedirect.co.uk](http://www.waitrosedirect.co.uk)) and well known merchants are also online such as Thresher's Drinks Direct ([www.drinks-direct.co.uk](http://www.drinks-direct.co.uk)). There are also several international and fine wine shops for that special bottle of wine or champagne: try Amivin ([www.amivin.com](http://www.amivin.com)) or Berry Bros & Rudd ([www.bbr.co.uk](http://www.bbr.co.uk)).

Sending your Christmas cards electronically is a free service offered by many Internet retailers. This is perhaps not intended to replace the traditional Christmas card but if you've missed the last date for posting to Australia, for example, you can send an electronic card using Marks & Spencer's service or choose from a huge selection of e-cards on Hallmark's web site ([www.hallmark.com](http://www.hallmark.com)).

Remember, this selection of web sites represents just a small sample of what is out there on the Internet. In essence, it is like having all the best high streets on your doorstep - Happy eChristmas Shopping!

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