

nd what a lovely gift this product makes!

That's what every mail order warehouse around the world would have everyone with a postal address believe. Need proof? Just take a look at your over loaded, splitting at the seams mailbox and you'll see all you need in the form of the 15 catalogs that arrived today.

Welcome to the Christmas buying season. In an effort to poke fun at the lunacy of this time of year, I present to you with what I call the 'Four Christmas Buying Myths.'

Giving a computer enthusiast a gift of hardware or software is the right thing to do.

Wrong, wrong, wrong.

Most of the users I know simply pick up the phone and order what they want when they want it. Waiting around until Christmas to buy RAM Doublers is as foolish as forgetting to leave cookies out for Santa.

Last year, my wife thought she would thrill me with a few CD-ROMs. Unfortunately, she completely missed the boat on what I thought was cool—and I spent the better part of two weeks getting things returned and then waiting for *Myst* to arrive. Computer junkies are fickle when it comes to their tastes. Best advice is to give them a gift certificate so they can pick up something themselves.

Computer books make great gifts.

This idea is about as good as the MacTV. Sure, they look good sitting on a bookshelf gathering dust (like the MacTV), but their overall usefulness is nil (like the MacTV).

Technology is changing rapidly, and the lead time required to get a book into print makes their usefulness really, really limited. Last year, someone gave me a copy of *Inside Macintosh* as a gift. While thoughtful, the information in it was for the 68000-series processor. And we all know that the 68000 is yesterdecade's news.

The simple fact is that books are good only as long as the technology they describe is still in use. Books that illustrate how to use software are especially dangerous. You just never know when a publisher will be releasing new versions. Though bigger programs, such as Quark XPress, PageMaker, Freehand, etc., are only updated about once every 14 months, smaller applications are constantly being revised.

Heaven forbid you get someone a book on the Internet. It's always in flux and what's a standard and cool today may be forgotten tomorrow. Be really leery of Internet Yellow Pages, because you just can't count on some servers to be online for more than a few weeks.

If you insist on getting someone a tome about computers, stick with generalities—they seem to last a little longer.

No one wants to wear—much less buy—Apple logoed goods.

About two years ago, Apple started a mail order company itself. From its catalog you could buy computers, books and neat stuff with the Apple logo on it. By calling an 800 number, you could proudly wear an Apple sweatshirt or buy Apple floppy disks.

And then, it disappeared. Sort of.

Every now and then, if you subscribe to eWorld, you can find references to the Apple catalog. But the really cool stuff is available only to Apple employees and user groups. Operated by an independent firm, the Apple Starting Line catalog has more stuff for loyal Apple users than you can imagine.

The trouble is placing an order. Unless you know someone at Apple or have an uncle who's a reseller, it's just about impossible to buy logoed material anymore. And that's a shame. Most Macintosh users are willing to shell out a few bucks in order to wear a snazzy golf shirt emblazoned with the six-color logo.

Given the recent lack of good publicity, I would think the marketing folks in Cupertino would love to have a million Mac users proudly donning the Apple logo.

The Christmas buying season is in full swing now and every retailer wants a piece of the computer-buying public's gift-

giving dollar. And I do mean every retailer.

(Ok, this is really a bitter truth. But 'Three Christmas Buying Myths and One Bitter Truth' would make a silly title for this column)

A few days ago, I opened my mailbox and counted 15 catalogs. These came from companies such as MacWarehouse, CD-ROM Warehouse, Home Computer Warehouse, MacMall, PC Junction, Fred's Garage Full of Computers, and at least ten more.

OK, so some of the names are fake. But trust me—I had an avalanche of catalogs from companies I only hear from during the Christmas buying season. Not so long ago I loved getting the latest catalog from Mac Zone/Connection/Warehouse. And at Christmas—oh boy, Christmas—I longed after the holiday catalog in much the same way I lusted after the Sears Christmas WishBook as a young child.

I could once spend hours upon hours pouring over the hardware and software offerings. Thinking how cool it would be to order some software I really didn't need just to get that free T-shirt. But over the last year or so, I have grown jaded. I've begun to dread the Christmas season. I get way too many catalogs from companies I will never buy from. And to tell you the truth, I no longer seem to want anything.

o there you have it. Hine's 'Four Christmas Buying Myths.' And one more thing: if you should discover you're out of newspaper as you start to build that warm, crackling holiday fire, a mail order catalog makes an excellent substitute.

Jim Hines explores the darker side of the Macintosh and PC culture in 'Blue Sunshine' Write to Jim at jhines@iglou.com, or simply 'Jim Hines' on America Online.