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- LCD
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The must have gadgets of 2006

Looking for great tech gear? Check out these magnificent seven.

Santa isn't the only one who's been making a list and checking it twice. Over the last year hundreds of gizmos have passed through Chez Freak, but only a handful inspire sincere gadget lust. (For even better holiday gift ideas check out PCworld.ca's [Top Holidays Gift Picks](#) by Jim Ducharme).

These devices all share certain traits: they serve a real need (read: not yet another iPod accessory). They're innovative. Most important, they're simple to use. Plug them in, turn them on, and they work. The way it should be.

iRobot Dirt Dog: Meet man's new best friend. iRobot's [Dirt Dog](#) is a sweeper designed for use in basements and garages. Just push the "Clean" button and stand back. It scuttles picking up wood shavings, loose screws, and other weekend workshop detritus. It is worth howling about too.

MusicGremlin: Don't wait for [Microsoft's](#) Zune MP3 player. With the Wi-Fi-enabled [MusicGremlin](#), you can download songs from any hotspot and then legally swap with your buddies online. Sure, navigating through songs could be easier, and the price (plus US\$15 a month for the music service) is pricey for a device with only [storage](#). But, being able to download virtually any song, anytime, anywhere, is cool.

Pure Digital Point and Shoot Camcorder: This pocket-size digital videocam captures 30 minutes of decent-looking video in its 512MB of flash memory and then transfers the clips to your PC via a clever USB "arm" that swings out from the back unit. The camera's built-in software allows you to manage videos, email download them to friends or share your masterpieces on Google Video with just a few clicks. The f

BACKGROUND

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 PC World
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bare-bones--only 2X zoom, 640-by-480 clips and minimal playback options on LCD-but, then again, so is the price.

PowerSquid Surge3000 Calimari: Even I find it odd how excited I am about [strip](#). Yes, it really looks like a squid: six tentacle like plugs extend to handle without blocking other sockets, and its surge protection (up to 3240 joules) keep pricey gear from getting fried. Two plugs even light up so you can find them in It's ideal for geeks with too many gadgets and nowhere to plug them.

Sony Reader: This device redefines the electronic book. Sony's glare-free screen Ink technology are amazing, the unit is push-button easy to use, and its 7-by-5 strikes the perfect compromise between a PDA and a laptop. The [Reader](#) can hold 80 books in its 64MB of memory, and more when you add a Sony Memory Stick Card. Sony launched with about 10,000 titles in its proprietary ebook format (that reads text, Acrobat and Word files). Pricing and availability of titles will vary, but itself is terrific.

Zvox 325: One wire--that's all the [Zvox 325](#) needs to produce booming audio TV, MP3 player or DVD machine. Just plug in this VCR-size speaker unit and connect the device's headphone jack. Two knobs let you control volume and switch from surprisingly good surround sound. It's simplicity itself.

PicoCricket: I got this robotics kit for my 7-year-old daughter, but soon I was for it. [PicoCricket](#) combines Lego pieces and fuzzy pipe cleaners with sophisticated motion and sound sensors. Kids build their own toys and then program them to stimuli by dragging and dropping "PicoBlocks"--brightly coloured shapes that represent different chunks of object-oriented code. So, for example, you can build a flower that plays music when the sun rises, or a birthday cake that lights up when you touch it. You can complete about 30 minutes with Pico's quick-start guide to master the basics, but far longer if you're willing to let your kids have at it.

A Merry Geekmas to all, and to all a good night.

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