

# GLOBAL GIFTING

From what not to do in China to the playfulness of the US, journalist **Phill Tromans** reports on how to gift around the world



December is a festive time around the world, and for retail businesses the rush to buy presents is a welcome part of the year. But depending on for whom you're buying, finding and presenting a gift can be fraught with social angst.

The concept of gifting dates back to a time before dates; anthropologists believe it's an inherent part of human social interaction. They even have a name for it – reciprocity. Exactly when reciprocity began isn't clear, but experts theorise that personal adornment, mixed with the interactions between groups of early humans, led naturally to an exchange of such adornments to solidify mutual cooperation.

Whether or not that theory is accurate, gift giving has for millennia been common to human interactions around the world, for marking occasions, celebrations or even mourning. But the finer details vary dramatically from region to region and even country to country.

**It is perhaps in Japan** where the etiquette of presents is most advanced and, for the uninitiated, the most complicated. The culture of gifting is hugely important in both social and business circles, with travelling businessmen and women advised to bring a selection of gifts with them in case they're needed. Although gifts in Japan are often expensive, it's the act of giving and the way it's presented that's more important than the gift itself. Gifts should be given and received with both hands, signifying the importance of the occasion, but it's considered polite to refuse – or at least, appear to refuse – once or twice before accepting. Much is made of the way the gift is prepared, and many gifts in Japan will be beautifully presented in carefully folded wrapping paper or even furoshiki – a traditional cloth used to wrap gifts. Numbers are significant in Japanese culture, so anything numbering four or nine should be avoided as those digits signify bad luck. To be on the safe side, present in pairs. But what to give, and when? In Japan, the big gift-giving occasions are Ochugen in mid-July and Oseibo in December when gifts are presented to those to whom the giver is grateful – usually parents, relatives and close friends. Food is always a good option, as Japanese cupboards are often full of gifts already.

While gifts are central to Japanese social interaction, other regions are very different. In **Saudi Arabia**, most gifts are exchanged only by very close friends, as receiving something from a lesser-known acquaintance can be seen as embarrassing and even insulting. When choosing a gift, it should be of the highest quality possible to show maximum respect to the recipient. Between close friends, the gift will usually be opened immediately, and a considerable show made of examining it to return that respect to the giver. In larger groups, it's considered polite to only open a gift later. It's considered rude in Saudi society to refuse a gift, but be careful – complementing someone else's possession can make the owner feel obligated to gift it, which tradition dictates should prompt a reciprocal gift of greater value.

Festivals and celebrations are perfect times to buy gifts in **India**. From weddings and births to religious festivals like Eid, Diwali or Christmas, Indians love a present. A visit to a friends' house is the ideal time to bring some sweets or dried fruits, and for special occasions the gift is often less important than the act and the thinking behind it. Yellow, green and red are considered lucky colours and so are the perfect choice for wrapping paper, but be aware that if a gift is wrapped it probably won't be opened until later.

In **Latin America**, the etiquette changes once again. Brazilian gifting culture features alcohol rather prominently, with wine, scotch or champagne considered an excellent gift when visiting someone's home. It's perhaps less suitable for children, so remember to bring something separate if they're present at the gathering. As with some other cultures, gifts between sexes can be misinterpreted, so a present from a man to a woman should be explained as coming from his wife or partner. Presents will normally be opened when received. Gifting in business is much less prevalent in Brazil than some other

countries, and in fact could even be interpreted as a bribe. If a gift is really necessary, it's best to present it in a social setting rather than a business meeting.

In the **USA**, the etiquette surrounding gifts is more relaxed than the countries above, but that doesn't mean it isn't big business. Retail sales during the holiday season totalled USD619.9 billion in 2014, a number that's rising every year. The greeting card industry is particularly strong in the US, with occasions that perhaps don't always 'deserve' gifts being the perfect time to buy a card instead. When gifts are given, toys are a staple for children, while for adults fine foods, chocolates, electronic gadgets and jewellery are common. At birthdays and Christmas, gifts will often be opened all together at the end of the day, but weddings are an exception – on such occasions, gifts are left by the guests and taken home and opened by

the bride and groom later, with guests subsequently thanked by a personalised, hand-written card.

As 2016 approaches and you ponder what to get your friends, family and business acquaintances, take care – in many countries, some gifts are a big no-no. In **Japan**, avoid lilies and lotus blossoms as these are associated with funerals, and in **India** white flowers also symbolise death. The same is true in **Brazil** of anything black and purple, and knives, scissors or letter openers could be interpreted as a symbol of breaking a bond. In **Saudi Arabia** it's best to avoid flowers, gold or silk for a man, as these are traditionally gifts for women.

However, in the **USA** giving a bad gift is often deliberate, and embarked upon with tongue firmly in cheek. Gag gifts for milestone birthdays or anniversaries are common, so perhaps if your gifting etiquette has let you down, you can always attribute it to some good old fashioned Western humour in a bid to escape your social faux-pas. ❖

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Dolce & Gabbana's trendy headphones parade down the runway

## Gift idea: Headphones

From chic metal models with impressive technological advances to trendy runway versions perfect for luxurious lounging, headphones are the hot item this season. Here are three of our favourites

### TRENDY: DOLCE & GABBANA

Paraded in the brand's fall 2015 runway show, Dolce & Gabbana's headphones became the collection's statement piece. By teaming with Friends, an audio company founded by a group of professional snowboarders, the luxury brand gave a high-end spin to smart sound. Embellishments include jewels, pearls, gold chains, velvet, and fur. Prices run between USD7,000 to USD8,000, making this pair more expensive than the quilted Chanel options launched in the brand's 2014 fall show. Created in partnership with Monster, Chanel's headphones run around USD5,000. [Dolcegabbana.com](http://Dolcegabbana.com)

### EDITOR'S PICK: ADVANCED COMMUNICATION SOLUTIONS (ACS) CUSTOM EARPHONES

Designed in collaboration with Beatles producer Sir George Martin, Asprey, and Meridian Audio, only 1,000 pairs of these entirely bespoke earphones will be created. Every set begins with either a soft silicon ear moulding, or a digital scan of the ear canal. After being sent away for bespoke creation, the earphones are delivered anywhere in the world. They arrive in luxurious handmade Asprey packaging, presented alongside a limited-edition portrait

of Sir George (painted by legendary drummer Gilson Lavis). "As an overall product, whether it's for yourself or as a gift, it's the experience you're buying," explains Natalie Ormsby, Special Projects Manager, ACS. "It's really something unique, and there's the quality within the sound. When you listen to music, even one of your favourite songs, and you hear it in this format, it changes the way you hear sound." A generous donation from each set will go towards funding vital research carried out by UK charity Action on Hearing Loss. [Assignatureseries.com](http://Assignatureseries.com)

### TECH: OPPO PM-3

These light weight, noise-isolating headphones focus on sound without being cumbersome. Planar magnetic technology is used to create exceptional audible quality. Added to this is a slick metal design, making something that sounds great while still being stylish. The headphones, notes Jason Liao, CTO and Vice President of Product Development, OPPO Digital Inc, are doing well: "We plan to keep these headphones on the market for some time." Yet the brand is doing research into multi-tone distortion measurement to quantify headphone performance. [Oppodigital.com](http://Oppodigital.com)