



**UNCLE
MARK**

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**GIFT GUIDE
& ALMANAC**



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INTRODUCTION

As a technology expert, I get a lot of questions – from friends, family, and colleagues – about what technology to buy. Since I work in technology and have strong opinions about what’s best, I can usually give a quick answer.

Uncle Mark 2006 Gift Guide & Almanac is the third annual compilation of those answers: it’s a free downloadable guide that helps you make the best decisions for technology purchases – and for certain gifts, too.

For your part, I expect that you have questions that you don’t want to spend a lot of time researching. Sure, plenty of magazines and websites can give you 17 different options of digital cameras – but which ONE should you buy? Uncle Mark will tell you. (The problem of having too many choices is expertly described in Barry Schwartz’s book [*The Paradox of Choice*](#), which recently came out in paperback.)

Every recommendation in this guide comes from my own personal experience. I don’t get paid by the manufacturers to mention the products.

Then why am I giving this guide away for free? For fun, for the common good, and to spread the word about my other projects (my newsletter at [goodexperience.com](#), my consulting firm at [creativegood.com](#), my conference at [gelconference.com](#), my anti-design guide at

thisisbroken.com, and others). But mostly I wrote this guide to answer, in one place, all the questions I get asked from people looking for technology advice.

Two final pointers:

1. If you want to be notified when the next guide comes out, then subscribe (for free) to my Good Experience e-mail newsletter. Just enter your e-mail address at goodexperience.com, reply to the confirmation e-mail, and you're on.
2. If you have any other questions, e-mail me here: mark@goodexperience.com. I might answer them in a future Uncle Mark guide.

Thanks for your interest,

(Uncle) Mark Hurst
October 2005

DIGITAL CAMERA: CANON DIGITAL ELPH

SUMMARY: If you want a digital camera, buy the Canon Digital Elph (PowerShot SD20). That's your answer. There's no need to read *Consumer Reports* or do a ton of research. I've done the research already, and this is the best choice for non-professionals.

DESCRIPTION:

Buy the Canon Digital Elph – the new SD20 version – because it's small. It's smaller than my wallet, smaller even than many cell phones, which means you can carry the camera in your pocket at all times. And isn't that the whole point of having a digital camera? Taking as many pictures as you want, whenever you want.



Consider how the Elph fares in the main criteria for buying a digital camera:

*The Canon Digital Elph (PowerShot SD20),
Uncle Mark's digital camera pick for 2006.*

- **Size:** It's small enough for your pocket. Some camera models are thinner (claiming to be "credit-card sized"), but they're bigger than the Elph in length and width.



- Battery life: Batteries last longer on the Elph than on most other cameras, because there's no zoom. Thus the battery powers almost no mechanical parts. Many popular cameras make a big deal about their zoom factor – but they use battery power to mechanically spin the lens out or in, causing a huge drain on the battery. On amateur cameras like these, the zoom usually isn't very good anyway. My recommendation: skip the zoom and get better battery life instead. So buy the Elph.



- Price: Retail price for the Elph is around \$300, which is competitive with most other major brands and models.

- Megapixels: The Elph has 5 megapixels, which is way more than any amateur will need; like zoom, a big megapixel count is just a way to sell more cameras to tech newbies. All you really need is 2 megapixels - this means that your prints will look great when printed out at sizes up to 5-by-7-inches. Prints from a 5-megapixel camera can print out wall-sized... who cares? (You can change the settings in the Elph to shoot at 2 megapixels.)

My pick from last year, the Sony CyberShot U40, is no longer sold. Not enough consumers wanted a 2-megapixel camera, no matter how great; the latest model is ugly and enormous.

I'll note that the Elph is not as good as my camera pick last year (the Sony CyberShot U40), shown above. Unfortunately, not enough consumers bought the U40, so Sony killed it – or rather gave it a zoom, more megapixels, and made the new model much bigger. Our loss. For now, the Elph is the closest thing to my beloved old CyberShot “spy cam.”



PERSONAL COMPUTER: APPLE MACINTOSH

SUMMARY: Without question, buy a Mac - unless you *must* be compatible with your work or school computers.

DESCRIPTION: What's better, Windows or Mac? This debate has raged for years - almost 20 years, since Apple introduced the Macintosh computer in 1984. Mine won't be the last words on the subject, but I can give you the reasons behind my recommendation for Macintosh.

Here's how to decide what to buy. First, the exceptions:

- If you need to plug into an existing Windows network (at a school or corporation) that claims not to be compatible with Macs, then buy a Windows machine. There's no need to fight the in-house techies.
- Some people are bitterly opposed to anything Apple- or Mac-related. If you're in this camp, buy a Windows machine.

Except for those two cases, *buy a Mac*. I highly recommend the 12-inch iBook, which is Apple's low-end laptop and a great machine that you can use at home or on the road. Order it from the Apple Store online - store.apple.com - or buy it from the retail Apple Store in your local mall - and get the following upgrades:

- Upgrade the RAM to 1.25 gigabytes, if you can afford it. (Certainly at least 512 megabytes.)
- Maximize the hard drive size at 80 gigs, if you can, or at least 60 gigs.
- Include the Airport Extreme card. (This is the wireless capability, which I highly recommend.) Make sure this is in there – it may not be there by default.
- Don't bother with any other upgrades or add-ons.

- Separately, from Amazon.com, buy Microsoft Office. I'll note that the [Student-Teacher Edition](#) is several hundred dollars less.

If in the end you do decide to get a Windows-based machine, one note of advice... make sure you get the full armor-plated virus protection; apparently an unprotected PC on the Internet today is infected by a virus within 20 minutes. Macs have no such worries.

There are two main reasons to choose a Mac over Windows:

I. Macs are easier to use.

The whole point of using a computer is to get things done. Given the choice between getting your work done more or less easily, why would you choose the harder option? This has always



The 12-inch iBook, shown above, is an excellent computer. Macintosh is always a better choice than a Windows PC, unless you have to connect to an existing Windows network.



puzzled me about people choosing Windows PCs – why would they choose to be LESS productive? The Mac was designed from its inception to be an elegant, easy-to-use system; Windows was built in pieces, leaving it unstable (think of a house of cards) and confusing in its user interface.

2. Macs are more secure against viruses.

Unfortunately, if you use a Windows PC, you’re constantly vulnerable to the latest Internet viruses – of which there are new strains almost every week. Using a Windows PC today – especially if you use the most vulnerable e-mail program available today, Microsoft Outlook – is a constant risk to all the files and other work you do on the machine.

Macs have little or no risk of catching an Internet virus. Fewer viruses are written for Macs, and the Macintosh operating system (OSX, pronounced “OS Ten”) is inherently more stable than Windows. The end result is that you’re less vulnerable to attack when using a Mac.

Easier to use, more productive, with few to no viruses – why wouldn’t you choose Macintosh?

CELL PHONE: TREO 650, OR AN OLD NOKIA

SUMMARY: Depending on how tech-savvy the “giftee” is, give one or the other.

DESCRIPTION: Cell phones are getting really complex – adding cameras, Internet access, and other features to their basic ability to make a phone call. There are two ways to deal with this: (a) find the best-designed device that offers all of these features, or (b) avoid all the complexity and find a phone that just makes phone calls.

For “techie” and early adopters who want all the latest features, I recommend the cell phone with it all: the palmOne Treo 650 (find it at palmone.com) combines a phone, e-mail, instant messaging, Web browsing, Palm Pilot software, and a digital camera, all in one device. I know from experience that the Treo is the best-designed of all the multi-function devices out there. (I have a hard time imagining who really *needs* all those features in one device, but it’s a great gift for a techie.)

For us mere mortals, who just want to make a phone calls that aren’t dropped abruptly, I would recommend finding the oldest, chunkiest, most boring Nokia model you can find in your neighborhood cell phone store. I recommend Nokia because they have consistently made the easiest-to-use cell phones. Some of their new models have silly designs that are hard to use; aim for an old one, shaped like a big chocolate bar. My phone is five years old and I love it.

Either way, make sure to buy a headset. It’s still possible that cell phones held to the ear for long conversations can bring harmful radiation into the brain. A headset totally prevents this problem.

THIS YEAR'S GIFT PICK FOR KIDS: 20Q BALL

SUMMARY: The 20 Questions ball is strangely accurate and surprisingly fun.

DESCRIPTION: Go to 20q.net to purchase Robin Burgener's amazing 20 Questions ball for the very reasonable price of \$15. This toy is hard to explain if you haven't tried it in person – but here goes. The ball's LED screen asks you yes/no questions to guess the thing (animal, mineral, vegetable, or other) you're thinking of. You push the "yes" and "no" buttons on the ball until 20 questions later, when the ball guesses *exactly* what you had in mind.



The one caveat, especially if you're showing it off to kids, is to start with something easy: a lion, or a broom, or something similarly easy. Allow the ball a good first impression – nailing the first item – and then work up to more obscure items later. (If you're especially interested in how the ball works, play the game online at 20q.net. It was thousands of online "games" of 20 questions that taught the ball all the answers. Amazing and clever use of collective online intelligence.)

The 20 Questions ball with four buttons: Yes, No, Sometimes, and Unknown. Brilliant design.

P.S. I also still recommend my picks from last year: the 50 states placemat (Google "US map placemat") and Five State Rummy (Google "five-state rummy" to find its Yahoo Store.)

VIDEO GAME SYSTEM: NINTENDO GAMECUBE

SUMMARY: Nintendo GameCube has the highest quality games.

DESCRIPTION: There are three main game systems to choose from:

- Nintendo GameCube
- Sony PlayStation 2
- Microsoft Xbox

I like the Nintendo GameCube because it has the highest quality games. For example: The game design, graphics, music, characters, playability, and overall experience of the game “Super Mario Sunshine” (made only for the GameCube) is far superior to almost any game you’ll find on the PlayStation 2 or the Xbox.

The advantage of the Sony Playstation 2 is that there are more games available for it - but they’re lower-quality games than those for the GameCube. It’s a little like the long-standing rivalry



If you're going to buy a video game system, get the one with the highest-quality games: the Nintendo GameCube.



between Macintosh and Windows PC's: the Mac is a higher-quality computer, but Windows computers have more (lower-quality) software available.

If you want to play high-quality games, buy the GameCube. Yes, there are more games available for the Playstation 2, but why wouldn't you want to play the best games available? Buy the GameCube. (One notable exception for the Playstation 2 is a game called "Katamari Damacy" – it and its sequel, "We Love Katamari", are the *only two Playstation games I highly recommend.*)

The other major game system, the Microsoft XBox, is my least favorite choice. It has the same number or fewer games than the Playstation, and the quality isn't anywhere near that of the GameCube games. Don't bother.

OTHER NOTES:

- If you want a good multiplayer game, buy "Super Mario Smash Brothers: Melee," available only for the GameCube. You may have to buy extra controllers (joysticks) at \$30 each to fill all four slots, but it's worth the expense. Smash Brothers, in my opinion, is the best multiplayer video game ever created. (There is a one-player version in the game, but the multiplayer "melee" mode is much better.) The game features major Nintendo characters - Donkey Kong, Mario, Zelda, etc. - all fighting each other. There's no blood or gore - just cartoon violence.

Best of all - this is the key to the whole game - there's a handicap function (make sure to set it on "automatic") which makes the game fun for everyone. If you lose a game, you get *stronger*. The winner gets weaker. Pretty soon, the player who just learned how to play five minutes ago

is beating the die-hards who've been playing for months. And there's plenty reason to keep playing: each character has special moves you can learn, as you get better. But you have to remember to set the handicap to "automatic."

I highly recommend buying a GameCube, buying "Smash Brothers," and buying some extra controllers - remember that it's best as a *multiplayer* game. In fact, you could buy the GameCube and *no other* game but Smash, and it would be worth the investment.

- The cost of the GameCube is below \$100. Smash and Sunshine each cost about \$30 new, and sometimes come bundled for free with the GameCube. Not counting new controllers for your friends, you could be playing Smash for under \$150. Great investment.

If you still want to buy other games for the GameCube after you've bought "Smash Brothers", here are a couple of ideas:

- Super Mario Sunshine: a great one-player adventure game (there's no multiplayer mode). You walk Mario through various adventures, cleaning up the environment of a small tropical island and fighting off cute Nintendo beasties. No blood and gore - just clean, even cutesy, cartoon fighting. As noted above, the experience of playing this game is unmatched on any other game system. Like "Smash Brothers," it's made only for the GameCube.
- Mario Golf Toadstool Tour: without question the best golf game for any platform - video game, PC, or Mac. The game play is near-perfect.

- *Pikmin*: Another game made only for the GameCube. This is a one-player adventure which challenges you to marshal your forces of... little seedling-plant-men, I guess... to find pieces of your spaceship. It's hard to explain in text; trust me, it's an extremely well-designed game. There's also a sequel, *Pikmin 2*, when you finish the first one.
- The only possible disadvantage of the Nintendo GameCube is that some gamers - especially the hard-core gamers - look down on the GameCube as only offering "kiddie games," with cutesy characters and no blood or guts. If you're buying for a teenager who is more into the blood 'n' guts games, try getting *Halo 2*, a very popular blood 'n' guts game made only for the Xbox. I've also heard that there are good reviews for "*Need for Speed Underground 2*."
- If your giftee wants a handheld game system, by the Nintendo Game Boy Advance SP with "*Wario Ware*", one of the best handheld games in recent years. "*Advance Wars*" is another good game, but it does have some (cartoonish) battle violence.

In comparing the GameCube, PlayStation, and Xbox, the Economist wrote: "Nintendo's GameCube has a far narrower range of games than Sony's console, but what it lacks in quantity it makes up for in quality, at least for the family-oriented audience that Nintendo targets... Because Nintendo has very high production standards, the games that are available are impressive."
(Economist, Sep 15th 2005)

Finally, note that all three companies – Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft – have announced plans to launch new consoles in 2006. Stay tuned.

MP3 (MUSIC) PLAYER: APPLE IPOD

SUMMARY: An excellent gift idea for anyone who has a computer and likes music.

DESCRIPTION: This whole Uncle Mark project came about when a middle-aged couple asked me awhile back what gift they should buy their teenage nephew, who was about to graduate from high school. I told them the answer immediately: get him an iPod. It turned out to be the best graduation gift he got from anyone; they came off looking like heroes, and I started thinking about how I could spread this knowledge.

As everyone seems to know already, this little handheld device plays digital music files. The music isn't there when you buy the iPod; the user has to use their computer to transfer the files onto the iPod.

There are many iPod models available today. I recommend the 2 gig iPod Nano, available at the [Apple Store](#). It holds plenty of songs and is extremely small. I'd recommend any iPod model except the iPod Shuffle, which I'd recommend only for gifttees who already own an iPod.



The Apple iPod (older model shown above) is a great gift for anyone who doesn't already own one.

INEXPENSIVE GADGET: 128MB USB DRIVE

SUMMARY: A lot of memory in a small case is a good stocking-stuffer for any gadget fan.

DESCRIPTION: Years ago, the only way to carry around digital memory was through floppy drives – 3.5-inch-square plastic tiles that carried almost 800 kilobytes – a tiny amount of memory today (equivalent to 30 seconds of music or one digital photograph).

Today, there's a much better option: the "USB keychain" – a keychain-sized doodad that carries a TON of memory. The Lexar 128MB Jumpdrive is a great stocking-stuffer for any gadget fan on your list. 128 megabytes is enough for 100 photos, two full music albums, or any number of Microsoft Word and Excel files.

Gadget fans will like this device because it's a great way to back up any files they take to a meeting or on the road. To upload or download files, just plug the drive into the USB port of any computer – Mac or PC – and the files are instantly available.

How to find it: Go to tigerdirect.com and search for "jumpdrive 128". You should see several models for \$25 each.



The Lexar 128 Jumpdrive, about the size of a keychain, is a useful tool for any techie on your gift list.

SEVERAL MORE “ESSENTIAL” PICKS

SUMMARY: Don't miss the best DVR, laser printer, wallet pen, subway map, and news mag.

DESCRIPTION: Here are a few more highly recommended items:

- **TiVo:** It really is as good as they say. If you watch any TV at all, buy a TiVo and free yourself of the idiotic tyranny of commercials and network schedules (and the very idea of TV networks). Some cable systems offer their own “DVR” but I highly recommend TiVo's near-perfect interface.
- **HP Laserjet 1012:** I use and recommend this simple, inexpensive, all-around great laser printer. It's Mac- and Windows-compatible, black-and-white only, and about \$100. Done.
- **Zebra pen:** This 4-inch-long pen fits in my wallet, so I'm never without a writing instrument. This comes in handy more than you'd think, especially since few people seem to know about wallet pens. Find it for \$5 at any good art-supply store.
- **StreetSavvy.com “Manhattan Subway” card:** Like the Zebra pen, this wallet card sees a lot of use. Near-perfect design for three bucks. If you live or visit NYC, get one, no question.
- **The Economist:** The best comprehensive print news source. Read the print magazine once a week and you'll get nearly everything you'd get from Time/Newsweek, Business Week, and the Wall Street Journal, not to mention international media. The website is good, too.

THREE BOARD GAMES YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

SUMMARY: *Settlers of Catan* and *Carcassonne* are two board games that almost anyone would enjoy playing. *Lord of the Rings: Confrontation* is great for Tolkien fans.

DESCRIPTION: This is not a technology suggestion - these are board games. (Remember them?)

Board games have made something of a comeback recently. *The New York Times* reported in 2003 that young Manhattan hipsters are spending Friday nights playing board games, of all things. Part of this resurgence is because new and creative games have been coming out recently, so that we have more choices than just Monopoly, Scrabble, and the classic “party games” (Pictionary, etc.).

Either of these board games would make a great gift for yourself or someone you know - age, say, 12 and up - who likes to play games.

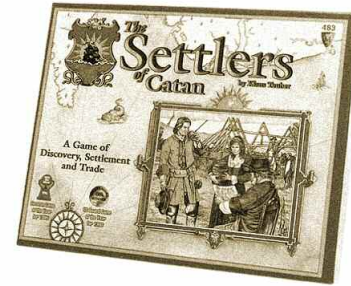
Settlers of Catan (3-4 players): Hugely popular among game-players. You build roads, then cities, on an island that contains various resources for those building projects. Lots of building and trading of resources.

Carcassonne (2-5 players): An elegant, simple game of tile-laying as players build the medieval city of Carcassonne together. This is one of the best two-player games of ANY type that I've ever encountered. It's also fun for more than two.

Lord of the Rings: Confrontation (2 players only): Unlike the other two board games, I wouldn't recommend this for a general audience. However, if you are buying for a *Lord of the Rings* fan, this is a great gift idea that they probably haven't heard of. This game is sort of like the classic game of Stratego, where two players move pieces against each other, only revealing the pieces' identities when they engage in battle. Despite a couple of ambiguities in the rules, this game is really well-designed and fits well with the popular *Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy. Recommended.

Note that Carcassonne is outstanding as a two-player game, but can accommodate more; Settlers requires at least *three* players; and Lord of the Rings is two players *only*.

Find these games at funagain.com, amazon.com, or your local game store.



Settlers of Catan is a hugely popular, very well-designed board game that most people still haven't even heard of. Well worth a look.

ALMANAC

THE BEST WAY TO SEND E-CARDS

SUMMARY: Use www.delivr.net, a free e-card service

DESCRIPTION: Several times a year I send out e-cards – for birthdays, anniversaries, and other important dates – but for a long time I couldn't find a good selection. Amazon.com and Hallmark.com only offer cheesy or maudlin designs, and other sites do who-knows-what with your e-mail address. I was happy, then, to come across www.delivr.net, a free service that uses publicly available photos from flickr.com, a photo-sharing service, for the cards. Try it.



HOW TO RUN A MEETING

SUMMARY: Start with time, agenda, and intros, and end on time.

DESCRIPTION: I'm often surprised at the inefficiency of meetings, since it's so easy to run a meeting efficiently with the tiniest investment of discipline. Here's the simplest method for running good meetings:

1. Start the meeting on time.
2. Start with TAI: time, agenda, and intros. At the start, establish how long the meeting will last (time); list the items to be discussed (agenda); and, if appropriate, have everyone go around the room and state their name and role (intros).
3. During the meeting, if the group strays from the agenda, write down the topic for a later discussion and return the group to the agenda. (If necessary, appoint a facilitator to watch time and agenda.)
4. End on time. Write down any unfinished business (on or off the agenda) for later discussion.



MERLIN MANN'S FOREHEAD TICKET TRICK

SUMMARY: Before leaving, everyone in the group must put their ticket on their forehead.

DESCRIPTION: Quoted in full from www.43folders.com/2004/11/the_forehead_ti.html :
So, you're going to a ticketed event, like a concert or a ball game. It's out of town. You're carpooling with four other people. How do you ensure that everyone in the car has their ticket with



them? The car doesn't move until each person takes out their ticket and holds it to their forehead. Been doing it for 20 years, and you'd be amazed how often it saves the day. -Merlin Mann



A GOOD RECOMMENDATION SITE YOU PROBABLY HAVEN'T READ:
COOL TOOLS, BY KEVIN KELLY

SUMMARY: www.kk.org/cooltools/ or Google "cool tools"

DESCRIPTION: Kevin Kelly (author, photographer, Internet veteran and Renaissance man) has written the Cool Tools website for several years. In it, he compiles recommendations from friends, along with his own, for the best single tool in different categories. It's like Uncle Mark, but more tech-heavy, and with lots of camping gear. Recommended.

(P.S. In the last two Uncle Mark guides I recommended Mark Twain's little-known travelogue *Roughing It* and Stanley Kubrick's 1975 movie *Barry Lyndon*. I still recommend both.)



A BETTER WAY OF VISITING THE CENTRAL PARK ZOO

SUMMARY: Buy the tickets next to the Children's Zoo.

DESCRIPTION: The Central Park Zoo is one of the busiest tourist attractions in New York City, especially on weekends. On a nice weekend day you'll wait in a long line to buy tickets.

Here's a way to buy tickets quickly: walk 100 yards north to the ticket booth next to the Children's Zoo, which has much shorter lines. Most people don't realize that you can buy tickets there for the main Central Park Zoo. So buy your tickets at the Children's Zoo, then walk back to the main zoo entrance, bypassing the long ticket line. Of course, once inside, you'll still be in a crowd.

(P.S. In last year's Uncle Mark, I recommended a better way of visiting New York's Metropolitan Museum – by showing up during the Puerto Rican Day Parade in June. Still recommended.)



A SKILL YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD

SUMMARY: Your index finger can be a magnifying glass.

DESCRIPTION: Here's a trick that works surprisingly well for any situation where you have to read fine print or any other small thing within arm's reach: turn your hand into a magnifying glass. Just curl up your index finger and hold it shut with your thumb. Make a tiny pinhole in the middle of the curl by opening your finger a tiny bit. If you look through that pinhole, you'll see that it magnifies anything that's about an inch away. Make sure it's well-lit.



HOW TO REMEMBER IF THE BATTERIES AREN'T IN YOUR CAMERA

SUMMARY: If the batteries are dead, or aren't in the camera, keep the battery compartment open.

DESCRIPTION: When you're charging your camera batteries (in a wall charger, say), keep the camera's battery compartment open. That way, if you pick up your camera to put it in your pocket or purse, you'll see that the battery compartment is open and will remember that the batteries aren't in it.



HOW TO WRITE DATES IN E-MAIL

SUMMARY: Use absolute dates, not relative dates, in e-mail.

DESCRIPTION: Here's something I see a lot in e-mails I receive: "Let's meet tomorrow at 7pm." The problem is that it's not always easy to tell *what day* the sender had in mind, especially if I check mail in the morning and am not sure if they sent the note last night or today. I always have to reply with something like: "Tomorrow meaning today, Tuesday Dec 7, or meaning tomorrow Wednesday Dec 8?"

Also problematic is the e-mail that says, "How about Friday at 3pm?" I'm not sure which Friday they had in mind! It may be clear in the sender's mind, but until we all perfect our powers of ESP, it's time for e-mail writers everywhere to use *absolute dating*.

Absolute dating is simple: always say the day of the week, the month, and the day. You can use a relative word like "tomorrow," but it **MUST** be clarified by the absolute date. "Let's meet tomorrow, Tuesday Dec 7, at 7pm." And if the recipient isn't local, clarify the time zone by geography (say "New York time" instead of "EST", since the time zone may actually be EDT, one hour back).



HOW TO DECIDE WHICH SEAFOOD TO EAT

SUMMARY: Google “[seafood wallet card](#)” and download the free PDF file.

DESCRIPTION: I don’t eat Chilean sea bass any more, if I can help it. It’s a delicious fish, almost however it’s prepared – but it’s so popular with consumers that it’s being fished almost to extinction. I don’t want to contribute to the extinction of this fish, so I eat other seafood.

In fact, many types of seafood are being dangerously overfished. A few are well-managed species and are OK to eat. How does the globally-minded consumer decide which to eat?

Solution: the Seafood Watch card, provided free by the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Just Google “[seafood wallet card](#)” and you’ll get to the right page. Some aquariums provide the printed color card for free. I carry one in my wallet and pull it out at restaurants. Monkfish? Sorry, no can do. Arctic char? Bring it ON!



HOW TO MAKE SURE THEY SEE THE PAPERS YOU DROPPED OFF

SUMMARY: Put it on their chair.

DESCRIPTION: Here's a tip I learned years ago and have used ever since. If you want to make sure that someone sees the papers you dropped off at their desk, put the papers on their *chair*. The natural inclination is to drop the files on the keyboard, or beside the mousepad. What's the first thing the person does when they get back to their desk? They shove the papers aside, onto a nearby pile. They want to check their e-mail immediately, and those papers are in the way!

But put the papers on their chair, and watch what happens: the person refuses to sit on them! They take a second to pick them up, and while they're in-hand, the person takes a look at the files while they get comfortable in the chair. Bingo: you guarantee attention to your drop-off.



SEVERAL FREE GUIDES TO TERRORIST-ATTACK PREPAREDNESS

SUMMARY: www.rand.org/publications/MR/MRI73I.I or tinyurl.com/52sqh
and www.health.harvard.edu/downloads/preparing_for_disaster.pdf

DESCRIPTION: At the Web addresses above, you can two free publications:

- By Rand: "Individual Preparedness and Response to Chemical, Radiological, Nuclear, and Biological Terrorist Attacks." (Click on the link marked "PDF" and you'll get the free 1.6-megabyte file.)
- By Harvard: "Preparing for Disaster: 3-Step Plan".

It's a sad sign of the times to recommend such guides, but they're good reading and it's worth knowing some safety tips from the experts.



RULES FOR WALKING IN NEW YORK CITY

SUMMARY: If you have to walk slowly in New York City, at least don't make any sudden movements.

DESCRIPTION: Walking in New York is like driving on a highway. There are rules, and there are safety risks if people don't follow them. Even if you don't live in New York City, you can apply walking rules to wherever you live and walk.

Here is the most important walking rule: **Don't make sudden changes in course.** Don't suddenly stop, or change your speed. Don't change directions suddenly for no reason, and don't make a surprise about-face. Just like driving on the highway: don't act unpredictably. If you have to walk (or drive) slowly, at least do it predictably, so that people around you can travel safely.

There are other rules (stay to the right when turning a corner, don't stop at the end of the escalator, etc.), but those will wait for another time. In the meantime, *The New York Times* wrote a story on their own walking rules in July 2002. From the Times archives: <http://tinyurl.com/vlrw>



UMBRELLA STORAGE SYSTEM

SUMMARY: A simple system that guarantees you'll never get wet in the rain.

DESCRIPTION: Here's the easiest, most efficient system for always having an umbrella on hand, 365 days a year, guaranteed. It just takes an easy setup (steps 1 and 2) and a tiny amount of discipline after that (steps 3 and 4).

HERE'S THE SYSTEM:

1. Buy two umbrellas.
2. Put one umbrella at home, and the other at work (or school).
3. Before you leave home or work, check to see if it's raining, or likely to rain. If it is, take that umbrella with you.
4. (This is the hard part.) When you return to that location (home or work), bring the umbrella *back* and put it back where it was. This is the hardest part of the system because it's often not raining on your return trip, and it's hard to remember an umbrella when the skies are clear. But if you forget to bring the umbrella back, the system breaks: you're vulnerable the next time it rains when you're at that location.
5. If you lose your umbrella at a restaurant, in a cab, etc., buy another one immediately and replace it in the appropriate location. Better to fix the system earlier than later.

HOW TO LEAVE A TELEPHONE MESSAGE

SUMMARY: Give the message quickly, but slow down when you give your phone number.

DESCRIPTION: When you're leaving a telephone message - on a cell phone's "voice mail," on an answering machine, etc. - think about the experience of the person listening to the message. The single most important piece of information in that message is your phone number. Even if everything else in the message is garbled, if they can understand your phone number, they can at least call you back.

Futhermore, most people you call won't want to hear a long, drawn-out, repetitive, boring, endless, boring, repetitive message.

Why is it, then, that most people reverse this system when they leave a message?

"Hey there, so um, this is, um, Gary, and we're going to send you that report, ahhhhh, as soon as we have it, and anyway, you'll be getting that report soon. And when you do, uhh, could you call me, at, twoightsifivesixfourfourthreetoeighnine." Click.

Long, boring, repetitive message, and then he turns into a speed demon when he leaves his phone number. WHY? And then to make it worse, to get the phone number, you have to listen to the whole message again, waiting for that last two seconds of nonsense. Sheesh.

Remember this: leave a brief message, then sllloooowwww doooowwnnnn when you leave your phone number.

KEEP IN TOUCH

To keep in touch with Uncle Mark:

1. Subscribe, for free, to my Good Experience e-mail newsletter. Just go to goodexperience.com, type in your e-mail address, then reply to the confirmation e-mail.
2. Take a look at my other free resources: thisisbroken.com, addyourown.com, and my free [Managing Incoming E-mail](#) report, all of which are linked from goodexperience.com.
3. Come to my Good Experience Live conference on May 4-5, 2006 in New York City. This *isn't* free - one of my few activities that isn't free for you - but it's well worth the ticket price. A full day of speakers talking about interesting, creative, good experiences. Plus, you get free local beer at the end of the day. Beer is good. Go to: www.gelconference.com

If you have any comments, questions, or stories about how this guide helped you, e-mail me here: mark@goodexperience.com. Be aware that I use a spam-filter that may ask you to answer a simple question in order to prove you're not a spammer. (That gives me an idea for next year's guide...)

(Uncle) Mark Hurst
October 2005