

On-line stores offer alternative to shopping mall

PAULA FELPS

KNIGHT-RIDDER TRIBUNE

Here's a cross-section of the many types of shopping sites available. E-shopping sites were initially selected based on referrals from e-shoppers and recommendations from other Web sites, then narrowed down based on the site's maneuverability and ease of use.

GIFTS

Illuminations

www.illuminations.com

This online candle store provides more ways to light up a home than most people ever imagined. The extensive site has more than a dozen categories for candle lovers, from basic aromatherapy and home scent candles to votive fireplace screens and candle chandeliers. Gift baskets, great for house-warmings or the holidays, come in a range of sizes and prices. Prices are comparable to what you'll find in stores, although selections are more diverse. For those who aren't sure what they're looking for, the site provides guides on decorating and entertaining with candles.

Martha Stewart

www.marthastewart.com

What would you expect from the reigning domestic diva? Answer: an incredibly large site containing stuff you didn't even know existed, let alone know that you needed. If you want to go shopping at a site where you're certain your gift won't be duplicated, this is the place to be. Because MarthaStewart.com is so huge, it's easy to get distracted from the shopping page. But once you get there, you'll find everything from Pet Paw Protecting Balm to copper squirrel-shaped cookie cutters. Fourteen shopping zones, including weddings, giftware, home keeping and setting the table, make it easier to wade through the massive site. Prices tend to be high, but there's a sale area worth checking out.

Leather Box

www.leatherbox.com

If this store were going for mass-market appeal, it would be named Boxes R Us. But don't look for boxes of the cardboard variety. Leather Box specializes in unique, distinctive leather accent pieces that will feel right at home in a study or an office. Browsing is far from laborious; the site offers just 14 items, including a trinket box and a safari trunk. Flash animation lets shoppers view selected items either open or closed. While the site won't appeal to the budget-minded, it does feature unusual, elegant gifts.

Red Envelope

www.redenvelope.com

This fun gift site requires a few extra clicks, but they can save shoppers time in the end. Gift searches get very specific. In-

stead of having For Him or For Her gifts lumped together, this site breaks down each of its main categories to specifics — no sense shuffling through pages of romantic items when you're browsing for Mom's present. Offerings range from the simple (monogrammed silver yo-yos) to the superb (spa in a box), and there are gifts for everyone from infants to executives. Prices fit all budgets, and you'll find so many great things that you'll hope someone might be shopping for you at the same site.

SPORTING GOODS

MVP.com

www.mvp.com

For both the athlete and the sports fan, MVP.com is a one-size-fits-all site. Part sports page and part shopping center, MVP.com is the joint venture of athletes Michael Jordan, John Elway and Wayne Gretzky. Sections include training and performance tips for various sports, as well as toll-free numbers to call for expert advice on your sport of choice. Extensive checklists and buyers' guides make it virtually impossible to walk onto any playing field ill-equipped, and the site sells everything from sports books, software and equipment to fan gear such as jerseys and ball caps. Covering the bases from cheerleading to water polo, you'd be hard-pressed to find a more thorough site.

Fitness Zone

www.fitnesszone.com

Concentrating on fitness rather than athletics, Fitness Zone sells equipment such as bikes, treadmills, free weights, stair climbers and other home gym items. Prices are reasonable and the selection is good, but you'll have to do your research elsewhere: Product descriptions range from single sentences to just a few lines that seem to be pulled right off the product. If you're beginning a search for equipment, this isn't the place to start; however, once you've settled on something, it's worth looking at because it might save you money. Shoppers can also click on the Coupons icons for added savings.

The Sports Authority

www.thesportsauthority.com

This Web site strives to be all things to all active people. For the weekend athlete, fan or fitness enthusiast, it offers everything from treadmills and exercise bikes to paint ball accessories and camping gear. The fan shop area includes college and pro teams, and each area has pointers for improved performance in a chosen sport. The site is easy to navigate and prices are competitive, with lots of specials and sales for added incentive. There's also a clearance area for off-season bargains.

ELECTRONICS

Buy.com

www.buy.com

Buy.com bills itself as the Internet

Superstore for good reason: While it is an excellent place to buy music, books and videos, it's also a great resource for home electronics equipment, computers, wireless phones and software. Prices are guaranteed to be the lowest on the Internet, with the difference refunded if you find a lower price online. Product information is limited to basic descriptions, so do some research before hitting the site.

800.com

www.800.com

Another huge source for audio and video equipment, home theater systems, telephones, games, movies and music. You won't find much for your computer beyond a digital camera, but 800.com also offers a low-price guarantee on 65 brand-name items and has specials such as free delivery on electronic items. The site also has buying guides and articles to help consumers decide which systems best meet their needs.

J&R

www.jandr.com

If it plugs into a wall, it's probably for sale at J&R. Appliances, electronics, audio and video equipment, and computers all share space in this superstore. Not many sites sell both air conditioners and notebook computers. Although J&R doesn't have a price guarantee, it promises to haggle if lower prices are found elsewhere. Prices are competitive, however, and side-by-side comparisons let you examine individual products, along with rundowns of their features and options.

Computers 4 Sure

www.computers4sure.com

Computers galore here: desktop systems, notebooks, PDAs and all the add-ons such as printers, scanners, digital cameras and software. The site offers some great deals, as well as a Price Drop Alert that notifies customers of reductions on selected products. Well-designed and easy to navigate, the site informs consumers upfront about shipping costs instead of making them go through checkout first.

CLOTHES

J. Crew

www.jcrew.com

At J. Crew, shoppers can view clothing in different colors and from different angles. The selection is just what you'd expect, but online customers get a break with returns. They can take them to any J. Crew store for credits and/or refunds. A gift guide offers shopping by price, category or both.

Lands' End

www.landsend.com

Power shoppers who enjoy browsing with a friend will love the Shop With a Friend feature, which lets two users explore the site together and put items in a single bag. Create a replica of anybody on your shopping list with the Virtual Model option and see how selected items fit before buying them — a high-tech version of paper dolls that's intended to cut down on returns.

Banana Republic

www.bananarepublic.com

Four doors — Man, Woman, Home and Shoes — greet shoppers here. Once inside, consumers can narrow their searches and access fitting guides. Flash animation displays different views and colors of garments, and there are specific sizing charts. In case a garment still doesn't fit, Banana Republic offers free alterations in its brick-and-mortar stores.

**THE SEAHAWK
IS LOOKING FOR
A FEW GOOD
FEATURES AND
NEWS WRITERS.
IF INTERESTED
PLEASE
CONTACT MEGAN
O'BRIEN OR
THOMAS RUYLE
AT 962-3229.**

Serendipity

"A Head to Toe Day Retreat"

**Why haven't you made the change?
Step into a new hairstyle this fall!**

Offering the latest in complete skin and haircare.



Kelly Williams
UNCW Student

Hair and make-up by Kelly Andrews

Facials/ Microdermabrasion/ Body Treatments/ Wraps/ Massages/
Nail Care/ Waxing/ Hairstyling Created Just For YOU (selected stylist)

Christmas Gift Certificates Available
Jewelry Now 20% Off!

This \$10.00 Gift Certificate is YOUR Special Invitation to visit our spa!