



Photos courtesy of Excitations.com

Gifts that thrill

From hang-gliding to hot stone massage

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What do you get someone who has everything?

Facing that common challenge, Hatef Yamini sought a gift that wouldn't add to his best friend's material clutter. When at work at the Tysons I Apple store, his dilemma was solved by a customer who came in for a computer repair.

"He told me he was in the 'experiential gift' business," said the Falls Church resident. The customer, Ian Landy, got on the Internet and showed Yamini an example: a Formula One racecar ride. "It was the perfect gift — I immediately handed him my credit card to buy it."

Looking for an extravagant, unforgettable gift? Something to Donald Trump the competition? Landy's new company, Excitations, has you covered, with choices that include hang-gliding above the madding crowd ... cloud-cruising in the Shenandoah Valley by vintage biplane ... and roaring down the road on a Harley for a day.

If your giftee's definition of "thrill" runs closer to pampering versus heart palpitations, Excitations offers a hot stone massage for two or ultimate home makeover.

Launched late October, the locally based experiential gift enterprise is geared to those seeking special presents for mates, parents, children, friends and business associates. You can give the opportunity to captain a private yacht for a year (maintenance-free!) for \$3,310. Or race one's own "Indie 500" for \$185.

For a more pastoral pastimes, give a guided horseback ride for \$70. Instead of buying a tchotchke, let your giftee make her own in a glassblowing class. Or give a curry-cooking class taught by a master chef — and drop hints that

you're willing to evaluate your giftee's newly expanded culinary skills. Who knows ... maybe your gift will inspire a loved one to pursue that back-burnered dream.

And don't forget the kids: Kidspreen choices include a \$150 paintball party, \$65 Fame School for drama queens and kings, or a \$60 rock-climbing excursion that will make them the envy of their friends.

Handling a holiday rush of orders in his Sterling office, Landy describes experiences as the cutting edge of gift-giving as people look for more creative ideas to make a lasting impression.

After the timely sale of his high-tech Silicon Valley firm in 1998, the entrepreneur began research that led to his new adventure-gift venture.

"The [experiential gift] concept is well-established in Europe, but not here in the States," Landy says.

Experiential gift-giving is on the upswing in the U.S., where it's a \$253 billion-a-year industry. An estimated \$1.4 billion of such gifts are purchased on the Internet. Landy and partner Kim AuBuchon, who plan to take the company national in the future, chose D.C. for its large population of "affluent, discriminating people without much time" and its wealth of exciting activities.

It helps that they live here, especially since they thoroughly research all potential "experience providers" before adding them to the Excitations gift list. Landy explains that gift-givers want to feel confident that the recipient will have a completely enjoyable, quality and safe experience. If the gift recipient doesn't find the chosen experience appealing or convenient, he or she can "exchange" it for another Excitations offering.

How's business?

"During the last 10 days of November, daily sales tripled," Landy says. "We're doing twice the volume that we projected."

And what gifts are proving the most popular?

"We're seeing success across the board," Landy says.

Pressed for details, he cites the Circle Choice gift packages. Instead of choosing a specific experience, the package allows that special picky giftee can choose among six to 12 experiences. Circle package prices start at \$75.

"Some of the art classes are very popular," Landy says. "In the hot glass fusion design class, you hold tempered glass in your hand and learn how to create a glass plate or night-light." Also a hit: self-help gifts, such as Breakthrough Life Coaching.

What would the entrepreneur like to receive?

"I'm more of a thrill-seeker sort myself," Landy says.

One could easily envision Landy taking the wheel in his Extreme Stock Car Driving experience.

Another trend noted by Landy: Individual and Circle packages "are particularly popular with the business market."

While experiential gifts can get pretty pricey, they offer ideal gifts for many locals struggling with coming up with gifts for significant others. One study by Unity Research estimated the average person's annual gift budget at \$2,062, with 40 percent spend over the December holidays.

Excitations gift certificates come in keepsake boxes and can be ordered online or at the company's kiosks at Union Station and the new wing of Tysons I.



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