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One Place on the Web to Find That One Gift

Instead of a tie for Christmas, maybe Dad might enjoy a ride in a vintage biplane (price: \$295). And instead of jewelry, maybe your loved one would prefer a four-mile hike accompanied by a llama, followed by a picnic lunch for two (price, including llama rental: \$125).

Those and other "experiential" gifts are being sold online and at kiosks at Tysons Corner Mall and Union Station this holiday season by Excitations Inc., a Fairfax start-up. "We're targeting the gift-giver who may not be aware you can give an 8-year-old scuba-diving lessons or that you could learn to play polo if you've never done it before," chief executive Ian Landy said.

Landy made millions selling Light-speed International Inc., a Sterling-based tech firm he co-founded, to Cisco Systems Inc. in 1998. He worked for Cisco for three years, then helped start Washington Capital Ventures LP. But he said he grew "itchy" for a company to run. The British-born Landy decided to start a business that would line up and market a variety of events offered by different operators.

"I stumbled across this some time ago in the U.K., and I never understood why it wasn't an acceptable concept in the U.S.," he said. "We have more mountains, more rivers and certainly a lot more fun things to do."

Landy said he made a "multimillion-dollar investment" in Excitations. He said he expects to expand its offerings along the East Coast next year and na-



BR BIPLANES

A biplane flight is among the unusual gifts sold through Excitations, a Fairfax start-up.

tionally in 2007. By then, he said, he will have to raise money from outside investors for "a big promotional push."

For now, though, the gifts are all aimed at Washington area residents, who can redeem a gift-boxed certificate for a biplane ride at Brandy Station in Culpeper County but must travel to Blairsville, Pa., to hang out with a llama.

The gifts aren't door-busters. A two-hour life coaching lesson sells on the Excitations Web site (www.excitations.com) for \$300, and 20 laps

around a track in a stock car goes for \$325. Most of the gifts are marked up 10 to 15 percent from what they would cost if the gift-giver searched the Yellow Pages or online, said Adele Gambardella, a spokeswoman.

But a Dandy Dinner Cruise on the Potomac River cost \$130 per person on Excitations last week, including tax and tip, compared with \$78.38, including tax but not tip, directly from Dandy. Asked about the gap, Excitations changed its price to \$220 for two.

—Larry Liebert