

# A shocking idea

## ■ How about a Skinnerian solution for the costly effects of playing Santa?

BY KIMBERLY GADETTE  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Like that rum-eggnog headache, it's finally over. The sound of Andy Williams' novocaine baritone crooning carols in every shopping mall in town has finally ceased. Dry and denuded Christmas trees lie in the gutters, punished, as if it was their fault we spent all that money on all that holiday cheer.

But Chris Hana Kwanzaa 2005 has given us precious memories. The extra pounds. Dried needles embedded in Fido's fur. Bits of broken ornaments popping up in our underwear drawers.

But like the scar from that cycling accident of 1991, or a lingering rash after a hike through poison oak, we have one memory that is still very much alive: this month's credit-card bills.

As we study them, that eggnoggy headache suddenly returning with a rush, we are reminded of our transgressions. Ah, yes ... all that scrambling and charging about on that first shopping day at the end of November, "Black Friday." And its newly named follow-up, the heaviest day of online Internet shopping, "Cyber Monday." Funny, but no one's mentioning Overextended Wednesday.

If only someone could help us out.

But wait. I understand that our very own Intel has recently signed a deal to make flash-memory chips for the iPod. Since they're already working on the technology, maybe they could come up with a gizmo that might walk us back into the black, too? We're already so used to strapping on electronic toys, from cell phones to iPods, that one more wouldn't hurt.

Call it the iPod.

The iPod would work like this: Say you're running through the department store on Christmas Eve of 2006, frantically looking for a gift for your wife. Suddenly you turn a corner and spot a herd of baby-yak leather jackets. They're so unbelievably smooth and supple. So what if you have to pay a little more?

Suddenly, a small electric shock courses through your body. Wow! What were you thinking? The iPod takes your spending impulse and matches it with a pulse of its own. The impulses are neutralized, one against the other, and *voilà!* you're Even Steven. Kids, it's a tactile life lesson of how two negatives make a positive. (And here you thought you wouldn't need math after high school.)

Having all your financial information stored and updated on a daily basis, the iPod does a quick calculation. It informs you that you can afford a) one pair of "Go Beavers" earrings, replete with dangling artwork beavers; b) a set of vaguely labeled bath oils in assorted tutti-frutti scents; or c) one piece of Godiva chocolate.

You take the earrings.

The next morning, the two of you seated near the used Kmart

tree, your wife opens her present — and immediately holds the earrings away from her body as if they exude a certain rodent-like aroma.

"But dear," you implore, "each Beaver tooth is an actual rhinestone!"

Just before a heated argument ensues, the iPod takes over, a small note popping up on its mini-screen. (The high-priced version could actually speak to her gently, calling her by her pet name.) It would explain to Snookums that by choosing cheap now, the two of you might be able to purchase a nice retirement home in Boca by your early 60s. It's either that or living under the freeway selling bags of oranges.

**A small electric shock courses through your body. Wow! What were you thinking? The iPod takes your spending impulse and matches it with a pulse of its own. The impulses are neutralized, one against the other, and *voilà!* you're Even Steven.**

Your wife understands. She beams at you. (Goodness! You never noticed this before, but her teeth look just like those jeweled Beaver choppers.) She tells you she agrees, and will immediately return the Limited Edition Tiger Woods Golf Clubs.

No one hears your strangulated screams over the sound of Andy, crooning those 1963 classics.

But wait, there's more! The iPod has a dozen uses throughout the year. The son wants a car? Let the iPod speak, reminding him that a tricycle needs no gas. The daughter needs some kind of overpriced get-up for her wedding? The iPod knows of a great deal over at Gently Used Togas.

And even better, because of the iPod's overwhelming success Intel will be able to keep all of its employees; the citizens of Oregon will no longer suffer debt; the fight over the preponderance of casinos will end because no one will have to gamble in a desperate attempt to pay the rent; and the sun will shine through.

Wait, this is the Northwest. Nix on the winter sunshine.

As for Overextended Wednesday? It will soon be replaced by Thrifty Thursday.

So what to do with all that excess cash? A hearty congratulations to us! We just might be able to pay this year's heating bill after all.