

The truth about unwanted Christmas gifts

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Christmas and presents go hand in hand. But is it worth getting into debt to buy the perfect gift? Especially as ING research shows 15% of recipients don't want or like what they're given.



[Presents of mind – Christmas 2016 from ING](#)

[ING International Survey – Christmas Special Report \(PDF, 1,3KB\)](#)

Christmas is traditionally a time for giving. Unfortunately, it seems not everyone is always grateful for the gifts they get. ING's third annual survey of Christmas spending found that around one in seven Europeans (15%) was unhappy with what they received last year, while 10% couldn't even remember their gifts.

And although more than half said they had kept their unwanted gifts, 25% 're-gifted' them to someone else. A further 14% sold the items and one in 10 tried to return them to the store. Five percent even said they had given the gifts back to the giver, with the British and Dutch being most likely to do so (11 and 9% respectively).

The online survey of 13,576 people in 14 European countries, also found that elderly people (65-plus) were more likely to donate their unwanted gifts to charity. Younger people aged 25 and 34 simply threw them away.

Buying on credit

So much for all the thought that goes into buying someone the 'perfect gift'. With the median cost of unwanted gifts estimated at EUR 45, that's not small change - especially for those who can't afford to buy them in the first place. The survey found that last year, 10% of Europeans borrowed money (or used credit cards) to cover the cost of Christmas – about the same as in the two previous years.

Most likely to fall into festive debt were Romanians (19%) and the UK, while people in Luxembourg were least likely (3%). By comparison, in the US, 22% of people will resort to credit at Christmas.

Forced to spend

Little wonder then that a whopping 70% of respondents agree that Christmas is too focused on spending. The exceptions are Poland and the Netherlands. The latter could be because the Dutch traditionally buy more gifts for the Sinterklaas festival earlier in December.

A further 42% of Europeans said they felt forced to splurge at Christmas. This sense of obligation was highest in Spain (57%), followed by the French and British (both 44%) and Italians (42%).

The Dutch feel the least pressure to open up their wallets (20%).

On the other hand, Christmas is the one time of the year that people allow themselves to spend without worrying about money – true for 40% of Europeans. Romanians, men and 25-34-year-olds are the most relaxed.

Still, the survey finds that a clear majority of Europeans do not let the festive season get the better of their finances. Most are sensible about their seasonal spending and are able manage the financial consequences. But for a small minority, Christmas is not a cheerful time of the year at all.

Outside Europe

Similar surveys in Australia and the US showed similar findings. Both countries agreed that Christmas is too commercial. There were a similar percentage of unwanted gifts, although Australians tend to give these away to charity.

In the US, re-gifting is more popular (40%), as is returning unwanted gifts to the store (31%) or throwing them away (19%). In addition, 22% of Americans will buy on credit at Christmas and more than half will relax the purse strings and spend more freely. Australians are also more relaxed about their festive spending.

What NOT to give this Christmas

Avoid gifts that appeal to personal tastes such as

- Perfume
- Cosmetics
- Ornaments
- Clothing – especially shoes and sweaters.

These are items that are most likely to find their way onto the 'unwanted' list.

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