



Tuesday, December 7, 2010



Just for him: Allen Edmonds custom shoes.

Holiday shopping

A special something for special someone

Retailers are happy to customize just about any gift for a buyer, 3B

Holiday shopping

Gifts made just for you

More retailers let you customize almost any type of apparel, food or shoe

By Jayne O'Donnell
USA TODAY

What says you care more than, say, a mattress with a love note on the label, beef jerky in your favorite flavor combination or Oxfords or loafers in your college team's colors?

Given the growth in custom products, now being touted as the perfect gifts for the holidays, it appears nothing can quite compare. Shirts, shoes, beds and baubles that are truly "you" are more

popular than ever, thanks to all the social-media emphasis on our tastes and traits.

"People are looking to find a way to express their individuality, their uniqueness, to the world," says John Long, a retail strategist at consulting firm Kurt Salmon Associates. "Everybody is looking at a greater level of personalization."

Retailers and manufacturers are more than happy to comply.

Monogrammed clothes, towels and totes may have been around for decades. But now you can

really design almost any type of apparel, food or shoe on a growing number of websites.

Prefer garlic, brown-sugar glaze and grass-fed beef in your jerky? Check out SlantShack Jerky. Know that your wife wants a purse that couldn't pass for anyone else's? Laudi Vidni ("individual" spelled backward) lets you design her (or your own) handbag. Want her to know you care enough to pick the placement of the stones on her ring? Try Gemvara.

More custom offerings:



Say it with a T-shirt

Athletic wear retailer Finish Line is adding T-shirt customization stations to its stores in partnership with Nike, which helped popularize custom sneakers. Now in Orlando, Indianapolis and Staten Island, N.Y., the stations let customers select from dozens of Nike T-shirt designs and personalize them with names, sports numbers or favorite sayings. The shirts, made in the Finish Line store while customers wait, average about \$30.

Finish Line President Sam Sato says teens, especially, like to customize items for friends, sometimes with a nickname, shared joke or team name that "bonds them together with their friends."

"It's instant gratification and the cool factor of giving a one-of-a-kind gift," says Sato.



A shoe-in

High-end shoe-seller Allen Edmonds lets you customize your shoe down to the soles, color, style and type of leather. A pair of green and red oxfords is decorating the windows of Allen Edmonds stores, but the shoes can be mainstream or as wild as blue and white for your alma mater. The company has been customizing for so long, it has built many of its customers' preferences into their in-stock offerings, but it finds people still like to special order or buy gift cards for custom shoes for the holidays. Custom shoes range from \$375 to \$450.