

MAKING LIFE MORE FUN

Technology Helps Bring Families Together For Good Times

(NAPSA)—There's no denying the fact that kids love technology. From cell phones to digital music players, it seems they are always interested in the latest gadgets and digital trends.

Wendy Smolen is a toy authority and the former deputy editor of a popular children's magazine. She is also mom to three kids who have literally gone from cradle to college playing with the toys she tests. Smolen says playing with her kids keeps her on her toes, and more often than not, gives both parent and child a chance to shine in different ways. Together with Microsoft, she offers a new spin on traditional ways to bring the family closer this season.

Take Back Game Night

The family that plays together stays together, and Xbox 360 offers unique ways to have fun whether everyone is under the same roof or half a world away.

Xbox 360 Arcade is a great way to get started. For an estimated retail price of \$279 (U.S.), the console comes with five games included such as "Pac-Man" and "Uno." With Xbox 360 Family Settings, plus more than 200 games rated "E" for everyone, "E10" or "T" for teen, Xbox 360 delivers age-appropriate entertainment for each person in the family. Film-loving families will love "Scene It? Lights, Camera, Action," a movie trivia game for up to four players or teams. Simplified "buzzer-style" controllers make it easy for non-gamers to jump into the action. (ESRB rating: Teen with Blood, Language, Suggestive Themes, Use of Alcohol and Tobacco, Violence)

You can really crank up family night with rock star antics from each member of the family. "Guitar



Families can find nearly 200 video games rated "E" for everyone, "E10" or "T" for teen on Xbox 360.

Hero III: Legends of Rock" allows fans to shred to master tracks from legendary bands such as the Rolling Stones, Aerosmith, Beastie Boys and Pearl Jam. No guitar experience required, just an ability to rock out and have fun. (ESRB rating: Teen with Lyrics, Mild Suggestive Themes)

In addition to great games and entertainment, you can also play digital music, view photos and connect to Xbox LIVE, a social entertainment network that lets families and friends chat via voice and video, and play together from around the world. For additional information, visit <http://www.xbox.com>.

Food for Thought

With busy schedules, it's hard to make time for the entire family to enjoy a meal together. Yet according to research by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, regularly sitting down for meals with your children promotes healthy eating habits and may lower risk for behaviors such as smoking and

drug and alcohol use.

Try involving the entire family in the mealtime experience. Together, search sites such as <http://www.allrecipes.com> or <http://www.cooks.com> for great recipe ideas and choose your favorite. Using the computer, get creative and compile everyone's favorite dishes into an original family cookbook or make recipe cards with themes, then burn them onto CDs to send to grandparents and friends.

Scavenger Hunt Gone Wild

Grab the GPS, fill the backpacks with trail mix and head for the hills on a new kind of family adventure. Geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunting game that is taking the nation by storm. Visit <http://www.geocaching.com> to find GPS coordinates of boxes hidden around the country; there may even be some in your own neighborhood. Searching for clues, the family may be looking in trees and digging holes, not to mention challenging Dad's mapping skills.

Create your own family cache and post it on the Web site for others to explore. Have family members pick an item that best represents themselves, building a box the family can visit as a family for years to come.

Whatever you decide, take a moment this season to discover new and creative ways to build memories and reconnect the family.

Wendy Smolen is co-founder of the Sandbox Summit, a series of seminars and exhibits that explore how technology is affecting the ways kids play. For more information, go to <http://www.sandboxsummit.org>.