

How to Do a Virtual White Elephant This Year (Because 2020 Is Weird)

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How to Do a Virtual White Elephant

Believe it or not, you don't have to jump through any serious hoops to pull off a virtual version of this popular holiday exchange. Of course, the event will feel different in the absence of in-person interaction, but—assuming no one on your guest list has bottled and wrapped immunity—this remote gift exchange isn't a bad option. (In fact, it's pretty fun.) Ready to give it a shot? Here's a step-by-step guide to ensure your white elephant get-together is a success.

1. Set a Date

Reach out to family members, friends and colleagues to arrive at a mutually convenient day and time for the event. It sounds a little formal, but depending on the size of the group, it may behoove you to send out a questionnaire via email—the kind that asks attendees to select their most available days and times of the week—so you can take it from there.

2. Have Everyone Purchase and Wrap Gifts

A white elephant only works if everyone buys and wraps a gift to bring to the exchange. Try to get everyone on the same page in terms of price point and type of gift, so that way you don't have one person leaving the chat with a gag gift (feeling cheated), while their cubicle buddy waltzes off on cloud nine having scored a fancy espresso maker. (Note: A set-in-stone budget might be useful here, and outrageous gifts are strongly encouraged.)

3. Draw Numbers

As the host, you can just assign everyone a number if you wish. However, if you want to stay true to the traditional exchange by leaving things entirely to chance, a couple websites—whiteelephantonline.com and secretsanta.com—have been designed to accomplish exactly that. Sign up and you can make use of their service to randomly assign numbers to invitees.

4. Pick a Platform

This virtual business is new for many of us, so reach out to your invitees and see which video platform they feel most comfortable with. It's good to get a read on the group in advance because it spares everyone a lot of groans in the event that one of your friends only knows FaceTime and has never used Google's Meet before. Bottomline: Get the tech tutorial out of the way in advance of the get-together.

5. Set Up Your Conference Call

When the date arrives, all of the attendees should show up to the conference call with their video settings on. After a little time shooting the breeze, have all your buddies hold their wrapped gifts up to the camera and let the games begin. At this point, person number one will have an opportunity to pick the most alluring mystery package, and when the choice is made, the person who bought said gift will do the honors of unwrapping and displaying it for the whole group, before proceeding to person number two. From here, the virtual gameplay is pretty straightforward—just consider whether you want to set some rules for the sake of fairness, and to avoid an event that drags on too long. (Some white elephant parties put a cap on stealing, so that no single person can have their gift lifted more than three times.)

6. Exchange Addresses

Before signing off, each participant will need to know the rightful owner of the gift they possess so they can mail it out. Maintaining a spreadsheet of everyone's names, addresses and the gift they're receiving can be helpful for coordinating this.

Now that we've addressed the white elephant in the room, it's time to gather friends and family and get gifty. Godspeed!
