It isn't just the thought that counts

The average family spends NIS 6,000-NIS 7,000 a year on gifts, but a poll by TheMarker finds a mismatch between what people give and what they want.

Thanks, but no thanks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likely to give as a holiday gift</th>
<th>Would be happiest to receive as a holiday gift</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books/ideas</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmetics</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadgets</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewares</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparel</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift certificates</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Panel

Gabriela Davidovich-Weisberg

The arrival of spring in Israel brings with it family get-togethers, means plenty of shopping and a raid on the piggy bank to cover the added expenses.

A typical Israeli family with 12-15 kids in monthly income spends an average of NIS 6,000 to NIS 7,000 a year on gifts, according to Nahman Lidor, an expert on household economics and partner in the Esh Lidor consulting firm.

So much should we give each other?

In a survey by the Panels market research firm for TheMarker, 53% said the degree of closeness is the main factor in deciding how much to give. 26% cited their financial situation. 10% said whether the gift had previously been received.

A hierarchy can be discerned between types of events by the amount invested in gifts. Not surprisingly, weddings top the list. Bar or bat mitzvah and brit or bris (for a girl) is also an occasion of great giving, but birthdays and holidays much less so.

For weddings, 35.4% of survey respondents said they spend over NIS 780 while the rest cited gifts in accordance with their relationship to the family. Responses averaged NIS 535 for close relatives, NIS 418 for close friends and NIS 299 for acquaintances.

The least spent was for holiday gifts, according to the survey: NIS 188 for relatives, NIS 127 for close friends and NIS 94 for acquaintances.

The giving and receiving of gifts certainly involve enormous sentimental value. But Yaron Timmon, deputy dean of the business school at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, explains that beyond emotional and romantic motives there are also status considerations dictated by society.

"Instead of the gift receiver being pleased he was thought of, the gift becomes another method to evaluate the giver and how much the recipient means to him," he says. "Israelis check to see who brings what and who's brought more."

Oren Kaplan, dean of business administration at the College of Management in Tel Aviv, adds that it's important to check everything related to giving presents, where to draw the line on expense and the meaning of reciprocity.

"The incentive nowadays for giving a gift isn't the thought of what the receiver wants and needs, but what will boost the image of the giver for the lowest possible price," according to Kaplan. "There are still some who give gifts from the heart rather than the head, but hardly on special occasions or for holidays. At weddings, for instance, we gauge the acceptable amount to give and what they had given us - like at a shop vendor."

"There was a study that showed how someone who had bought a cup for $5 wouldn't give it up for less than $6, considering it a particularly good cup because he had bought it," explains Kaplan. "Another person wasn't willing to pay $3 for it. This shows that the receiver undervalues a gift while the giver overvalues it. So both sides lose out even though someone does benefit from it all."

According to Timmon, the gift industry is directly tied to the events industry. "Events have become bombastic and the original intent behind the giving of wedding gifts, a sign of good wishes to the newlyweds, is no longer relevant," he says.

"Guests don't want to express emotion but rather help defray the wedding costs out of a sense of obligation and to prove they're able. Behind closed doors you can hear people expressing deep embarrassment over this growing gift-giving trend, but it's a vicious circle that's hard to get out of. With smartphone applications suggesting the best size of a gift, many feel the need to toe the line and maintain this insane competition."

One of the most interesting findings in TheMarker survey is the gap between what people buy for the holiday and what they like to receive. Sarit Sternberg, CEO of Panies, points out, with 30% preferring to give household goods and kitchenware but only 4% happy to receive them.

"The most desired gifts are gift certificates or gadgets, but few choose to give them," she says.

The result, says Kaplan, is an enormous waste of resources. "You can also see the waste at children's birthday parties, but in an opposite way: The celebrator receives a pile of gifts with little value and no useful purpose."

One solution he proposes is an Internet purchase group: "Homing in on large presents and sending a group of friends the suggestion to participate."

WEDDING FOR THE DOUGH: Expect NIS 535 from family, says Levy