

SCHOOLS SEE DECLINING YEARBOOK SALES, THANKS TO TECHNOLOGY AND OTHER FACTORS

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Hello, Facebook. Goodbye, yearbook.

At a time when teens are logging onto Web-based social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace in droves, more and more are declining to pick up a copy of that tried-and-true memory keeper, the high school and college yearbook.

"It's just a book. It's a list of people, and most of them I don't even know," explained Megan Kumm, 15, a sophomore at Springfield High School, where sales have dipped from 500 copies about five years ago to about 415 now.

Other area schools have seen even more precipitous drops. Whitmer High School once sold as many as 1,300 copies; now it's down to 900. Maumee High School has dropped from more than 700 in the past to 483 this year.



Students at Whitmer High School look at this year's yearbook. (THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)

At colleges like Bowling Green State University, it's even tougher. Annual sales there have plummeted from a peak of 3,600 copies in 1986 to between 200 and 400 per year now. As a result, next year the school plans to give up the traditional hardbound format and replace it with a slimmer magazine published twice a year.

That decision makes BGSU the fifth college this year to give up its traditional yearbook, according to Lori Brooks, chairman of the yearbook committee for College Media Advisors, a national organization for collegiate media professionals.

"The problem that yearbooks are facing is that we're in the business of selling history to people who are still living it," she said. "It's not a new problem."

School officials also blame struggles with the economy and student apathy, but some issues contributing to the decline of yearbooks are unique to modern times. Thanks to digital cameras and the Web, students can take their own photos of their circle of friends, then share and comment on them online.

"I think just about every student at this school is going to have a Facebook or MySpace account, and there's really no need for a yearbook if you can just go online for free and look up those pictures," said Tyler Wepler, 17, a Springfield junior.

Darnesha Lindsey and Asha Willis, 15-year-old sophomores at Whitmer, didn't have yearbooks handy at lunch earlier this week, but they did have a digital camera. Both had plans to post pictures on the Web. It was the best alternative they could think of to buying yearbooks, which at that point were selling for \$85.

"That's a lot of money, especially when you can get a digital camera and take pictures of people around the school," Darnesha said.

Cost was a common factor for students at Whitmer who opted not to purchase a yearbook this year. Some will wait until their senior year to buy one and think there are better ways to spend their cash now.

"That's too much money for a book," said Sean White, 16, a sophomore.

Yearbook sales fell by about 100 copies to 1,200 this year at Bedford High School in Temperance, Mich. and yearbook advisor Cindy Ramirez is sure the economy has something to do with it.

"I know that people are struggling now," she said.

At Toledo's Scott High School, yearbook advisor Trevor Black said she noticed some slow sales this year, but nothing major. She does think, though, that students will want a yearbook more if they're more visible within it.

"If they're not in it, they don't want it," she said.

Colleges are a different scene that sometimes can have more trouble with yearbooks because they are not as intimate a setting as high school. The University of Toledo hasn't had one since 1971, with the exception of a brief attempt at a resurrection in the '80s. So BGSU's recent decision may not come as a huge surprise to some.

"The climate for yearbooks has been deteriorating for many years," said Robert Bortel, BGSU director of student publications.

The static nature of such books seems to go against that of current students who are glued to their cell phones and send text messages constantly.

"I think students really live in the moment of immediacy," Mr. Bortel said. "Yearbooks aren't a sense of immediacy. They're long-term perspective"

Still, not all schools are facing yearbook woes. Sylvania Northview High School managed to sell yearbooks to about 80 percent of its students this year, according to yearbook advisor, Sarah Huey.

One reason, she said, is because of how involved the students there are in clubs and activities that appear in the book. Another factor is the timelessness of the investment no matter what other technological advances may come and go.

"It's never going to be out of date. You'll always be able to open it and read it," she said.

That's part of the mantra of Steven Dufrane, the local representative for Jostens Inc., which produces yearbooks for many schools in northwest Ohio.

"The printed yearbook is something that has kind of stood the test of time," he said. "You have a product with permanence."

Mr. Dufrane said he's noticed "minimal slippage" in book sales over the last year or two and he blames that on the economy.

It should be a comfort to him that Jackie Layng, associate chair of the department of communication at UT, is a firm believer in the future of yearbooks despite various challenges. Alternatives like video yearbooks have come and gone, but none has been able to displace it as a high school mainstay.

"You're always going to have yearbooks around to a certain degree," she said

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