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Even digital natives, who barely ever touch a piece of printed media, still prefer the novelty and permanence of traditional, hardcover yearbooks over digital alternatives. (PHOTOS BY STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE)

TEENAGERS

## LURE OF PRINTED YEARBOOKS REMAINS FOR TODAY'S DIGITAL TEENS





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TEENAGERS

## LURE OF PRINTED YEARBOOKS REMAINS FOR TODAY'S DIGITAL TEENS

# Hard-bound memories

By Karen Ann Cullotta  
Chicago Tribune

**H**uddling in the hallways and sprawling out on the lawn of the Prospect High School campus, in suburban Mount Prospect, Ill., hundreds of teenagers set aside their smartphones and tablets in favor of poring over the glossy pages of their high school yearbooks.

"With social media, the pictures and messages we post kind of go up, and then they go away," said senior Caroline Chengary, 18, editor-in-chief of the 2015 Prospect yearbook, "Crest," which was distributed to students recently.

"I always loved looking at my mom's old high school yearbooks. It's the one tangible thing from high school that you can keep with you, and look back at when you're older," she said.

Many of today's teens are tethered to their digital gadgets and rarely crack a magazine or even a traditional, hardcover textbook. Yet students, teachers and industry experts say high school yearbooks remain surprisingly popular among the so-called digital natives of the Snapchat generation.

Printed products have continued a downward spiral with the surge of digital technology. Yet despite a decline in spending per pupil on yearbooks, revenue on the publications nationwide has held steady for the past five years, in part because of an increase in student enrollment, according to a 2014 report from IBIS World, a market research firm.

"We've tried digital yearbooks, but we've found that there's something very central to people looking through a hard-copy yearbook, to actually feel the book in your hand," said Kelvin Miller, corporate vice president of Lifetouch, a chain of portrait studios that also produces yearbooks.



Freshman Caitlin Smith and David Wohlge-muth, right, react as they look through their new yearbooks at Prospect High School in Mt. Prospect, Ill.

**Our yearbook sales are as strong as they've ever been. Students tweet, text and Snapchat, but they see that as a very temporary thing. When it comes to reading, many kids I talk to overwhelmingly prefer a real book in paper, which is so different from all their media experiences."**

Kevin Bond, New Trier High School yearbook adviser

"With a high school yearbook, all you need to look at it are your two human eyes, and that will stay the same 100 years from now," Miller said.

That's not to say the yearbook hasn't evolved.

Murad Velani, chief operating officer at Jostens, a Minneapolis company that has published yearbooks for 65 years, said some high schools are incorporating a digital technology known as "augmented reality" into their hard-copy yearbooks.

The technology uses an app to tag print photos with digital links to videos of special events, like prom or a winning football game,

he said.

Still, Velani said many contemporary teens seem to appreciate a yearbook's vintage appeal and permanence.

"Facebook and other kinds of social media have their place, but the messages are just fleeting moments in time," Velani said.

Pete Macabobby, the yearbook adviser at Wheaton Warrenville South High School, in Chicago's western suburbs, said 1,300 yearbooks were sold to students this year for \$50 apiece.

"We sell a yearbook to more than half of the students enrolled here, and sales have picked up a bit in recent years," he said. His school's Tigris yearbook is produced by 10 students who are members of the yearbook club. Other schools still devote whole classes to the production of the yearbook.

"We looked into using some video clips, but it's almost a novelty with the kids to have a high school yearbook that's permanent and old-fashioned," Macabobby said. "I also sense a trend that there's starting to be a bit of backlash from students who don't want to be too plugged in. The kids seem to have a desire to dwell on things a little bit more."

At New Trier High School in north suburban Winnetka, yearbook adviser Kevin Bond said the spring tradition of distributing the Trevia includes a celebration for seniors, with the jazz band performing while students gather to write in each other's yearbooks.

"Our yearbook sales are as strong as they've ever been," Bond said. "Students tweet, text and Snapchat, but they see that as a very temporary thing. When it comes to reading, many kids I talk to overwhelmingly prefer a real book in paper, which is so different from all their media experiences."

At Prospect High, junior Brady Schwartz, 17, was all smiles as he picked up his yearbook on a recent morning.

"It's always exciting to see your pictures in the yearbook," Schwartz said. "And when the yearbooks are handed out, you know it's that much closer to the end of the school year."