

HAVE A PLAN...

Organization is key to the success of a yearbook sales campaign

Yearbook sales don't just happen. Your team needs to think about the school calendar and plot out some logical times to approach parents about buying the yearbook. Herff Jones provides support materials that can be used to help market the book — including instructional guides, tracking charts and even messaging for ads via email and automated dialing systems.

Sitting down to chart out specific efforts, deadlines affiliated with price changes and the holiday calendar will allow you to think through — and plan for — highest efficiency. While it's a great idea to have a shorter window for your back-to-school discount, make sure that you give parents enough notice that they have time to buy. And doing a follow-up sale that provides parents with a way to make a yearbook a stocking stuffer or holiday gift is a great idea, but you'd want to have that sale completed before they get too far into their other shopping.

Mapping out the whole plan is just one of three important aspects here. Sometimes follow-up sales fall to the wayside when other tasks seem more urgent. But if you originally scheduled four distinct sales events because you thought that would bring you the best results, then that's a pretty strong sign that you need to do whatever it takes to make those four sales happen.

Regular assessment is important as well. If you have a good sales history available, you may be able to see how far ahead of last year you are date-to-date. If not, begin building those records now so you will have that information going forward. And review results compared to expectations after each major sales push. You may find that it's necessary to make some changes as you execute future sales.

- Check any available records to measure success of sales efforts in previous years.
- Plan distinct sales pushes so you'll be able to measure the results of each.
- Create a separate checklist for the on-campus and to-parent promotion of each effort.
- Communicate clearly to the school community all the important information about how to buy a yearbook.
- Decide when on-campus sales make sense or whether all purchases will be made through the Yearbook Order Center so parents can use credit cards.

It's often said that failure to plan is planning to fail — and that's really true in the world of yearbook. In a best-case scenario, you'd sell lots of books at the best (fair) price as school began. Then you'd have time to execute some audience-specific sales that would bolster your numbers. It's always best to be "sold out" before the books arrive on campus, even though the plant might send some overruns you could sell at a premium.

And, as you attempt to get yearbooks in the hands of as many students as possible, there's nothing like a true sell-out (when there literally are no more books available for sale) to help with sales the next year.



THEY WILL BUY...

Being in the yearbook makes it more “needed”

Inclusive coverage is a valuable part of every yearbook. Not only does it raise the staff's credibility, it also adds to the number of yearbooks sold. The more students that know they are in the book, the more books you are likely to sell. It's a proven fact. Those who know they are included, buy the yearbook. So think of ways to let students know that they have been pictured or quoted.

Often, staffs will post an updated index in the halls and common areas of their school every so often showing which students have already appeared in the yearbook. Or they let students know they've been included with pre-designed “You're in It” post cards, specifically for those who haven't yet bought a yearbook. The message — “You're in it and here's how to buy it.” — encourages action.

Staffs can also use an “ACD” (all-coverage device) to reach coverage goals. These reappearing mods or marginalia ask a common question and appear on numerous pages throughout the book, allowing many more students to be included. Promoting that and getting that feedback could help sales, as students know their responses may appear in the book.

You could reach out to specific clubs or student groups and devise a contest with a proposed incentive that will reward the group with the highest buy rates. Alert the different teams, clubs and organizations of the contest, tell them they are in the book and whichever group provides the most sales will be awarded in a way that you and the staff choose. You could also increase sales by taking advantage of eShare. Promote the program to let students and parents know they can submit photos for possible inclusion in the yearbook. This is an appealing option for students and could persuade them to buy a yearbook if they know their photos may appear in it.

- Set a staff goal as to how many times you want to try to include each student in the yearbook, in addition to the class portrait. This number will vary by school size and book size. Two or three inclusions per student in the school is both a worthwhile and workable goal.
- Many staffs keep a list of people they need to avoid in random candid photos and quotes because those students are certain to receive coverage due to their high level of school involvement.
- Using an inclusionary device that has photos and/or quotes of several students as part of each content spread throughout the book can mean many more people are covered.
- Keep a running index after each deadline submission and post it on campus where it is sure to be noticed by students. This is a quick way to let students know where they are included in the yearbook.
- Prior to yearbook sales events (and after pages have been submitted), use “You're in it!” postcards to let students who have not yet purchased a book know what pages on which they are already included.

All staffs have different ways of achieving their coverage goals and it's just as important to promote the yearbook in fresh, new ways. Encourage involvement throughout the school and create campaigns that surround the yearbook staff's coverage goals.



REWARD QUICK RESPONSE...

Use incentives to encourage early sales

Tiered yearbook pricing has proven effective repeatedly. Offer the best price in a limited window early in the year, and let the buyers know how much they can save by purchasing then. To exercise this option, you'll need to work with your representative to set the lowest initial price. It's important that even the first sales price cover the cost of producing the book and running the yearbook program. It would be awful to sell books for less than they cost to make, and it's important to know that advertising that the first price is the lowest price may bring out more early buyers than you have had in the past.

There are schools that have successfully tiered their pricing with two, three and four levels. You might offer your best price throughout the check-in period, through the end of the first week or, depending on when Back-to-School Night/Open House is, through that first big event for parents on campus. Refer to that best price as an "early-bird discount." The next sales price should be the "regular" price. If you don't buy early, you don't get the "discount."

Some schools have one price for the first week and another for Back-to-School Night. A logical next price might conclude with Homecoming or at the end of October. Both would allow one more "last chance to pre-order" push before the holidays and the date when copy counts must be shared with the plant. Wise schools plan to sell a quantity of books at a price that's higher still once the yearbook has arrived on campus. Your yearbook rep can help you determine how many books to order and help you figure out a break-even point on extras you might order to sell at the highest price once the books arrive on campus.

- Meet with your Herff Jones representative to learn about book sales history and discuss logical pricing for this year's book.
- Discuss (or create a plan and set another meeting to discuss) the number of prices at which you want to sell, the increase at each price change and the time frames during which you will sell at each rate.
- Build a budget showing proposed revenues for book sales.
- Determine whether you will announce all prices and sales periods from the start or announce that the current price is good through a certain date, at which point there will be an increase of \$XX.
- Since parents generally are the ones who buy the yearbook for their students, be sure to get the message out to them about discounted early pricing.
- Assess progress after each time period ends to determine how you can convince even more students to want a yearbook or more parents to buy during the next sales period.
- Don't slow down when you get close to selling the same number of books that were sold last year. In a best-case scenario, a school with 1400 students could sell more than 1500 books by targeting teachers, advertisers and patrons as well. Your goal is to help sell as many books as possible.

Your goals are to get more people buying the book and to have more buyers purchase earlier in the process. Strategize messages for each time period, attempting to create a sense of urgency. While it's not a bad thing to have some books to sell at distribution, it's best to know that you've already sold enough books to cover your bill as early in the year as possible.



OFFER A PACKAGE DEAL...

Another way to increase revenues

While sales of autograph supplements and plastic covers may also occur at your signing event, history shows us that offering personalization and accessories in varying packages when you sell the yearbook will likely increase revenues. Most schools that sell varied packages offer at least three options (a book alone, a deluxe package that includes lots of accessories/extras and one in the middle); and, generally, the middle option is most popular.

Think about what makes most sense at your school.

- Additional items such as plastic covers, autograph supplements and personalization with either a namestamp or nameplate may be purchased along with the yearbook. If priced appropriately, these extra items can be part of the staff's fundraising efforts.
- Careful planning and organization are needed to be sure purchasers actually get the extra items at distribution.
- Many options are possible when it comes to offering extra items, ranging from options being available for anyone to being something offered only to seniors each year.
- Some staffs offer either the namestamp or nameplate to anyone who purchases a book by an early sales deadline. In that case, you would need to include the price of the namestamp/nameplate in the basic price for the book. Those who buy a book after the early sales deadline would either pay the same or higher price, but not get the personalization.
- If the Herff Jones World Yearbook news supplement is not included with every book, it could also be included as part of a package plan or sold separately.
- Be sure to check with your yearbook representative for specific ordering deadlines for extra yearbook items and pricing information.

Many schools “leave money on the table” by not offering their buyers the option to purchase these accessories. The math is very simple. If you charge a dollar or two more than the cost of a namestamp or nameplate and half of your buyers would pay for a personalized book, you could be making hundreds — or thousands — of dollars for the yearbook program. The same is true for autograph supplements and protective, plastic covers.

Selling these items when you sell the yearbook gives you a better idea of how many to order and allows you to make even more profit if they buy them at a distribution event. People who do not pre-order autograph supplements would expect to pay more.

And, unlike the other items, personalization cannot be ordered at the last minute; if having a nameplate or namestamp is important to your buyers, they need to be presented with that option beginning with the very first sale.



MAKE IT EASY...

Simplify the purchase process

In order to successfully garner yearbook sales, the buying process must be super simple. It is your and the yearbook staff's job to make buying the yearbook one of the easiest processes ever. Many schools use the Yearbook Order Center to sell books in which case, clear direction to the site and instructions once there are absolutely necessary. No parent wants to navigate a website without clear instructions, especially when it comes to spending their money. This could be a time when posters, eBlasts, announcements and other communication outlets can be used most efficiently to list the website, login with school number, deadlines etc. Simplifying the process is the most important thing you can do for your buyers.

Some schools choose not to use Yearbook Order Center. They have traditional sales that are held in the school, and perhaps with order forms mailed home to parents. If this is the case, make sure you have all the information needed to order a yearbook (location, time, date, payment type, etc.) advertised in advance throughout the school or stated very clearly on the letter and order form sent home. Also include purchase deadlines, and be sure to reiterate those dates so no one misses out.

Having both options is also a possibility. There is more flexibility, but there is more to keep track of, so still make sure you are thorough when you let parents know all the important details. Let them know they have the option to choose how they buy — online or in person. Advertise dates, times, deadlines just as you would if you were offering only one option. Keep them informed throughout the year to eliminate any ambiguity or questions.

- Find out from the school finance office if they can accept payment by cash, checks or credit cards. Whatever the policy is, be sure to clearly share that information with buyers.
- Using the Herff Jones eBusiness software program is a great way to keep track of yearbook sales that are completed either on campus or online.
- The Yearbook Order Center allows yearbook purchasers to buy with a credit card and provides an accurate sales log for the yearbook business staff as well as the school's financial office. More and more schools are going strictly to the HJ Yearbook Order Center as a way to avoid students needing to handle money from book sales.
- Regardless of whether you are doing yearbook sales on campus, through the Yearbook Order Center or a combination of the two systems, it is imperative to publicize dates, prices and final ordering dates.
- If books are being sold on campus during parent events, be sure to have sufficient sales stations and workers to make it a fast and efficient process.

No matter which way your school chooses to sell the yearbook, your goal is to make it as easy as possible for buyers. Ease of purchasing can help increase sales. So, whether you hold actual face-to-face sales or direct buyers to the Yearbook Order Center, make sure they know what to do, how to pay, when to pay and when to order by. Make sure to reiterate these details throughout the year, not just once, since the yearbook is on sale for the majority of the school year. Do this, and your sales will be stronger.



SET THE DATE...

Plan your sales around the calendar

When it comes to selling the yearbook, many marketing techniques come into play. For instance, it's important to take into consideration the dates that you sell the yearbook. The majority of purchasers are the students' parents. So plan to sell during events that parents are sure to attend — open house, home football games, homecoming etc. Advertise and promote the sales beforehand so the parents are well aware of the date the yearbooks are being sold, where they are being sold, for how much and what forms of payment are being accepted. You could do this by sending an automated phone call home, sending out an eBlast or posting to social media.

Because there are only certain events that attract parents to the school, these types of sales should typically be short and focused on a sense of urgency to render ideal results. If parents are told the yearbook is a certain price for a limited period of time, perhaps through the next week, they are more likely to buy right then and there.

Parents, especially those of seniors, have many expenses for their students throughout the school year, so they will appreciate knowing about the sales events well in advance as well as the ease of the entire process. Just as you target specific students based on grade levels, take advantage of events where parents will be and target them as buyers.

- While you want to get books sold as early in the school year as possible to stay on budget, remember that families have many other expenses associated with the start of a new school year. Consider a date between the start of the school year and the start of winter break.
- Campus events that draw large numbers of parents to campus can be a strategic time for book sales. Be sure to publicize in advance so parents know to bring cash, checks or credit cards, depending on methods of payment accepted.
- Sale dates before holidays can be used to promote the idea that a yearbook (or yearbook gift certificate) could be a great gift idea. Grandparents or other relatives often see the yearbook as a gift that will always be kept and appreciated.
- Thinking about parent paydays — start of the month, middle of the month or end of the month — is something to consider to help families make buying the yearbook less of a financial burden.
- If the yearbook staff has done a good job of promoting and publicizing the yearbook sale and its specific dates, then be sure to adhere to those dates. Otherwise purchasers will feel like the dates don't really matter — and they'll believe they can buy at the previous prices if they just ask.

Make parents aware that the yearbook is on sale before it's too late. Be present at events they attend and reach out to them with the opportunity to purchase a yearbook for their son/daughter right then, so they have one less thing to worry about. The yearbook sales at these events will be much more successful if parents know all the details beforehand. Be ahead of the game by being prepared.



SPREAD THE WORD...

Look for varied channels of communication

One reason so many yearbook staffs begin their book sales during registration/orientation/book pick-up is that parents are already in the mindset of buying everything their students will need for the year. They are in the habit of getting new uniforms, new books, new school photos, new IDs and paying fees as the year begins.

While some schools offer the option of paying for the yearbook each fall alongside the other items needed for the year, most staffs do not have this benefit. But most schools do send home some sort of packet each year. Whether your school sends PDFs and digital messages or mails a packet filled with requisite forms, you want information about yearbook sales included in the mix.

If the school is doing a mailing, use the free full-color letterhead and the provided templates to make a yearbook sales flier that stands out from the rest. Let parents know when, where and how to buy the yearbook. Parents may be most likely to read official school communications as the year begins so you want yearbook sales to be something they learn about right away.

- Check first with the principal's secretary/assistant to get date and deadlines for any summer/fall mailings or eBlasts being sent to parents.
- Contact the person in charge of the parents' newsletter. This may be through the principal's office or through the school's parent organization.
- Who is the person in charge of making updates to the school's official website? Develop a working relationship with this person so they know the yearbook staff will want to keep information current about book sales.
- Is there an administrator in charge of approving any posters or fliers to be posted or distributed on campus? Make contact to find out the guidelines and procedures.
- Will any automated robo calls or email blasts be made with back-to-school information? Check with the principal's secretary/assistant about getting yearbook sales information included. Although the message would need to be very brief, it could include dates/locations for purchasing yearbooks.

If you missed the opportunity to be included with the back-to-school information, there are likely other options on your campus. Many schools email quarterly newsletters, post web links on the school website and do regular or "special event" automated calls or emails from the office.

Parents at your school are likely to pay attention to these "official" school releases, so you definitely want information about yearbook sales to be included.



HIT THE TARGET...

Aim your yearbook sales to specific groups on specific dates

All buyers are different. They all have different needs and different expectations, so your team must take this into consideration. Consider who your buyers are and how you can effectively target them separately. Simply put, your buyers are the students and their parents and are most easily classified by their grade level. Many schools have found success by targeting each individual class.

So consider how to individually target the different grade levels and strategize about how to sell to each one. Think about how a yearbook means different things to each grade level. For freshmen, a yearbook could be a way to learn the school better and preserve memories of their very first year of high school. Selling to them is important in beginning an ongoing tradition of buying the yearbook. For a senior, a yearbook is a much more nostalgic and sentimental book. It's their last year of high school, a culmination of everything they've done to get to this point and this is their last chance to own the volume that celebrates them and their classmates.

You know your school better than anyone else, so really think about how to relate to the different classes and create campaigns for each of them in order to sell more yearbooks. Create and plan separate events to attract students from each group. Decide when to hold the events and how long they will last — a day, a week? Each one should be on a different date and don't forget to create a sense of urgency for each event. Maybe you could offer a discounted price at this time, but emphasize how it will go up as soon as the event ends.

- Sell to a specific grade level on a specific date as a way to generate interest of buyers and focus on that specific audience. By targeting seniors on one or two days, then all the promotional efforts are directed to that grade. Each grade level would have its own sales dates and focus.
- Some yearbook staffs have had great success by focusing sales to the entire school, but for a short time period — such as one week. Yearbooks may only be purchased during that one-week time period. If there are any extra books after regular distribution at the end of the year, they would be sold at an increased price on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Some staffs have been successful with an even shorter sales period, such as one day. Starting and continuing a successful short sales program requires detailed communication and promotion.
- Be sure to also target community groups and businesses who may want to have a yearbook for historical and display purposes.

By targeting different groups of buyers, you can zero in on the needs and expectations of your customers. They will feel as if the buying process is more personal and that will likely result in more sales. The different grade levels are not the only groups to target, however. Take into consideration sports teams, clubs, school organizations, other community groups and businesses who will potentially purchase a yearbook. Their needs and your persuasive techniques will vary from that of the individual students you target.



LET THEM KNOW...

Be creative and demand their attention

In order for students to get excited about and care about the yearbook, they need to be convinced of its relevance and reminded of its presence constantly. It shouldn't take long after walking through the front doors of the school to see that the yearbook exists, is being created and, most importantly, is on sale NOW. Visuals are invaluable when it comes to marketing — think posters, fliers or banners (all of which we have available for you to use to promote the yearbook.)

Using pre-designed marketing materials can be a fun and convenient option to promote the yearbook. From posters, banners, fliers and stationary, your limits are few to how you spread the word. But you can do even more beyond the marketing materials. You can get creative and design your own posters or fliers — featuring things that only you know will get your fellow students' attention and elicit action — the actual purchasing of a yearbook.

The key to really getting the message out is to let it be known through as many sources as possible. Take advantage of your school's announcements or broadcast system. Have a message there. Use yard signs, available through Herff Jones, to have the message outside of the building. Send automated phone calls or eBlasts home to parents. Think of all the ways a message could be effectively communicated and use them to announce anything pertinent to the yearbook. Advertise that it's on sale and where/how to buy it. Announce events like distribution day to sell the last few copies. Advertise a fundraising event or special sale that may be going on.

- Put posters up in high-traffic areas around campus such as the quad, cafeteria, gyms, front office and hallways. Change the posters often to maintain interest and attention levels. Make use of the variety of posters available in addition to ones made by the yearbook staff.
- The sales stationery, which is available at no charge, is a great way to get all the yearbook sales information on one sheet of paper to be mailed or handed out when parents are on campus. Don't rely on students carrying the sales flier home if given to them at school.
- School-wide media broadcasts are a high-impact way to get the attention of the student audience. Many yearbook staffs are using fun, entertaining video presentations to not only get the word out about yearbook sales, but to reinforce the long-range value of having a yearbook.
- Make use of any kind of announcement opportunities, including everything from the daily bulletin to skit performances at rallies and assemblies.
- Prior to each sales event, consider placing fliers in lockers or car windshields to serve as reminders and generate interest.

Constant reminders can be effective in selling the yearbook — posters, fliers, banners, announcements, broadcasts, phone calls... there are so many possibilities! You must use the resources available to you in order to make successful sales. Take these resources you have to effectively communicate with your audience (potential buyers), and then get creative and change them up. Keep them fresh and informative to see excellent results.



MAINTAIN THE EXCITEMENT...

Help students anticipate the arrival of their yearbooks

Much of your effort will revolve around selling the book, which is extremely important, but you must also keep buyers and potential buyers interested and excited throughout the year. Ultimately, the yearbook is a surprise at the end of the school year. While it's a large scope project that will hold surprises and some mystery that only the staff will know about, it is important to let the rest of the student body know a bit about what's going on in the process.

To attract and keep students' attention, updates surrounding the yearbook should be frequent. You should use the resources readily available to you — social media. Through popular social media platforms that your audience uses on a daily basis, you can create interest and engage students in conversation about the yearbook. Tease an amazing photo that will be printed in the yearbook or announce a really cool spread topic to get students excited and talking.

Sometimes, requesting action from your audience will create buzz and elicit interest. This could be through asking students to submit photos or thoughts on a particular topic to be featured in the yearbook. Or maybe you poll students on which topic they would rather see in the yearbook, offering a handful of options. Harvest excitement and interest by holding students' attention spans — there are countless number of ways to do this.

- Many yearbook staffs are using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms to keep interest high for the yearbook.
- There is enough work involved in an active and engaging social media campaign to warrant a staff position of social media director or editor.
- Having students and community members submit photos using the Herff Jones eShare program keeps students involved and can result in great coverage that might have otherwise been missed.
- Consider using an inclusionary coverage device throughout the yearbook that requires gathering several photos and/or quotes from different students on campus. Either the yearbook staff is visibly out gathering details or better yet, have students submit their own pictures and quotes. The coverage could be theme-related or simply cover random topics provided by the yearbook staff.
- Be sure to keep the yearbook and school websites updated with yearbook information and as a reminder that work is continuously going on in order to record the history of the school year.

Your goal is to sell as many books as possible, but at the same time, to keep students slightly informed of what's happening with the book that they have purchased or are considering purchasing. The rest of the student body may buy the book and appreciate it at the end of the school year, but showing them just how much actually goes into making it is valuable as well.

