

This year's hot graduation gift: Snapchat geofilters

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Ann Beverly had eyed a set of golf clubs as a college graduation gift for her son. In an impulse buy during commencement, though, she just had to tack on something else.

She was browsing on her smartphone - not on Amazon.com or Facebook, but on Snapchat - when up popped a small graphic congratulating some other Chico State student on graduating.

Beverly, a Snapchat user since her children introduced her to it three years ago, knew that the messaging app offered graphics to decorate photos and videos. But she hadn't known that she could upload her own artsy stamps. Beverly immediately wanted to make a graphic that would celebrate her son Parker that day and be available for anyone nearby to affix to their Snapchat messages. It ended up costing her \$27.

She was far from the only one this graduation season to realize the briefly available graphics, which Snapchat calls geofilters, can be a prize for a generation of young adults who've grown up competing for social media likes, hashtags and friendships. To them, virtual novelties are as essential at graduation as posters, funny caps and purple orchid leis.

In the year since Snapchat began welcoming geofilters, paid submissions have increased to tens of thousands per day. Graphics tied to weddings and birthdays are most popular. But graduations, with 15 percent of buys, claimed the No. 2 spot from birthdays last month, according to data from Snapchat's template library. About half of users design from

templates provided by Snap Inc., with the rest turning to their own skills or contractors found online.

Businesses use geofilters to attract customers. But it's a form of advertising offered to ordinary users too, giving people a chance to call attention to themselves or loved ones.

"He's 23 and was thrilled," Beverly said of her son. "It was heaven for him to have his own filter. We got so many comments from friends and family who viewed it saying, oh my gosh, how did you do that?"

Some plan ahead. Lilibeth Torres started on a Snapchat graphic to surprise her graduating friend a week out. It featured a drawing of her friend Arturo, adorned in cap and sash, with a diploma and cash floating about. Torres, who is studying graphic design at San Jose State, spent about four hours crafting the look.

"I wanted to do something cool, but not over the top," she said.

Purchasers must set the time-and-location availability for their submissions, with greater visibility increasing costs to about \$500 for an entire town for an evening. Torres' geofilter cost \$10 for five hours over three small areas. The graphic drew more than 1,000 views.

Gabriella Peralta ordered a geofilter for herself the night before graduation when she realized she had devised a great tag line, "Grad and Boujee," a play on her nickname Gab and the title of a hip-hop song. In the Cal State Stanislaus' grad's eyes, that geofilter created a way by which people could remember her.

"It's cool to have the spotlight on you," she said. "I spent four years at Stan making a name for myself and it felt fitting to do that at graduation too. I like to leave my mark on the world."

Peralta, who received a bachelor's in communication studies and works at the campus gym, accrued 86 uses of her geofilter over five hours last month. More than 7,700 people saw the graphic, according to data Snap provides buyers.

She commissioned it for \$10 from designer SnappyDaysCo through the crafts app Etsy. It cost an additional \$6.65 to make it available at the school's arena and a nearby Italian restaurant where she held a party.

Beverly, who learned of customized geofilters as she sat through nearly 2,000 student names being announced, searched on Google for how to make one. It led her to Snapchat's website because the app itself doesn't have a submission tool. She logged in through her iPhone, chose a confetti-filled template and, with some assistance from her daughter, had a "Congratulations, Parker" sticker available long before the final student's name was called. All designs must be approved by Snap, and Beverly's got the OK within 15 minutes.

She said she would have spent up to \$100 to honor her son on Snapchat, but settled on \$27 to run the geofilter from 6 p.m. to midnight in the Chico nightlife corridor where they bar-hopped. They slyly surprised the graduate by taking a picture and then having him browse the geofilters. It was used 190 times in all.

Beverly's only regret: Not buying an extra hour.

By the time the family made it to the watering hole affectionately known as the Bear, the geofilter had expired and her son was disappointed he couldn't add it there.

It's unclear how much revenue Snap derives from users' geofilter orders because the Los Angeles company doesn't breakdown sales by category. But at 10,000 orders a day at a minimum of \$5, Snap would bring in

more than \$18 million, or about 2 percent of the \$992 million in revenue analysts expect it to generate this year.

Snap has the market cornered for now. Instagram, its main competition, declined to say when it might launch a similar feature for users to submit filters.

Meanwhile, Snap is expanding its template library to promote geofilter creation for beach parties, Fourth of July gatherings and bachelorette and bachelor escapes.

It's also signing partnerships to get the word out about its feature. Event-planning services including WeddingWire and Event Farm recently began offering geofilters as part of their packages, providing templates designed by brands such as Domino's pizza and Lily Pulitzer.

Buyers say geofilters aren't a fad. Torres, for example, already looks forward to someone making one for her graduation next year.

Logan Lorenz and Payal Patel, a pair of Los Angeles-area tech industry workers who married this month, said they spent about \$250 on two geofilters for their tropical-themed wedding. They also had geofilters for smaller events before the wedding, including an engagement last year, and they have no plans to stop.

"We'll probably do them for every party," Lorenz said.

But there may be a point where it becomes all too much, some worry. The filter options are already becoming overwhelming at popular destinations.

What's certain is they don't replace traditional gifts. Beverly says she's still working on getting her son those new golf clubs.

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