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Well, It Wasn't a Bad Year for Everyone

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The last year will be remembered as a bad one for business. Losses, layoffs, pay cuts, furloughs, closings — the numbers and the news were largely negative. And yet, over all, some industries managed to avoid the negative vibrations. A sampling of sales figures in major industry categories makes this clear.

Manufacturing companies experienced sales declines of more than 10 percent in 2009 over 2008, according to preliminary data from Sageworks, which focuses on privately held companies. Wholesalers had declines of 8 percent, while retailers' sales fell 7 percent. As might be expected, sales at construction companies and at real estate, rental and leasing firms also dropped.

But health care remained strong: its sales increased 5 percent. And as people in declining industries lost their jobs, some decided to go back to school. That's probably one reason that educational businesses were relatively unscathed by the economic crisis, with sales up more than