

A JEWISH FUNDERS NETWORK MONOGRAPH

# JUDAISM 2.0: IDENTITY, PHILANTHROPY AND THE NEW MEDIA



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BY GAIL HYMAN

The **Jewish Funders Network** (JFN) is an international organization of family foundations, public philanthropies, and individual funders dedicated to advancing the quality and growth of philanthropy rooted in Jewish values. JFN's members include independent philanthropists, foundation trustees and foundation professionals—a unique community that seeks to transform the nature of Jewish giving in both thought and action.

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**A**CCORDING TO the Pew Internet Adoption Rate Survey, internet penetration among American adults reached an all time high of 73%—or 147 million people—in 2006, up from 66%, or 133 million just one year earlier. And, internet user adoption rate growth affects all demographic categories. From the years 2000-2006, American adult men and women of every age group were initiating or increasing their web use.

The internet is not a static medium. We have moved from Web 1.0, the first stage of the consumer web experience, to the next level, Web 2.0, where increased interactivity, social engagement, and most importantly, user-created and shared content now form the basis of the global communications network. As a result, the possibilities for creating effective, person-to-person connections are growing exponentially.

Meanwhile, Jewish philanthropies are continuously looking for ways to use their wealth to influence the Jewish

future, and yet they, like most of the philanthropic world, are falling behind when it comes to the new media. Some few experts in the communications and technology worlds are using their expertise to try to plug the hole in the dike of Jewish disengagement. Many others work in more traditional organizations, and need to learn how to better utilize the new tools in order to build and nourish the social connections that will facilitate their philanthropic activities.

This report documents a few of the many ways that Jewish communications professionals are using the new technology to engage in Jewish life. We've highlighted a small sample of noteworthy online offerings with an eye toward providing new models for communicating, and made some broad suggestions for being responsive to the new modalities. We believe that the latest thinking on new media can serve as a guide to Jewish philanthropic investment, and our aim is to inspire, as well as to inform about the potential of an exciting new field of thinking.

## **A SHORT HISTORY OF THE WEB**

Time Magazine's annual December, "Person of the Year," cover for 2006 was not a Head of State, a Nobel Prize winner, a tyrant or a scientist. Using a cover made of reflective Mylar, the person of the year was dramatically revealed as "us." The individual is now the central star of the information age. Time's editor, Richard Stengel, noted that the creators and consumers of user-generated content are transforming art, politics and commerce.

One need only look at the growth of social networking sites like YouTube, My Space and Facebook; at entertainment sites like iTunes, amazon.com, and BitTorrent; at toolmakers Google, Wikipedia, and eBay; and at the gathering and filtering sites like digg, flickr and del.ici.ous to begin to appreciate that we are in the middle of dramatic societal and cultural change that is driven by individuals not institutions, and that it is both personal and global in its scope.

### **WEB 1.0—WHERE IT ALL BEGAN**

Web 1.0 was the first stage of the consumer web experience. Web 1.0 was read-only. Businesses and nonprofit created web sites and site content to

showcase products and services and to present marketing messages and build brand awareness. Users went to these sites to get information easily and on their own time. Success was measured by number of user pages viewed and the "stickiness" of the site experience (i.e. how long a user stayed on the site).

### **WEB 2.0—THE "WE THE MEDIA", WEB EXPERIENCE**

The concept of Web 2.0 was created by technology pioneer Dale Dougherty of O'Reilly Media in 2004, as a way to describe the turning point when the web moved from a passive, read-only experience to a new platform of interactivity. Dougherty described the dramatic shift as "the harnessing of collective intelligence, the democratization of content creation, the blogging phenomenon, [and] the organic growth fueled by online and real word of mouth buzz." The advent of really simple syndication (RSS) feeds which allow users to subscribe to (and thus monitor) site updates, and the overall architecture of open source user participation that trusts users to be co-developers of the current, dynamic web experience, are two of the best examples of the paradigm shift.

## THE SCOPE OF THE CHALLENGE

**YOUNG ADULT** American Jews behave like the rest of their age cohort in their use of communications technology and channels. They are quick adopters, technologically adept, interested in acquiring the latest devices and exploring the newest media. They are smart, sophisticated, educated, affluent media consumers. They are heavy users of popular social networking, dating, informational, and pop-culture sites, as well as consumer guides. They purchase goods and services online, get their news online, and rely on highly-trafficked web sites, search engines and portals to navigate their daily lives. And, increasingly, they rely on respected blogs to shape opinions and make decisions.

The talented creators of *Jewcy*, *Heeb*, *Jewschool*, *PresentTense*, *Jewlicious*, *MyJewishLearning*, and *The New Jew* along with lesser-known sites like *Corner Prophets* and *Radical Torah*, all rely on their obviously Jewish site names and ethnic graphic design to attract young American Jews who are comfortable with and seek Jewish-specific sites. They each offer edgy, interactive and decidedly hip points of entry into a very “inside-the-tent” Jewish online life. Jewschool founder Daniel Sieradski refers to it as lowering the social barriers. “Websites...offer Torah study, teach

Hebrew, offer social networking, build minyanim, collaborate on document writing, share text databases, and perform group tzedakah. We don’t have to rely on federations or synagogues or ADL. It’s all online.” And, as author Chris Anderson says in his book about communications and marketing, *The Long Tail*, even the narrowest of topics can find its audience. For the new breed of Web 2.0 content creators, it means that the definition of success has changed.

Still, young, relatively unengaged Jews do not frequent these sites in large numbers, nor is there a single site or portal designed for people who may have Jewish interests but prefer to explore and discover them in a secular environment. Sieradski, who is also the director of the nonprofit technology consulting company, *Matzat*, explains that in the beginning, *Jewschool* was targeted to young, alienated Jews, but that it has since shifted focus to address a more insider audience of rabbis, rabbinical students, educators and creative people. Aaron Bisman, creator of JDub Records, and one of the most recognized of the young Jewish content entrepreneurs, says that right now no one has the answer for how to capture

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a broader Jewish audience, “*JDate* is among the top 20 sites, but for the *Jewcys* and *Jewschools*—none of it works because Jews don’t want their own world.” Shifra Bronznick, president and founder of “Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community,” and a keen observer of the

contemporary American Jewish scene, notes, “*Jewschool* is not extending the Jewish brand; not reaching outsiders who live off references to mainstream media. *Heeb* Magazine and *Guilt and Pleasure* and others are really [Jewish] missionaries, and are not yet reaching those on the margins.”

Most of the traditional American philanthropic organizations have also failed to activate web-based communications as an essential tool for reaching their constituencies, who are

increasingly using new media for their communications and engagement activities. For most of the national Jewish organizations, and even the stronger local ones, digital communications remain largely at the Web 1.0 level of sophistication. Many have attractive and well designed but not powerfully interactive web sites. Very few have RSS open source platforms, use podcasts, offer blogs, or are

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set up to permit user-generated content. Only a handful of Jewish organizations can articulate an understanding and appreciation of the strategic opportunity that Web 2.0 offers or have made a significant investment in it.

Very few understand that Web 2.0 technology is especially valuable for customer relations management and data-mining. Rather, they see the new technology as trendy rather than central, and not terribly useful. Most Jewish organizations are not investing in their online technology talent; technology and content developer salaries are below market rates.

Even, younger, entrepreneurial Jewish philanthropists who understand the value of web-based communications have been uninterested or unable to build a critical mass of philanthropic partners to lead a communications initiative for the Jewish future. Seth Merrin, founder and CEO of Liquid Net, the number one electronic marketplace for block stock trading wants to transform Jewish philanthropy, but finds the road to success more challenging than building a multi-billion dollar technology company. “I’m pretty negative,” he says, “I want to be supportive of change, but the organizations are not open.” Most of these philanthropists, like the creators of online Jewish content, are going it alone. Some have sought to connect with the established community, but have become frustrated by its slow, consensus-driven culture. The vast potential for building stronger and more active social networks across generations and sectarian practices through new media is getting lost in the shuffle.

## NEW APPROACHES, NEW WAYS OF DEFINING SUCCESS

**DANNY KRIFCHER**, the President of the *Jewish Telegraphic Association* (JTA) and a former senior executive at AOL, who now advises technology startups, notes that the American Jewish community is comprised of small percentages of both Orthodox and disengaged Jews, with a large number of people in the middle who comprise a sizeable and reachable target, toward which there are at least four actions to take:

- Segment the younger Jewish demographic and separate out the young marrieds from the post-college single target.
- Leverage sites like *BBYO*, *taglit-birthright Israel*, and *UJC Web* and collaborate on a community-wide initiative.
- Seed entrepreneurial ventures like *Reboot* and *Bikkurim* and let them figure it out.
- Build off one of the existing social networking infrastructures like *JDate* or *BBYO's b-linked* and offer it to the entire community.

**JEFF SAGANSKY**, former *NBC Television* programming executive, and a board member of *Jewish Television Network* (JTN) takes a slightly different approach. He believes there is a place for a Jewish portal that is “all things Jewish. But it must be non-affiliated so that it attracts everyone to find and feel comfortable about the experience. It must attract non-Jews and cannot be sponsored by any one group. We need one URL that can have a thousand areas.”

Linda Kaplan Thaler, CEO of The Kaplan Thaler Group, one of the fastest growing advertising agencies in the country, supports the creation of a Jewish portal but cautions that it has to be both pro-Jewish and pro-Israel, but also “disruptive” and “intrusive.” “Don’t call it anything Jewish. You need people who can create their own unique content—forget TV—hire an army of 100 young, motivated, tech-savvy geeks and let them figure it out. Let them create it and send it out with footage and photos...with blogs. Sprite and Coke moved from television to online. If we did the same, we could start a social revolution of Judaism online.”

Philanthropist Marcella Kanfer Rolnick notes that “Jewish people’s identity is blurred. Jews are using non-explicit Jewish domains like *MySpace*. The challenge is partly how do we create relationships with *MySpace*, which already has a Jewish sensibility, and engage the holistic self there? We need to break down the barriers between Jewish young people and our institutions. We expect people to step out of

their lives into ours—it should be the reverse. The technology allows the connectivity and interactivity. We need open source networks to facilitate dialogue and open thought.”

Implicit in all of these ideas is the centerpiece of

the new thinking on social networking—the power of crowds. “Crowds make better decisions,” says philanthropy strategist Lucy Bernholz in her blog *Philanthropy 2173*, “Ethnic, racial, gender, class and experiential diversity should be built into decision making teams that are seeking to understand a challenge, imagine new solutions, and seek out financial leverage.” Jewish grantmaking needs to re-organize around the principle of diverse groups. To truly reach out to the non-affiliated Jewish populations, philanthropic organizations must expand how they think and communicate about Jewish identity.

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**DANNY GREENSPUN**, President of Greenspun Media Group, creator of *Vegas.com* and an emerging Jewish philanthropist, believes that Jews need a “me channel. A convergence of *Facebook* and *MySpace* that is Jewish. There is no Jewish online channel. We have given up the brand. Can we get it back by re-branding?” Greenspun concentrates on buying up relevant Jewish domains to bring his vision of a Jewish portal to reality. “Owning the top ten searches will lead to good Jewish sites and will overwhelm the haters out there. We can link the good sites together with 100 domain names.” Greenspun’s vision includes aggregating Jewish news sites, rolling up the Jewish weekly newspapers and creating “different flavors.”

Mark Pearlman is a private equity investor and media executive who spent many years in senior management positions at *CBS* and *Fox Television* before stepping into the Jewish media world. Out of a desire to put his professional talent and expertise to work bringing Jewish life to ordinary people using new media, in 2006 he funded and launched *Sinai Live*, a nonprofit web site dedicated to “promoting Jewish pride through personal experiences.” With an approach that aims to link multi-media experiences with in-person learning and social events, Pearlman hopes to create a platform that offers a “big highway that people can personalize.”



One of the popular mainstream Jewish centered websites, BabagaNewz demonstrates the full potential of the Web 2.0, integrated online experience. Founded by the Avi Chai Foundation and JFL Media (Jewish Family & Life), the site targets 4th to 7th graders. A culturally-hip, educational and entertainment site, *BabagNewz* also has a magazine that reaches approximately 30,000 Jewish teens and is used as a resource in 3500 Jewish class-rooms. *JVibe*, another of JFL Media's publications, is a pop-culture website marketed to a slightly older, teen demographic, and also pairs a website with a print magazine.

Funded by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, *BBYO's* website and its complementing b-linked social networking site that launched in 2006 has 13,000 teenage users whose information is being captured for organizational follow up and tracking. The Schusterman Family Foundation has also underwritten Jewish Coalition for Service's *JSoN* project, a social network/data management site targeted to alumni of Jewish volunteer programs.

*MyJewishLearning* is another site that reflects cooperative work between philanthropic organizations. Originally a partnership between the Samuel Bronfman Foundation, Jewish Family & Life, and Hebrew College, it received early funding from The Schusterman Family Foundation, as well. Its target demographic is broad, says Daniel Septimus, editor-in-chief, "we have 2,500 articles in 7 topic areas, covering everything from Israeli history to Bar Mitzvah resources to articles about Woody Allen—so our users come for a wide variety of reasons." Their user data indicates a broad age demographic too—as many as 50% of their readers are 45 years or older. As Schusterman Program Director Lisa Eisen, puts it, "Our hope is to get the whole community into the digital age. We see our investment as a tool to advance our mission not as an end in itself. It's more important that we get people connected to content and to participate in live programs."

**ARIEL BEERY**, editor and publisher of Presentense magazine and its partner website, reports that the print version of the publication has made small profits through very modest subscription efforts, but adds that the profits are not the real source of success. “The magazine is the vehicle for profit generation to push the rest of the work. We are creating a new world online. Young people want to see other young people—social networks make this happen...The paradigm shift is not about the organization—that is the industrial age model...it’s about the power of being seen by your peers as ‘good’ at your area of expertise.”

Of course, money does matter, and the challenge of monetizing the new brand remains at the fore of any organization’s development. *Heeb*, a print quarterly, web site and a cultural event nonprofit organization rolled into one was “brewed in Brooklyn in 2001 as a take-no-prisoners ‘zine for the plugged-in and preached-out.” It’s given young Jewish America a new voice, in part by using an unorthodox way to sustain its mission, acting as both an independent content source as well as a quasi-ad agency. *Heeb* claims a sustained circulation of 30,000 and its parallel web site counts 20,000

unique visitors monthly. Ad sales account for 44% of the magazine’s current operational budget, and while the budget has grown each year, it has not yet achieved profitability.

*Jewcy* editor and president, Tahl Raz, who left a mainstream editorial career, explains that *Jewcy* started as a brand, and grew to become a multimedia platform of events, social networking and blogs targeted to reach “Jews who are unaffiliated or at the margins, and those non-Jews who are either married to or closely aligned with Jews.” Launched in November 2006, with no advertising or marketing, it is now, according to Raz, “the most trafficked exclusively online Jewish magazine on the web.” *Jewcy* targets advertisers seeking an upscale, highly influential target, and it also sells its own Jewish-themed tee-shirts.

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## SHAPING CULTURE ON-LINE—A SURVEY

**NO ONE SUGGESTS** that digital media should replace real-time and real person-to-person engagement, particularly not when it comes to private philanthropy, but its impact is tremendous, and there is no question that the paradigm is in the middle of a stunning change. Social networking, embedded video, blogging, podcasting, really simple syndication (RSS), data mining, viral marketing, indeed, even viral philanthropy are the new tools, and their social and economic utilities are being felt globally.

**A JEWISH PRESENCE** in the roster of new nonprofit media leaders is detectable largely by its absence. If charted along an adoption curve, one would see a skewed bell curve with a large cluster of organizations at the beginning of the curve line, a few mainstream Jewish organizations at a more advanced stage and no Jewish organization at the leading edge. As one young Jewish creative type put it, “Perhaps the traditional organizations still think they own the official Jewish bully pulpit and don’t get that they lost that position with the Internet.”

One area in which non Jewish nonprofits are responding more quickly is in the area of fundraising. The Salvation Army has a MySpace profile called “Mr. Red Kettle” as an online persona for the organization’s longstanding Red Kettle holiday fundraising drive. A related “Saturday Night Live” video sketch posted online, with entertainer Justin Timberlake playing a charity worker, has been viewed more than 800,000 times.

Online gaming is another high-growth area for philanthropic consciousness raising. *The Chronicle of Philanthropy Technology Report* reports that 50 games with social agendas have been created over the past two years and nearly 100 more are in development—a clear indicator that some organizations are increasingly sensitized to the online habits of younger media users. *Games for Change* and the *Serious Game Initiative* are just two of the new initiatives aimed at forging links for the public good with the multi-billion dollar electronic game industry. In April 2007, MTVu, an MTV channel focused on college students, released *Darfur is Dying*, a game that has been played more than two million times online and was never actively marketed. As Stephen Friedman, channel general manager told *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, “It has gone far beyond our market. That’s when you realize you really tap the viral nature of the internet.”

The American Cancer Society, along with several other charities, has teamed up with *Second Life*, an online community of two million registered users who select online “avatar” personas to represent themselves in the virtual community. In July 2006, the cancer society held its second annual “Relay for Life” online, an equivalent of the real-life walking and running races it holds across the country. More than 1,000 avatars participated raising more than \$41,000.

The American Red Cross ran one of the country’s first text-message fund-raising campaigns following Hurricane Katrina. Recognizing that some 200 million Americans have cell phones and that young people use them for texting, Red Cross and other national charities are paying concerted attention to this fundraising option. United eWay marketing and sales manager Jeffrey J. Slobotski told *The Chronicle* “if we want to talk to the 18-34-year-old demographic, we have to go to where they are.”

**ONE FAST GROWING** Jewish phenomenon, however, is the online, organic shul, which has emerged in the past few years as a means to offer and to foster collaborative creation of new ways of practicing Judaism. Using email to reach potential worshipers, who then will help create new expressions of religious service, leaders like Rabbi Sharon Brous, founder of *IKAR*, Elie Kaunfer, a founder of *Kehilat Hadar* and *Mechon Hadar*, and Bryce Jacobs, founder of *DC Minyan* have seen their vision grow into reality in just a few years.

Rabbi Brous stumbled into forming *IKAR* in 2003, when three friends having coffee in a Los Angeles coffee shop shared with her their unhappiness with the traditional Jewish religious scene. They urged Brous to email invitations to 40 friends and acquaintances they thought would be interested in a new Shabbat service experience. That first email brought in 135 previously disconnected young adults together for the first *IKAR* Shabbat service, held in the borrowed studio of a friendly local artist. The service Brous created is, “traditional but at the same time personal, accessible, stimulating, challenging—and hard but not so hard that you won’t come back.” The formula seems to be working, drawing people who according to Brous, “are not seekers but people who are searching for something and are surprised to find themselves here.”

Unlike traditional synagogues, *IKAR* depends exclusively on internet channels to communicate with and mobilize its participants. Rabbi Brous, who also belongs to a traditional synagogue in Los Angeles, notes that *IKAR* is “all online and our website looks and feels really different than other synagogues’. It’s key to how we communicate and how we express who we are.” At the time of this writing, *IKAR* has 300 member units in Los Angeles and many more participants who have not yet become members.

Elie Kaunfer introduced *Kehilat Hadar* in 2001 with a one-paragraph email to a short list of friends and acquaintances explaining his vision for a new shul experience. By 2002, he had created a web site to address the information needs and dialogue generated by his growing list of users and shul attendees. By 2006 there were *Hadar* groups on *MySpace*.

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Bryce Jacobs formed *DC Minyan* out of a local bookstore meeting, where several friends gathered to create a new shul experience. At the start, *DC Minyan* used emails to publicize its Friday night and Saturday morning Shabbat services. Through word of mouth marketing alone, *DC Minyan* has grown to its self-limited 200-member capacity in just five years of operation. With 700 on their email list in the D.C. area, Jacobs and his community are not interested in expansion but do offer advice to other communities seeking to build their own similar, new shul experiences. This do-it-yourself, self-propagating approach is a key element of the Web 2.0 culture.

*The Riverway Project*, affiliated with Temple Israel of Boston, demonstrates how one creative young rabbi and an open-minded synagogue forged a changing model of synagogue experience using new media. As Rabbi Jeremy Morrison, head of *The Riverway Project*, explains, “We put a high premium on ownership and free expression of opinions...so we must get everyone involved. We use email, web posting, MP3 liturgy.....But we are not media centric. We use technology to connect.” *Riverway* connects 1,200 people through its email program and averages six live events each

month. All communication is done through the internet and by word of mouth. Says Rabbi Morrison, “These people are not reading the *Jewish Advocate*. Viral marketing from friend-to-friend, which is all premised on interactivity one-to-one, is how it works.”

Sarah Bronson, a journalist writing in *World Jewish Digest* in 2005, proposes that these online experiences have “taken the place of the synagogue or Jewish community center as a meeting place for discussion and evaluation of Jewish life.” While this is partially true, it is important to remember that nearly all of these organic web-based shuls have physical, in-person manifestations, and opportunities for face-to-face connection. What is undoubtedly clear is that for growing numbers of young Jewish adults there are more and more choices of where and how to worship, all searchable on line.

## MOVING JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS FORWARD— USING THE DIGITAL TOOL KIT

**THE 92ND STREET Y**, one of the largest and oldest American Jewish cultural institutions, has had a century of experience working to meet Jewish New Yorkers' cultural and community

needs and expectations. It is also one the best examples of how an organization can use communications technology to meet its goals. Sol Adler, president of the Y, describes their push to stay ahead of the technology curve, even though their user base is largely over the age of 45, as critical to building community, their primary business.

Today, the Y hosts 33 live satellite broadcasts to Jewish Community Centers at 100 locations around the country. They offer live,

interactive sessions for its distant audiences in tandem with these broadcasts, giving audience members a real-time way to engage a top-name speaker or performer they would not otherwise see.

The Y also has a relationship with *Audible.com*, which offers 45 of the Y's spoken word programs to a growing online audience of fans who live well beyond the New York area. As Karen Kolodny, Director of the Millstein/Rosenthal Center for Media and Technology at the Y, puts it, "We have proven that the Long Tail phenomenon is accurate. No matter what type of program we offer, it finds an audience online. Every program has a buyer."

And, in 2007, the Y entered a relationship with Sirius Radio where it broadcasts a weekly program which has also proven successful both for the Y and for Sirius Radio.

The Y's *Makor* blog, launched in 2005, is described as the single most important tool for pulling all Y program elements and users together. It's an outgrowth of the Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation's interest in weaving Jewish content into a secular cultural venue in order to educate, inspire and entertain young Jews which led to the bricks and mortar arts and culture center, *Makor*, which, since 2001, has been a program of the 92nd Street Y.

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The blog is an outgrowth of Makor's interest in reaching its target younger adults, thousands of whom seek spiritual growth, intellectual edification, opportunities for service, social and entertainment possibilities as well as the many synergies between popular culture, Jewish meaning and artistic expression afforded by the Makor program..

In addition to *Makor*, the Y uses on-staff bloggers to get the attention of other bloggers, and to encourage them to write about the Y in their commentaries and push the Y's messages through their viral networks. All Y blogs are searchable online by topic, making it easy for users to find the information they want. The Y's *Wonderplay Initiative*, dedicated to the topic of childhood and parenting, offers popular parenting blogs to help young parents deal with their children's health and socialization issues. Eleanor Goldhar, Executive Officer of External Affairs, comments, "Blogs keeps us in the gossip loop, makes us current. We have 900 blog subscribers who average 2500 visits per day."

The 92nd Street Y website has undergone a recent redesign, adding an RSS feed to give users a more specialized, immediate and interactive experience. Lectures and concerts are offered through 12 different feeds, giving each target a highly customized experience. Targeted e-newsletters offer users 20 different publication choices from health and fitness to Singles news. The Y's e-news system allows the user to select their own information

choices and to get updates on a schedule that is responsive to their lifestyle needs. More than 220,000 users click open its 20 targeted e-newsletters monthly.

The Y uses podcasts to showcase excerpts from some of its most popular programs, and plans to digitize its entire library to bring more programs to a larger audience. The Y is also MOBI-registered, anticipating that younger audiences will want to use their handheld devices to experience the Y's programs.

The 92nd St. Y is one of 175 arts organizations licensed to use the *Tessitura Arts Enterprise* software, a unique blend of development, fundraising, ticketing and box office software developed by the Metropolitan Opera in New York to meet its customer relationship management needs. The Met created the official version of *Tessitura* when it found many of its fellow arts organizations eager to buy its software. The Opera decided that a consortium of users would ensure continuous improvements to the product and give all participating organizations a service previously unavailable. This collaborative, need-based method of product development is an excellent example of Web 2.0 principles applied on a large institutional scale. The Y uses the software to determine its marketing, communications and transactional strategies and uses the consortium as a valued consulting arm. The *Tessitura* experience suggests just one approach that the Jewish community could utilize.



**WITH A MILLION** visitors to its site each month, more people know about the **Anti-Defamation League** through the web than through any other means, according to Graham Cannon, ADL Director of Marketing and Communications. Says Cannon, “In terms of public outreach, the website is critical. Fifty percent of our visitors find us through an online search and they are agnostic about ADL. Research shows that a key principle of the web is you must offer the visitor value and our site must provide that.” Cannon and his staff closely monitor traffic and usage to constantly keep the site informative and responsive to users’ interests.

ADL’s site does not offer all the Web 2.0 features available, partly because the open space platform creates challenges for the organization. ADL is trying to make its site more open and informal, yet the need to protect its institutional integrity has kept ADL from adding blogs and open content creation to its site. The challenge Cannon poses to himself is as follows; “How do we move away from the institutional voice to the individual voice, break down the barriers and create a more informal space?”

In its effort to remain one of the most highly trafficked Jewish websites for Jews and non-Jews alike, ADL is focused on making the online experience for its current and prospective donors a value-added and relevant one. Working toward this goal, ADL is using its website technology to create a more informal, more spontaneous and less hierarchical experience for its core constituents. ADL’s email strategy is designed to leverage these capabilities. A recent ADL email petition drive on the issue of British journalists boycott of Israeli goods captured 25,000 signatures online, drove the organization’s message and mission, and allowed ADL to reach the signers with future targeted communications and appeals.

Still, Cannon cautions that the web is not everything. “Web is an important part but everything needs to be better... materials, road shows, every engagement. I am competing with *American Idol* and it’s a mistake to think the web can be everything. We need to figure out how to make it all work together.”

**GESHER CITY WAS** created by the JCC Association to serve as an online community-building tool. It strives to be a vehicle to maintain relationships among alumni groups who can find one another and cluster in groups, like the popular and successful *MeetUp* site which signaled a revolutionary way to reach voters in the last US presidential election. “It works” says Adam Courtney, Director, Young Adults Initiative, *Gesher City JCC Association*, “because we create pages on places like *MySpace* and we are out there in the mainstream.”

The JCC Association also tailors its programs to its target audiences by demographic, using programs like the new *Senior Net*, which JCC Association President, Allan Finkelstein, is developing to address the large and growing number of tech-savvy seniors reaching retirement age. “As more people retire we will have more people emailing,” he says, “this creates opportunities for distance learning.”

Despite a commitment to the steady increase of his tech budget to meet growing demand, Finkelstein admits to not totally having a handle on all that is coming. “We are not educated in Web 2.0, but we are committed to learning. When it comes to technology we don’t think about it, we just do it.” This attitude, in its fearlessness and its curiosity, can be a helpful approach to dealing with a large and sometimes confusing set of tools.

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we just do it.**

**THE HILLEL CHALLENGE:** finding Jewish college students who don't show up at Shabbat services. Says Wayne Firestone, President, "Our Board pushed us to develop metrics and tracking devices to find out what happens to the students. We needed to create a platform and a database to track them and we went to *Facebook* sites, created our own presence there, and used networks there first to find them. As a result we have younger professionals' actively mining data from *Facebook*, since 90 percent of students use it."

As a result of its data mining work, Hillel has built a new constituency of on and off line advocates. Using Web 2.0 tools, Hillel is growing a sizeable database using viral strategies for projects and events, and by using *MySpace* as a "loudspeaker" to connect with young people. Hillel has moved its rallies and petitions online, and raises funds online. Says Firestone, "You have to know your constituency—how they work on line and off line. Tech in and of itself is not a magnet for engagement, but as a tool for finding people it is very useful. Organizations that cannot speak the language will be left out of the conversation."

**WITHIN HOURS AFTER** the tsunami hit Southeast Asia in December 2004, the **American Jewish World Service** suddenly found itself with 40,000 new supporters and volunteers—people who had emailed the organization and left messages on their answering machine, eager to respond to the crisis. Unprepared for the emergency, the organization turned to online technology as the most effective way to communicate with the thousands who wanted to help. Using a range of digital tools, including a blast email letter from CEO Ruth Messenger with flash video attachments, AJWS sent its new email list a series of updates and ran podcasts, featuring staff who were sent to the crisis zone with cameras, to continually keep people informed and give them ways to respond.

According to AJWS vice president, Phyllis Goldman, the tsunami experience changed the organization's way of operating forever. "Now we have a culture of commitment to the technology. Everyone here got trained on video production. We are now always tracking and testing. And we are using our young staff as the very real and important assets they are for communicating in this new age."

**THANKS TO A** three-year grant from the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, the **Jewish Coalition for Service** recently launched JSoN, a web site targeted to alumni of volunteer programs run by JCS's affiliate organizations. Simha Rosenberg, executive director of JCS, describes the web site as "a unique blend of strong back-end content management capacity with a powerful open-space platform for real engagement of alumni of Jewish volunteer programs. Our goal is to keep the alumni of our affiliates engaged with programs of civic action and social justice in a Jewish environment. Technology is critically important. There is no other way to do this. How else would alumni from one area find alumni in another zip code?"

With an 8000-name database of volunteer alumni in hand, (composed mostly of post-college adults), the site works in some ways like the popular *MySpace* and *FaceBook* social network sites. Project alumni can email their peers, search the database by zip code, date, and type of volunteer experience, as well as share photographs, publish blogs and generally engage with one another. Rosenberg anticipates building the database to 12-15,000 alumni names and personal profiles by 2009, and plans to offer affinity groups and job postings on the site to serve her alumni and keep them connected to JCS.

JCS has also created *JServe.com*, a portal site that helps people find volunteer opportunities online, and allows them read and participate in blogs about volunteer experiences.

**T**HE SHIFT IN contemporary communications strategy has already happened. How we—as individuals and as members of organizations—deal with the challenges before us will definitively impact the ways in which Jewish life in America will be encountered, understood and embraced by many Jews.

The organizations described here are a sampling of the few who have advanced their mission using new media tools. Their efforts demonstrate increasing skill at finding elusive target audiences, creating valuable databases and tracking mechanisms, expanding their markets, opening new communications with and between people, targeting messages to match constituents' interests, opening new dialogues through blogs, creating new advocacy and emergency response mechanisms, and leveraging the online channels to build real-time relationships. In many cases they have been the recipients of seed monies to create these initiatives, and in every case they are thought-leaders and role models.

By showcasing these leading media strategists, this essay hopes to inspire other Jewish grantmakers and nonprofits to realize the importance of taking similar risks. Consortiums—virtual, and real-world—could be created to leverage costs and share expertise and talent. Media leaders in the Jewish community could help jump-start fledgling projects. Fundraisers and communications directors could begin to research and adopt the new methodologies. And Jewish grantmakers could become increasingly receptive to the possibilities within this important new funding arena.

Now is the time to make the targeted, repeated philanthropic investment necessary to help bring the most vibrant and creative Jewish nonprofits into the 21st century—and to help them stay there. The communications landscape has undergone radical change; it's time to start asking—and answering—the new questions.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Gail J. Hyman is a strategic marketing and communications consultant who has spent more than 25 years developing and implementing communications programs for the Jewish community. She has worked extensively with Jewish federations to design and implement communications and marketing programs designed to increase support and attract younger people to the federation ranks. She was responsible for developing and introducing United Jewish Communities' UJC Web which was the first non-profit web template system built for a large organizational network. The innovative web system was highlighted in both the Chronicle of Philanthropy and the Wall Street Journal.

After leading the marketing and communications departments at UJA-Federation of New York and later at United Jewish Communities, Ms. Hyman launched her own consultancy in 2006 and now advises non-profit organizations in marketing, branding, message development, online communications strategies and public and media relations.

**Radical Torah**  
<http://www.radicaltorah.org>

**Corner Prophets**  
<http://cornerprophets.com>

**Jewcy**  
<http://www.jewcy.com>

**Jewschool**  
<http://jewschool.com>

**Presentense**  
<http://www.presentensemagazine.org>

**The New Jew**  
<http://thenewjew.wordpress.com>

**Bikkurim**  
<http://www.bikkurim.org/v2>

**Jdate**  
<http://www.jdate.com>

**Mechon Hadar**  
<http://www.mechonhadar.org>

**Heeb**  
<http://www.heebmagazine.com>

**My Jewish Learning**  
<http://myjewishlearning.com>

**Jewlicious**  
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<http://www.ujcweb.org>

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<http://www.b-linked.org>

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**Sinai Live**  
<http://sinailive.com>

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<http://www.jserve.org>

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<http://www.ikar-la.org>

**Gesher City**  
<http://www.geshercity.org>

**92nd Street Y**  
<http://www.92y.org>

**Reboot**  
<http://rebooters.net>

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<http://www.babganewz.org>

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<http://www.frumhere.com>