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**The Internet:
Pathways and Possibilities**



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Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewish Life to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational, religious and cultural initiatives that are designed to reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life.

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The Internet: Pathways and Possibilities

The most revolutionary innovation of the Internet is arguably its democratization of information and of communities. Not since the advent of the Gutenberg press have the barriers between people and data been so widely traversed. As China's recent dealings with Google and Yahoo reveal, it is this open access to information that terrifies repressive regimes. The democratic impulse suffuses not only the receivers of Internet content, but the creators as well. In December, the science journal *Nature* found that the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia* – maintained by 45,000 volunteers, both professional and lay people, across the globe – was almost as accurate as *Encyclopedia Britannica* in its science articles.

How has the democratization been a boon to Jews, and how can the Internet be better harnessed to increase involvement in Jewish life?

For one thing, lack of formal Jewish education need not be the barrier it once was to Jewish involvement. With widespread access to information from each of the denominations as well as from pluralistic and interdenominational websites, the potential for Jewish learning and literacy is practically unprecedented. In addition, the grass roots nature of the Internet has empowered people the community has typically ignored: the young, the unaffiliated and the non-wealthy. This is particularly true for the younger generation, a cohort the community professes to be concerned about but has by and large ignored when it comes to involvement and ideas. Indeed, the relatively level playing field of the Internet has subverted the traditional paradigm of top-down discourse. At the same time, the Internet has facilitated the creation of vibrant communities that rival "real world" communities and that themselves often spill over into the non-virtual world. As the articles in this issue of CONTACT illustrate, the Internet has become one of the most kinetic landscapes of contemporary Jewish life.

In many respects, the Internet is too dynamic to be harnessed and controlled by the organized Jewish community. And this is not at all a bad thing. If the strength of the Internet is its populism and democratic impulse, the community should provide educational resources and work to facilitate further grass roots flourishing without trying to co-opt the medium or to dictate a top-down approach. In so doing, the community might learn new ways of inspiring people to participate in Jewish life.

Eli Valley

Eli Valley

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Jumping INTO THE Web

by **MICHAEL KRESS** >>

**LIKE THE REST OF THE WORLD,
THE JEWISH COMMUNITY HAS
JUMPED INTO THE WEB WITH
THAT SAME MIXTURE OF FEAR
AND FASCINATION THAT I DID.
BUT THERE IS STILL A LONG
WAY TO GO FOR JEWISH
INSTITUTIONS AND LEADERS TO
REALIZE THE FULL POTENTIAL
THAT THIS MEDIUM OFFERS.**

I started out right out of college as an old school print journalist, and like so many others, I looked at this new medium, the World Wide Web as we so quaintly called it, with a mixture of fear and excitement. I remember the odd feeling of publishing my first article on the Web as a freelance writer. It felt incomplete, insubstantial — and yet, it probably found considerably more readers than anything I'd written before, and that audience was certainly more geographically far-flung than any I'd had before.

Today, barely more than half a decade after those early days of trepidation, I've worked at two very different websites — Beliefnet, a website for peo-

ple of all faiths, and MyJewishLearning, a pluralistic site for Jewish information and education. At this point, I can't imagine life — professionally or personally — without the Web.

My story is hardly unique. Like the rest of the world, the Jewish community has jumped into the Web with that same mixture of fear and fascination that I did. But there is still a long way to go for Jewish institutions and leaders to realize the full potential that this medium offers.

Perhaps the first and most important lesson I've learned is that the Internet truly is a new medium. This may seem a simplistic and obvious observation, but there are profound ramifications to the truth that the Web is not merely a place where books and magazines appear on a monitor and humans communicate via typing instead of talking. To make the

Michael Kress served as the founding Editor-in-Chief of MyJewishLearning.com. He now edits the arts and entertainment coverage of Beliefnet.com.

best use of the internet, we need to understand how the culture and behavior of Web users is unique to the medium. This includes questions of how we digest information, how and where we look for information and whom we trust, the length of our attention spans, and many other such issues. So how do we take best advantage of this new medium? I'd like to focus on just two broad areas: Communication and connection, and information and authority.

Communication and connection: At both websites I've worked at, discussion boards play key roles in the organizations' missions, allowing readers, wherever they may be, to post questions and opinions and interact with each other about the profound and the mundane alike.

Though only a small percentage of readers will ever take advantage of the boards — Internet discussion is not for everyone, and this has proven true across the Web — those who do participate can be changed forever by the experience. One of the most rewarding experiences I've had as a Web editor was "listening in" on some of Beliefnet's Jewish-themed discussions and seeing how people from different worlds engage with each other in substantive dialogue. The ease and anonymity of the Web allows for a type of discussion rare at best in the "real world."

I'll never forget the Orthodox man from a fairly closed community who took to Beliefnet's boards early on; he was repeatedly saying how much he learned about others' religious lives and viewpoints, even as he continued to assert his own opinions, thereby teaching others about *his* world. True, there are times when participants abuse the anonymity to spread hate, but by establishing and enforcing clear guidelines for what's acceptable and what's not, the Web offers a safe and easy place to connect as individuals or groups with people of different denominations, faiths

and cultures. This is happening on Beliefnet, MyJewishLearning and any number of other sites, such as Children of Abraham, where Jewish and Muslim teens from around the globe — including places like Pakistan, South Africa, and Israel — interact with each other. People who would never attend in person an interfaith or interdenominational dialogue are on Internet message boards asking questions, answering others' queries and debating any topic imaginable. Discussions are not organized or linear, and they can seem bewildering for the inexperienced user to read through,

Let's make sure we're equal players in this marketplace by getting our texts, our leaders' voices (contemporary and historical), our community members, our opinions, even our internal disputes out there for people to find, respond to and embrace or reject.

but — especially in moments when participants ask about someone who hasn't been around for a while or take a moment to discuss personal news in their lives — there's no doubt that real connections are happening.

Information and authority: Even the most egalitarian-minded of Jewish communities is accustomed on some level to hierarchy: Rabbis and educators teach, students/congregants learn. Texts transmit, learners absorb. We may grapple and disagree with texts — and rabbis — but, ultimately, we come back to them as our sources of authority and organizing principles of our religious world. The Internet, on the other hand, is without hierarchy or authority. It is the ultimate in democracy or the ultimate in chaos, depending how you look at it. The Internet allows us to shop for information, rabbis, shuls, or new denominations or even religions, and there's no stopping that. Responsa from even the most cloistered *haredi* rabbis are dissected on the Web, and everyone who knows how to use Google has access to mountains of information, some terrific,

some entirely inaccurate, with no way for the average person to decipher which is which.

American religion has always run on a model of free-market capitalism, one faith competing with another, thriving by responding to market needs. Though it may not be the traditional Jewish model, we're all part of the system whether we like it or not. Rather than approaching this ever-more decentralized world with fear, Judaism would be better served by enthusiastically embracing it. Let's make sure we're equal players in this marketplace by getting our

texts, our leaders' voices (contemporary and historical), our community members, our opinions, even our internal disputes out there for people to find, respond to and embrace or reject. As the Internet, inevitably, moves toward more of a multimedia model — audio, video — and away

from its reliance on text, let's embrace that too, and translate our tradition into this new format just as we transitioned from a fully oral tradition to one that mixes the oral and the textual.

Finally, though the old hierarchies and sources of authority may be forever changed, it's important to remember that they're not dead. Despite the everyone's-a-rabbi environment on the Web, I've noticed that the real thing, a knowledgeable and authoritative teacher, is still respected and even thirsted for. People will rarely investigate who that rabbi is who respects and who disagrees with her or him, but they're eager for "the right" answer nonetheless. The chaos of the Web is both liberating and scary. If we provide the forums and the tools for Jews from around the world to interact with each other via safe, easy to use websites, and if our best rabbis, most creative teachers and most expansive thinkers take the time to understand the uniqueness of this new medium and venture out there onto the Web — as many already have — we may find we are influencing more people than we'd ever imagined. ✿

On December 26, *hillbilly* posted “mo happy Chanukah I heart you” to *shully05*’s wall blog. Translated in non-teen-speak: Hillary posted a message to the webpage of a friend wishing her many more happy nights of Chanukah and telling her that she loves her.

Since October 2005, thousands of Jewish teens from around the world have come together to make friends, talk about common areas of interest and access valuable resources in an online community exclusively for Jewish teens — *b-linked.org*. The website, already being used by close to 4,000 teens, was created by BBYO, Inc., the world’s leading pluralistic Jewish teen movement.

While the language in which these teens

b-linked is a place where Jewish teens can feel comfortable, have fun and be exposed to a dynamic

are communicating may not be easily decipherable to the over-18 crowd, one thing is clear: *b-linked* is a place where Jewish teens can feel comfortable, have fun and be exposed to a dynamic community of their Jewish peers — a community that, without the Internet, they may never have known.

b-linked is the culmination of a year-long research initiative launched by BBYO to understand the core interests and needs of today’s teens in an effort to develop strategies to involve more of them — especially those who are at risk of turning away from the Jewish community — in more meaningful Jewish experiences.

Through conversations with teens and research compiled from over two dozen Jewish and secular sources, including Teenage Research Unlimited, the Pew Internet & American Life Project and the 2001 National Jewish Population Survey, BBYO discovered several key opportunities to reach more Jewish teens:

- Teens are the first generation to grow up almost fully wired, with 87 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds using the Internet.
- A majority of teens value religion, and most are looking for less conventional ways to connect.
- Today’s generation is not likely to be spoon-fed information; in fact, teens are creators rather than consumers of content, pushing more content onto the Internet than they pull away.

Matthew Grossman is Executive Director of BBYO, Inc.

- Getting into college is the top concern among today’s teens.
- Teens are being required to (and want to) conduct community service at record rates.
- Significant numbers of North America’s 350,000 Jewish teens are losing their Jewish connection following their *b’nai mitzvot*.

Armed with a better understanding of the teen audience and the challenges facing the Jewish community, BBYO recognized that it would need to expand and make its approach for connecting with teens more strategic. While BBYO’s renowned leadership programs, Aleph Zadik Aleph for young men and its female counterpart, B’nai B’rith Girls, will remain a core focus of the organization, they can no longer be the organization’s only gateways for involvement.

With that in mind, BBYO fine-tuned its target audience, identifying a market of 100,000 Jewish teens who it considers to be “on the fence” Jewishly, and set out to create *b-linked*. It’s an unconventional entry point to Jewish involvement — a place where teens can be the content creators and there are no barriers to involvement. *b-linked*’s registration process is simple, there is no cost involved, and all Jewish teens are welcome to:

- Make thousands of new friends from around the world and stay connected to friends from camp, travel experiences and school;
- Connect with other Jewish teens based upon common areas of interest, from music and movies to volunteer work and sports;
- Communicate through message boards and blogs about their favorite topics and issues;
- Learn about and get involved in social, travel, athletic, community service and leadership opportunities.

What’s unique about the *b-linked* experience is that it’s not just virtual. Unlike other social networking sites, *b-linked* emerged from and feeds into real communities supported by more than 80 BBYO professionals “on the ground” who can involve teens in meaningful Jewish experiences.

What also distinguishes *b-linked* from other social networking sites is its ability to add value to the lives of teens. Under

the *b-linked* umbrella are a variety of sub-communities designed to appeal to the core needs of teens. For example, *b-accepted.org* provides tools to help college-bound teens with the admissions process. Powered by *The Princeton Review* and Hillel, it features a one-of-a-kind search engine containing both Jewish and secular data on more than 800 colleges and universities. Teens using *b-accepted* also have access to a personal college organizer to help them keep track of schools of interest and important deadlines; an alumni mentor service; a roommate matching message board; and pertinent information about the application process, SAT exam and financial aid.

Since about 70 percent of high schools now require teens to fulfill community service requirements, BBYO will soon launch *b-kind*, a community service site enabling teens to track their involvement and learn about service opportunities, while introducing them to a fundamental component of Jewish life, *tikkun olam*. Other communities in the works include *b-inspired* (Judaism and spirituality), *b-everywhere* (travel) and *b-alive* (health and wellness).

The strategy behind *b-linked* and *b-accepted* “makes perfect sense,” said Dr. Leonard Saxe, Director of the Steinhart Social Research Institute at Brandeis University and author of *Being a Jewish Teenager in America*, in an interview with

community of their Jewish peers — a community that, without the Internet, they may never have known.

The Jewish Week. These sites “help young people deal with contemporary issues.” “What it also makes clear is that being part of the Jewish community is relevant to their lives, as opposed to something that they do on the holidays or at certain life events,” noted Dr. Saxe.

BBYO’s goal is to have 50,000 teens — half of its target market — using *b-linked* by 2008. More important, BBYO hopes to inspire teens like *hillbilly* and *shully05* to make Judaism a permanent part of their lives by allowing them to create their own meaningful Jewish experiences. ✨

MyJewishLearning.com: Every Jew A Rabbi

by DANIEL SEPTIMUS

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[Matisyahu began his European tour with a midnight show](#) produced by JFL

MyJewishLearning.com was conceived in 2001 to address a practical need. The Internet had become a fact of contemporary life, a preferred source of information for all things, including the academic and spiritual. Ironically, perhaps, Orthodox institutions were quick to respond to this sea change. Organizations such as Chabad and Aish Hatorah solidified their web presence and became the leading sources of online information about Judaism. Despite the remarkable proliferation of Internet projects in the 1990s, no pluralistic Jewish counterpart emerged.

Edgar Bronfman founded MyJewishLearning to fill this void. Our mission was — and is — to be a free, comprehensive, authoritative and transdenominational source of Jewish information. In our first few years, with the generous support of the Samuel Bronfman Foundation, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation, Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation and the Abramson Family Foundation, we have begun to fulfill this charge.

Today, MyJewishLearning's 2,500 articles cover everything from baby-naming ceremonies to the Israeli electoral system. An MJL user can find content about Maimonides and Malamud, Emma Lazarus and Ezekiel. Our seven topic areas — History & Community, Holidays, Ideas & Belief, Culture, Texts, Daily Life & Practice, and Lifecycle — address all the major aspects of Jewish life. In addition, MJL features quizzes and recipes, primary texts and recommended readings. A successful website must connect to the entire Internet; thus, we've posted thousands of links to other Jewish institutions and resources.

And yet, while MJL's pragmatic function birthed the website, it has theoretical — dare I say, theological — implications that are also worth noting.

Let's imagine a time, fifteen or twenty years ago, say 1987. A place: Omaha. A woman: nodding to Virginia Woolf, we'll call her Judith. She's in her mid-thirties, Jewish, with two kids. Because of a television program on biblical archeology, or an upcoming lifecycle event, or a question from one of her children, her interest in Judaism is piqued. She wants to study and explore. But where does she go? Perhaps she goes to a bookstore or library, but in Omaha, the pickings are slim. More likely than not, she has a single possible destination.

Indeed, in 1987, nearly 2,000 years after Jerusalem was destroyed, dispersing the seat of religious authority from a single place (the Temple) and ruling elite (the priests), the concentration of power — of knowledge — was still overwhelmingly concentrated in a single institution: the synagogue.

This is not necessarily nefarious. A synagogue rabbi might be bright and imaginative, and more importantly, kind and caring, but no matter how talented he is (and in 1987 most rabbis were still "he"), his resources are limited. The rabbi might give an adult education class on Talmud or

THE RABBIS OF THE
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IS NEITHER IN HEAVEN
NOR IN THE *BEIT*
MIDRASH. IT IS
EVERYWHERE.

Daniel Septimus is Editor-in-Chief of MyJewishLearning.com.

CONTACT

the laws of charity, while Judith's interests might be art or biblical poetry. The synagogue might have a library with more books than the local Barnes & Noble, but not that many more, and it's foreign territory; it's intimidating.

In truth, the existence of a woman like Judith already points to the breakdown of a Jewish learning elite. Education for women and the rise of academic Jewish Studies are but two ways Jewish knowledge was diffused in the twentieth century. Still, the theoretical implications of the Internet — of a Jewish Internet — trump all of these.

In a visionary essay, "Judaism and History," published in the mid-1970s, my teacher Rabbi Yitz Greenberg envisaged a time in which traditional models of Jewish leadership would give way to a new one: "Just as Halakhic behavior is subtler and more naturalistically religious than the Temple's sacramental services, so the new Jewish lifestyle is likely to be concretized in subtler behavior, more anchored in the natural than in current *Halakha*. Every man his own rabbi may be the analogous step to the democratization of access to God taken in the shift from priest to rabbi."

Rabbi Greenberg's vision included a world distanced from traditional modes of Judaism, but his sensitivity to the religious possibilities of democracy, to its theological significance, was prophetic. Though he couldn't have known it at the time, the Internet will help usher in this age.

The Internet is democratic to its core. The accessibility and transferability of information supports a populist tide. According to Professor Mark Poster, a media theorist at University of California, Irvine, "The 'magic' of the Internet is that it is a technology that puts cultural acts, symbolizations in all forms, in the hands of all participants." The Internet empowers. It does so by being user driven. It is a self-navigated universe of choice. It is open to anyone, at any time, in any place. In this sense, the Jewish experience of an MJL user is qualitatively novel. Participants engage MJL out of their own volition. They choose what they want to study and learn at their own comfortable pace. They study in their homes and offices. At 3 a.m. or 3 p.m. Recently, MJL unveiled a version of the website for handheld devices such as mobile phones, Palm Pilots, and Blackberries. Users can study on the subway and on

line for the movies, in airports and, if their religious sensibilities allow it, in the bathroom. The rabbis of the Talmud declared that the Torah was not in heaven — it was in the *beit midrash*, the study hall. Now the Torah is neither in heaven nor in the *beit midrash*. It is everywhere.

Last December, MyJewishLearning had its busiest month: 375,000 visits and well over 100,000 unique visitors. That's 100,000 Jews forging Rabbi Greenberg's vision of "every man his own rabbi," but there's still a lot of work to be done. MyJewishLearning strives to be comprehensive. Twenty-five hundred articles is a wonderful beginning, but it doesn't do justice to a culture 4,000 years in the making.

In addition, if MJL is merely a place people go for answers, it is not properly leveraging the Internet's potential to nurture community. We need to facilitate interactive technologies already integrated into the website, like discussion boards and Talkback features, and to branch out into other online media, like weblogs.

Blogs, as they are known, are exploding. According to Technorati, a website that organizes and tracks blogs, a new blog is created every second of every day. Technorati alone tracks 27.2 million blogs. Jewish blogs such as Jewschool are already connecting Jews and creating vibrant online conversations about Jewish life. We believe there are ways to integrate Jewish learning into this medium as well.

However, for these new technological features to be successful, for MyJewishLearning to be a place where people communicate and debate, our content needs to be relevant, regular and plentiful. It needs to speak to the dynamism of our lives. We need to constantly produce content that engages the world around us.

For MyJewishLearning and the Jewish Internet generally, the future is now — but it is also still unfolding. We are building an institution that will enable practically unprecedented access to Jewish learning, one that can also change the very fabric of the Jewish community. Bill Gates has written, "The main advantage of any new technology is that it amplifies human potential." Indeed, a healthy and vibrant Jewish Internet will not only be efficient and pragmatic. It will be transformative.

It will be transcendent. ✿

nextbook by BLAKE ESKIN

Nextbook.org is now a full-blown web magazine with original features, regular columnists and a weekly podcast, but it didn't start out that way. In November 2002, I was brought on to create a one-page website with two functions. First, it would take to heart the Saul Bellow quotation that gave this project, funded by Keren Keshet — The Rainbow Foundation, its name: "We are always looking for the book it is necessary to read next."

The Nextbook site would direct visitors to articles of interest about Jewish literature, culture and ideas. It would also provide information about Nextbook's "Jewish Encounters Book Series" and the Jewish literary and cultural programs Nextbook would be presenting in Chicago, Seattle and Washington, D.C.

In other words, the website was conceived as something of an afterthought to these two ambitious projects. However, a series of books or literary events can be years in the planning before they reach an audience. So the launch of Nextbook.org became Nextbook's public debut, and the "Cultural News Digest," a blog updated five days a week, took the lead. Each morning, I combed through the cultural offerings of dozens of news sites — major dailies and quarterly journals; just-the-facts newspapers and partisan publications; from America and abroad; and from both mainstream and Jewish publishers — looking for reviews and other stories worth recommending, or that at least contained a tidbit dealing with Jewish culture that people would want to pass along. The digest was meant to be lively and eclectic, to appeal to readers who are culturally sophisticated and Jewishly curious but perhaps also Jewishly uncomfortable; to reach those who didn't think something was interesting simply because it was Jewish.

A blog doesn't have to be shrill and inflammatory to change how its readers see the world. By collecting so many stories in one place, Nextbook.org showcases the many varieties of the Jewish experience, and the many ways Jewish culture is interwoven into the culture of our world. While the digest is an efficient way to cover the world of Jewish culture, we quickly realized that many important stories were getting short shrift and poor coverage. We now commission pieces by noted fiction writers, journalists who contribute to the cultural sections of leading publications, and our own crack editorial staff. We also feature regular columns by Etgar Keret, Shalom Auslander and Lynn Harris.



Blake Eskin is Editor of Nextbook.org.



Emails, Blogs and Websites, Oh My!

by TARA HARNED

With the influx of Blackberries, iPods, laptops and PDAs, today's youth are digitally connected and primed for instant gratification. Young people meet and greet one another via the wired world, and this technology is a central force in uniting groups and keeping them connected. Maximizing the Internet as both an information venue and a networking tool is at the heart of Taglit-birthright israel's online mission.

Taglit-birthright israel provides the gift of first time, peer group, educational trips to Israel for Jewish young adults ages 18 to 26. Recognizing that young adults communicate online, virtually all of the registration process occurs on the Taglit-birthright israel website, birthrightisrael.com. When newly-minted alumni return from the trip, the Taglit-birthright israel website is often the first place they head to find pictures from their experience, connect with bus mates and seek information on how to be involved in their home communities.

The Alumni Central section of the Taglit-birthright israel website (alumni.birthrightisrael.com) has become the principal mechanism for alumni to connect with one another and serves as the virtual home of the birthright israel Alumni Association (BRIAA).

The website currently supports four main activities — education (regarding Jewish life and Israel); social networking via AlumNet (a profile-based system similar to online friend networks like MySpace, Friendster or Facebook); exchanging community and organizational information and news; and interaction with Taglit-birthright israel.

As an educational site, Taglit-birthright israel strives to provide relevant, age-appropriate information on all things Jewish. The website features two webzines — *Inside Israel* (which covers Israeli current events, editorial pieces related to Israeli culture, politics, etc.) and *Jewish Life* (which covers news and resources related to Judaism, Jewish life and

Jewish communities outside of Israel). Other interactive experiences on the Taglit-birthright israel website include videos, eCards, message boards, an events calendar, opportunities listings and a Jewish history educational module.

The social networking component of the website, AlumNet, allows users to create a profile and connect to friends from their bus, as well as search for and connect with people who share similar interests. It differs from other networking sites by operating as a closed system, meaning that only Taglit-birthright israel alumni, *madrichim*, and *mifgash* participants are members of the site. AlumNet has grown tremendously since its inception in 2004, with more than 5,000 active profiles and over 110,000 hits.

The international nature of AlumNet is another attractive feature. Alumni from around the world create profiles and communicate with one another via the website.

In addition to the main Alumni Central portal, there are local sites that are maintained by the Taglit-birthright israel Post Programming Professionals. These professionals are responsible for connecting with local alumni and involving them in the larger Jewish community. These local sites have easy to remember URLs (e.g., Atlanta.birthrightisrael.com) and allow professionals to share community and organizational information with regional alumni. They also provide a direct link to Jewish communities with a public events calendar, listings for upcoming alumni events, a search engine to find other local alumni, a local message board and local opportunities (jobs, internships, fellowships, volunteer positions, etc.). The Taglit-birthright israel professionals have the ability to manage content and create newsletters. There are even a few local sites that boast alumni webmasters, where professionals have empowered alumni to edit the website, creating a peer-to-peer link that encourages leadership and initiative.

Alumni investment and buy-in is tied to their involvement in website development. Taglit-birthright israel frequently reviews how alumni are using the site by asking alumni (both

leaders and random participants) to participate in focus groups, surveys and test runs on proposed features to the site. By including alumni in the review and planning processes for web resources, we maximize our ability to respond to their shifting needs and use their input to better hit the moving target of online trends.

In addition to our own Taglit-birthright israel website, alumni use the Internet in other ways to organize themselves and connect with one another. Some have formed groups on Myspace.com, Friendster.com, Meetup.com and similar sites as a means of keeping in touch with birthright israel friends and bus mates.

We believe in encouraging alumni to find one another and connect in any way possible, including the use of these outside sites. Taglit-birthright israel professionals are constantly seeking ways to tap into this powerful grassroots force. Jay Rosen, the post Professional for the Washington D.C. campus area, is a constant fixture on networking sites. "Tracking alumni on sites like Facebook has become an integral part of my work on follow-through," Jay says. "From online photo albums to message boards filled with inside jokes to group affiliations such as 'Social Action' and 'Jews who like Booze,' it's easier than ever to tell the level of impact the experience has had on them. Working with a dozen campuses and hundreds of college students, I rely on their profiles to spot trends, interests, and potential leaders."

Taglit-birthright israel recently hired a new firm to create the next generation of our website. The existing structure will change to reflect advances in both technology and the technological shrewdness of the young adults we serve. The new site will be even more graphics-heavy, borne out of the photoblogging trend in which alumni use sites such as Flickr.com to share photos of their trips. There are thousands of photos posted on Flickr with the keyword tag "birthright" that are a direct result of alumni wishing to share their birthright israel experience with the world, and we feel that it is important to incorporate this kind of technology into our own website.

There are many Taglit-birthright israel alumni whose preferred method of post-trip engagement occurs solely via the Internet. This is a very valid form of connection, and we strive to meet their needs as well as the needs of the more event-oriented alumni. Helping alumni make the leap from a cyber experience to a viable live community is an area we want to explore further. This year, we will seek collateral resources that will enable us to create innovative programming related to the new communities generated by this cyberspace network. Ultimately, we would like to offer alumni modest grant resources to help support future creative endeavors.

The role of the Taglit-birthright israel website in post-trip engagement is crucial. In order for the website to remain useful within our cohort, we do our best to offer a relevant means of connecting and learning that appeals to an iPod generation. Keeping the website fresh is central to capturing the shifting attention of a group that engages "à la carte." ✿

Tara Harned is Director of Alumni Affairs at birthright israel Foundation.



Distance Learning in Jewish Education: PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE

by DAVID GORDIS and MARTIN KAMINER

Online learning is the key unlocking the treasure house of Jewish knowledge that is our collective right and heritage.

It's been observed that many of the innovations of the information age have in fact been part of Jewish life and learning for millennia. The Talmud is a hypertextual document. "Flame Wars" have always been part of Jewish discourse, personal and professional. And distance learning was well developed within a few hundred years of the destruction of the Second Temple, as communities in Europe sent *she'eylot* to Baghdad and received directives on liturgy and *halacha*.

In ancient times, distance learning took place between provincial Rabbis in the west and scholarly authorities in the east. It was not accessible or even of interest to the laity. While this type of correspondence among clergy continues, the potential that distance learning offers today is to unlock the treasures of Jewish learning for all who

seek it, regardless of where they live or their level of Jewish literacy.

Over the last ten years, experiments in online learning have proliferated at Jewish institutions of every description. It is rare to find an educational organization that doesn't offer some sort of learning, casual or structured, via their website. The most adept schools have found that by tiering their offerings along a gradient — offering free resources for casual browsers, e-letters for those interested in a particular topic, short adult-education courses, more intensive professional development courses and, eventually, online for-credit courses and degree programs — they can meet a learner's needs wherever they are and encourage them to progress and dig deeper. Someone who stumbled across a site as a result of a web search might eventually matriculate into an online course or hybrid degree program. These offerings also comprise a range of technologies: web pages, synchronous and asynchronous conferencing, interactive

video, chat-rooms, podcasts and, of course, email. Myjewishlearning.com is an excellent example of a learning portal designed to be valuable to scholars and novices alike and to serve as a point of entry to other more in-depth or specialized online resources.

Given the mission-driven nature of Jewish institutions of higher learning, they might be wise to consider the bold example of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, whose Open Courseware initiative (<http://ocw.mit.edu>) places all curricular materials on the web for free to encourage and promote scientific learning. Users of Open Courseware don't receive a degree or any academic credit, but the example of free learning on a massive scale is a boon to all.

A dozen or so years into the age of the Internet, it's clear that the impact on both the educational world and the Jewish world of online learning has hardly begun to be felt. Much has been tried; there have been notable failures as well as promising successes. Some of the key aspects of what

Dr. David Gordis is President of Hebrew College in Boston, MA. **Martin Kaminer** is CEO of Instructional Systems Inc., an educational technology company.

makes the combination of Jewish learning and the Internet so exciting include:

- Availability of world-class teachers to groups, communities and individuals regardless of geographic location;
- Availability of library resources online, both catalogues and full texts of books and journals;
- Artifacts and manuscripts being digitized and made available electronically to anyone who wants to examine them;
- Formation of cybergroups to link individuals into virtual communities;
- Creation of online resources that complement, extend, and enhance classroom instruction.

Many universities have found the most potent programs are not the purely virtual ones but rather a hybrid model, where students complete a portion of their requirements online but also spend a period of time on campus, which could also allow the existing bricks-and-mortar to serve a much larger population. Examples of the hybrid model in action at Hebrew College include:

- Me'ah Online (http://www.hebrewcollege.edu/html/adult_learning/meah.htm), an adult education program that combines in-person and online instruction to create a remarkably profound and intense learning experience;
- Training of early childhood educators in Springfield, MA, using interactive video and face-to-face interactions with faculty;
- A Masters in Jewish Education degree offered to students in Florida via a combination of interactive video, web-based material and visits from Boston College faculty (which turns out to be a potent remedy for faculty apprehension about distance learning, particularly in the winter months);
- A summer semester at Boston College for students in the online Master of Jewish Studies program. Summer students have included not only people from around the United States but also a Presbyterian Minister from Ghana, the Brazilian Consul to Japan and a Muslim from Ramallah.

Some of the most wonderful developments to come out of online learning are also the most unexpected. An early online course in “Jewish Self-Discovery Through Writing” was taken by about twenty students scattered throughout the country and abroad. They bonded as a group that endured after the course ended. As a result, one couple in Alaska decided that it lived too far from a Jewish community and decided to move to Seattle. Twelve students at the University of Shandong in China are currently studying Hebrew as Hebrew College students online. Their university, along with University of Shanghai and Beijing University, has now approached Hebrew College to explore a broader affiliation in Jewish studies including online courses and faculty and student exchanges.

The potential applications of technology to Jewish formal and informal learning are enormous. The experiments that have been undertaken should be viewed as pilots that show that this mode of education can expand Jewish educational opportunities to those who have no access to in-person Jewish educational resources and can enhance the experience of those who do. Online learning is playing an increasing role in every area of academic endeavor — from *Torah Ishma* to scholarly research — with its importance in areas like *chevruta* learning, language instruction and curriculum creation just beginning to be understood.

The question that originally confronted online learning — can it be as good as being in the classroom with a master teacher — is already moot. That infinitesimal fraction of us with the time, money and geographical good luck to find ourselves in the presence of a true *Talmid Chacham* would be foolish to deny ourselves the pleasure. For the overwhelming majority for whom this is not the case, online learning is the key unlocking the treasure house of Jewish knowledge that is our collective right and heritage. As always, technology is not the *ikar* but simply the method; what makes Jewish distance learning exciting is the same thing that has made it exciting for millennia; the technology merely enables it to occur.

At a recent panel on the use of technology in Jewish Education, one of the speakers said what delighted him about online learning was that now he could study in *chevruta* anytime — even at 4:00 a.m., sitting in his basement in his underwear drinking a beer. The immediate response from an anonymous audience member: “What’s so new about that?” 🌸

ONLINE MENTSCH BUILDING >>

by YOSEF I. ABRAMOWITZ

Young children can be a joy and a challenge at the same time — and as every parent knows, there are times when having a non-judgmental expert would be just the thing. To meet this perceived need, Jewish Family & Life!, with the support of the Mayerson Foundation, embarked on a journey to offer online Jewish parent coaching to a group of pilot participants through JewishParentCoaching.com.

Participants in the pilot were paired with a Jewish parenting coach who was able to offer valuable parenting advice and a new venue to explore Jewish life with their preschoolers. Parents were able to work through many of the standard issues that parents struggle with like eating, sleeping and disruptive behavior. Many parents struggled with approaching the holiday season as part of an interfaith family or as residents in a non-Jewish town. Many struggled with raising Jewish children with non-Jewish grandparent involvement. Others face the challenges of carrying on a Jewish family after divorce. Other participants had very little experience being Jewish and were looking for advice on where to begin finding the way with their own family. The coaches provided insights into the incorporation of Jewish values, traditions and customs in a meaningful and realistic way into everyday parenting as well as helping them over the rough spots by offering practical advice, Shabbat greetings and words of encouragement.

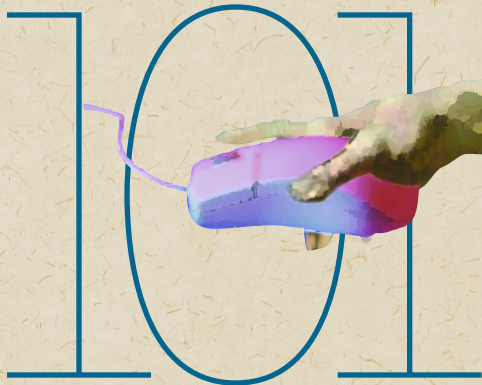
The online environment proved to be far more intimate than we ever believed as program participants formed deep connections with their coaches over the three-month trial period. The coaches not only had backgrounds in Jewish education, but all were actively engaged with parents of preschoolers as well as experienced parents. One parent commented, “I realized that Jewish tradition and wisdom contributed to my coach’s way of parenting and being. Encountering people like my coach has helped inspire me to become more involved Jewishly, on an individual (spiritual) and familial (ritual) level.”

Today’s time pressures, complicated family situations and declining membership in synagogues make the Internet a great way to connect with parents who want to bring a Jewish perspective or understanding into their parenting. If we are lucky, we will have many years of celebration with our children. JewishParentCoaching.com offers one more puzzle piece in the vast array of resources that will hopefully make this a reality.

Yosef I. Abramowitz is the CEO of Jewish Family & Life! and is co-author of *Jewish Family & Life: Traditions, Holidays and Values*. Visit his blog at www.peoplehood.org.

In the Blog-inning

Jewish Blogging



by ESTHER D. KUSTANOWITZ

Jewish blogs — weblogs that function as a hybrid of the personal journal and the online magazine — give voice to the vocally underrepresented and the disenfranchised, the alienated and the opinionated, the lonely and the social activists. It is a new community model that provides a framework for creativity, support and an open conversation that standard, offline contemporary Jewish life lacks.

IN THE BLOG-INNING

As Jews used to rally around the tabernacle and the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, today's Jews congregate around the issues in the JBlogosphere. Jewish blogs — weblogs that function as a hybrid of the personal journal and the online magazine — give voice to the vocally underrepresented and the disenfranchised, the alienated and the opinionated, the lonely and the social activists. It is a new community model that provides a framework for creativity, support and an open conversation that standard, offline contemporary Jewish life lacks.

Blogging starts small, with an issue or perspective, at the grassroots level — like a rumor at the shtetl market. One person finds a blog, and tells a few *yentas*. Via today's electronic *yentas* — email and hyper-linking — the rumor becomes something for opinionated tribemembers to investigate and form their own commentaries.

In the blog-inning, no one knew what

Esther D. Kustanowitz, a freelance writer based in New York, freely admits her blog-biases: in addition to her own blogs, JDatersAnonymous.blogspot.com and MyUrbanKvetch.com, she also writes for the group blog www.Jewlicious.com.

Jewish blogs were. And then 2002 hit, a year that witnessed the births of many influential blogs like Town Crier (June), Steven I. Weiss's Iatribe (October) and Protocols of the Elders of Zion (December), which also served, via its extensive blogroll, as a portal to other blogs. Shortly after Protocols was launched, Daniel "Mobius" Sieradski (see page 13) founded Jewschool, a hipper, more graphics-heavy design for material similar to what appeared on Protocols: trends in contemporary Jewish society, here and abroad, and reactions to Jewish and mainstream media coverage of such issues.

And it came to pass that Protocols begat many Jewish blogs, and influenced countless nascent bloggers as Jews began to get acquainted with the technology and potential that blogging presented. Jewlicious (July 2004) arrived just in time for a blog boom and was embraced by the blogosphere's young, birthright-israel-era Jews looking to connect with young, irreverent voices on tradition. Breaking new ground, Jewlicious teamed with birthright israel to produce a Jewlicious track and program for the Israel trip and with California's Beach Hillel to produce Jewlicious @ the Beach, a major student conference on Jewish identity now in its second year. For its part, Jew-



In areas where Jewish communal life is either absent or unsatisfying, the virtual community emerges out of necessity.

school also promotes Jewish social and social justice events, fundraisers, film screenings, conferences and other happenings in line with its mission.

DON'T BURN YOUR JCC MEMBERSHIP CARD YET...

Israel blogs provide amazing insight into life in the Holy Land, but in some ways, Jewish blogging owes its burgeoning popularity to Diaspora-dwelling Jews looking to connect. In areas where Jewish communal life is either absent or unsatisfying, the virtual community emerges out of necessity.

"Blogging provides an avenue to form 'virtual' friendships, built on shared interests and ideas — which may lead to real-world friendship," according to Oklahoma-based technology consultant Simon Fleischmann, who has been blogging off and on since 2002 at Up-Load.com. "This is especially important for Jewish individuals in much of the US, where fractionated communities have seen an ever-increasing decline in synagogue attendance and participation in Jewish life," he continues. "For individual Jews, who may have felt alone in a seemingly hostile world, this can only be a good thing."

As quickly as individual Jews have been to embrace blogging as a mode of connection, Jewish organizations are noticeably more tentative. One organization that has embraced a blog interface is the Jewish Outreach Institute. Most visitors to the site might not even realize that they're visiting a blog, but the medium provides a simple, user-friendly framework for opinions and feedback. "You can update it more easily and regularly," said JOI Associate Executive Director Paul Golin, also the site's main blogger. "You can also 'create community' by allowing comments. I think group blogs like Jewschool and Jewlicious do this well; it seems like the 'regulars' and cross-posters on such sites have created a community," he observes. But most bloggers and internet gurus acknowledge that the JCCs and synagogues of the world are still

safe. "Blogs are communication tools in the furtherance — not replacement — of physical community," Golin says, "including Jewish spiritual community."

WHOSE BLOG IS IT, ANYWAY?

Students or professional writers who blog do so to gain media visibility or because they want recognition for the sentences they've crafted. But a large contingent of Jewish and non-Jewish bloggers blog anonymously to maximize their freedom of self-expression. Under the cover of sobriquets — to protect their identities, their families, or their jobs — they reveal more than many people do even to their intimates.

"I think the anonymity is helpful in more ways than it is destructive," says Robbie Medwed, a Chicago-based Jewish educator who blogs at rjmedwed.blogspot.com. "We have a chance to be online who we can't be in real life, and with that we are able to speak freely and explore without being worried of community opinion." JOI's Golin opines that anonymity "does allow a certain debasement in the tone of discourse," but sees that as "a fair trade-off for the access to interdenominational dialogue that had all but disappeared from the scene until this new medium arose." A woman who blogs only as Orthomom says that blogging "affords people who live in [Orthodox] communities where conformity is part and parcel of their lives to express their frustration or anger regarding certain aspects of communal life in an anonymous forum. These criticisms can thus reach a large audience when they might otherwise have been left unsaid."

In 2005, one such voice took the Jewish blogosphere by storm. Nice Jewish Girl, a 34-year-old religious woman, had "never been kissed" because she observed the laws of *shomer negiah*, which precluded her physical contact with men until she is married. The blog (shomernegiah.blogspot.com) focused on her yearning for human contact, her burgeoning sexual desire and her

depression over remaining single in a religious world. She wondered if she was meant to be alone forever within her religious beliefs, or if she could give up her religious restrictions in order to secure companionship and satisfaction. An outpouring of understanding came from sympathetic readers, who assured her that her sexual and emotional drive for companionship was normal, but others condemned even her thoughts: by even considering the possibility of violating the laws of *shomer negiah*, they said, she was premeditating a life of sin.

The blanket of anonymity that liberates the opinionated-but-platformless also allows chronic *kvetchers* to react to world events, publications and other people with impunity, which isn't always a good thing. "Blogging is an interactive and instantaneous dynamic," says Jewlicious co-founder David Abitbol. "The real world doesn't give you as many opportunities to engage in that sort of discourse. Intervening layers of technology create distance, which encourages honesty." "All of us have been attacked and called horrible names online that never would have [been said] to our faces," added the blog's other co-founder, Laya Millman. "But we hope for a trickle effect, that by throwing our ideas out to the public sphere, people will think more about the issues in their own lives."

ALL THE REST IS COMMENTARY

If we think about the structure of the blog, a bell of recognition should ring somewhere within our Jewish collective unconscious. With one central text and commentary jutting out from every side, the similarity to the Talmud should be clear. The Talmud inspired academies of thought in Israel and in the Diaspora that gave voice to varying opinions in the spirit of rigorous discussion; online, blogs inspire an international academy without walls. By discussing the issues that affect Jews everywhere, blogs in some way represent the fulfillment of our textual, social and scholarly destiny. ✿

Blogging Our Way Back

by DANIEL SIERADSKI

I used to lament not being part of a Jewish community.

Despite coming from a fairly traditional background, I didn't have many Jewish friends where I grew up. After my parents lost their business (a result, in part, from a falling out with the Orthodox community in which I was raised), they couldn't afford to enroll me in a youth group, day school or Jewish camp — not that I would've been particularly interested anyway. We had had a rough ride, and I was reeling from the experience. I went from yeshiva straight into the public school system: One day it was “put your *kippa* on,” the next, “take your *kippa* off.” I never fully recovered from the culture shock.

In college, I could hardly relate to the kids in my campus Hillel chapter. Having spent the prior summer studying in yeshiva in Israel, I felt alienated from my classmates. My only Jewish friends on campus were secular and detached from Judaism. There, too, I had no real community.

When I finally left school and entered the “real world,” I landed a great job at a prominent Jewish organization in Manhattan and found myself smack in the middle of the liveliest Jewish community in North America. But I still had no one to have Shabbat dinners with. And I certainly had no place where I felt comfortable attending services. I felt as though I was “the stranger in your midst,” and I longed for a community that would welcome and accept me, warts and all.

I had started keeping an online journal in college, and so I was well acquainted with blogging and quite active and known in the “blogosphere.” As the full-time webmaster for the JCC in Manhattan, and as a freelancer for organizations such as the Andrea & Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, I saw quite a lot of interesting Jewish material in the course of a workday, but it wasn't really relevant to my readership. In 2002, thinking it might be a good vehicle for sharing this material, I decided to launch *Jewschool.com*, an online clearinghouse of all things Jewish.

Surprisingly, within a few months, *Jewschool* took off, and suddenly I was receiving

email from all sorts of interesting and exciting people doing innovative Jewish projects. They recognized a potential in *Jewschool* that hadn't even dawned on me, and soon enough I was collaborating on projects like JDub Records, Heeb and Bar Mitzvah Disco, and having interblog discussions with other major Jewish bloggers. These relationships helped *Jewschool's* readership soar, and I found myself receiving dozens of e-mails each day from perfect strangers expressing their interest in and support for the project.

In addition to sharing news stories, event notices and the like, I have also used *Jewschool* as a platform to engage with my Judaism — asking difficult questions about God, Torah, Israel and contemporary Jewish life, all the while expressing my admittedly irreverent, unconventional and sometimes controversial views. Oftentimes I receive email from other young Jews across North America, thanking me for being open about my difficulties with Judaism and Zionism and telling me of their struggles and how I've helped them feel as though they are not alone.

One such person is my friend Amy, who now lives in Jerusalem and studies at a yeshiva I used to attend. Amy discovered my personal weblog, *OrthodoxAnarchist.com*, over a year ago, and followed my adventures and my struggles living and learning in Israel. “Your website is my favorite thing in the world,” she wrote from Ohio, soon after discovering the site. “It really has changed my relationship with Judaism and wrestling with levels of observance and Jewish politics to know there's a *chevra* I relate to.” Amy, who had also never found the Jewish community she'd been longing for, finally found it when she discovered my blog. Now she lives down the block, and is a most welcomed addition to my community. She's quickly become one of my best friends.

Over the course of *Jewschool's* three years of publication, the e-mails have continued to pour in and I have met countless new people, made wonderful new friends and developed amazing new relationships. Suffice it to say that now when I'm in New York, there may be a fight over whose house I'm going to for Shabbat dinner. I also have at least half a dozen places in New York where I know enough people to feel comfortable *davening*. And I owe all of this to blogging.

Jewschool now has over thirty contribu-



tors from five countries, some of whom I've never met face-to-face, but with whom I have found kinship as we've shared many hours together chatting online. One by one, they come to visit me in Israel, however, and our friendships excel, as I play *madrich* for their visits.

Since its launch, *Jewschool's* readership has grown to 50,000 unique monthly visitors, which suggests it has definitely struck a chord with the wider Jewish community. *Jewschool* has generated a community of its own, with dozens of conversations taking place each day among the site's regular readers. In recent months, we have also organized several successful events, bringing our readers together for concerts, poetry readings and the like, fostering real-world community among them. As the members of the *Jewschool* community come in contact with one another in these real-world spaces, they too develop meaningful bonds, which translate into friendships and non-virtual ties. As the project continues to expand and grow, the opportunities for making these connections multiply as well.

Can blogging lead to meaningful Jewish communities? *Jewschool* is living proof that, indeed, it can. ✨

Daniel Sieradski is the editor-in-chief of *Jewschool.com* and the founding director of *Matzat* (matzat.org.il), a start-up non-profit specializing in the creation of online Jewish communities.

TODAY, IF YOU ARE JEWISH AND WANT TO FIND JEWISH FRIENDS OR A JEWISH SPOUSE, YOU JDATE. PERIOD.



JDate

Using the Power of the Internet to Build Community

by DAVID SIMINOFF



I would be surprised if any of you reading this article do not have a friend or family member who has met someone on JDate. There is a good chance you've attended a JDate wedding. Today, JDate has almost 600,000 active members around the world. We estimate more than one in ten single Jews in North America has a profile on JDate.

With very little marketing investment, JDate has grown by word-of-mouth. First throughout the Jewish community and more recently into the mainstream community, JDate has become part of our pop culture vernacular, with mentions on *Sex & the City*, *Ricki Lake*, *Nip/Tuck* and *Saturday Night Live*. JDate has been featured on *CNN Headline News*. Joan Rivers and Rosanne Barr have talked about searching for men on JDate. Howard Stern repeatedly promotes JDate on the air and even Tom Brokaw has mentioned the website. Its members have written songs about JDate. It has even inspired a Broadway play.

As JDate's name recognition continues to grow, what is even more striking is its widespread acceptance across generations within the Jewish community. Mothers purchase memberships on behalf of their sons and daughters, yet JDate still manages to retain its "cool factor" among young single adults.

JDate is helping to strengthen the Jewish community and ensure that Jewish traditions are sustained for generations to come by providing a global network where Jewish singles find life-long partners within their faith.

Given JDate's success, what can non-profit organizations learn from JDate so that they can better use the Internet as a vehicle

to build community?

JDate began with an understanding of, and sensitivity to, the Jewish community. The sensitivity of JDate's founders is what built JDate. Its founders understood the vacuum that single Jews felt and they did something about it. And, they did it better than anyone else.

JDate offers single Jews a sense of acceptance and belonging in a community so often focused on families. Particularly among young single Jews, who often find themselves away at school or enmeshed in their careers and separated from the associated networks of home, JDate provides easy access to a global community. For many single Jews, dating is associated with family pressure. JDate embraces single life and liberates the single person to make his or her own choices. JDate gives single Jews a voice where they once had none.

A website becomes a community when its members have a voice and the ability to interact. As each individual voice becomes part of the larger collective, it begins to resonate throughout the community.

At the core of our business is a natural human desire for connection. Over the years, the Internet has helped to smooth the very awkward transformations behind getting to know people. For this reason, the Internet is ideally suited to single people. It provides a huge opportunity to build alliances among groups and individuals who are socially and geographically separated. Creating a virtual community of people to rally around a cause or mission can be powerful, especially when it consists of people who may not otherwise interact. An online community can support fundraising efforts and help spread the word about an organization's activities to the public.

In this context, an online community can be a powerful tool to bring individuals together not only to share their concern for an issue but to bring about change. We witnessed an example of this in 2002, when over 1,500 JDate members answered our call to action and registered with The Gift of Life Bone Marrow Registry in order to save the lives of patients suffering from leukemia, lymphoma, aplastic anemia and a wide range of other life-threatening cancers, immune diseases and genetic disorders. One JDate member made a life-saving match and a successful transplant ensued. Through our "Giving Back" campaign, we continually utilize the strength of our membership base to strengthen the Jewish community.

Today, if you are Jewish and want to find Jewish friends or a Jewish spouse, you JDate. Period. However, our members are free to list themselves on other personals websites as well. Thus, we live in an intimately fragile world where users always have other options.

With that in mind, our ethos is that every single detail counts in the strive for perfection. It is not easy to do what JDate does. There are a myriad of processes that must be executed perfectly before somebody subscribes to our service. For JDate, much effort is required in order for our customers to come to trust us, spend money with us, love us and then find love on our sites.

In the non-profit world, a "customer" becomes a constituent, advocate, grantee, member or donor. Similar to JDate, all are there because they share a common mission or support a similar cause. It is the harnessing of this common mission and the conferring of a voice that are essential ingredients in the creation of a vibrant and sustaining Internet community. ❁

David Siminoff is President & Chief Executive Officer of Spark Networks plc, the parent company of JDate.



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e are building an institution that will enable practically unprecedented access to Jewish learning, one that can also change the very fabric of the Jewish community. Bill Gates has written, "The main advantage of any new technology is that it amplifies human potential." Indeed, a healthy and vibrant Jewish Internet will not only be efficient and pragmatic. It will be transformative.

It will be transcendent.

— DANIEL SEPTIMUS