



Tips For Marketing To The Jewishly Unengaged

by PAUL GOLIN

Effective marketing and effective programming both begin with the same step: understanding your audience. Who are you trying to reach? Why are you trying to reach them? And, what are you offering?

We are all good at tuning out commercials or other marketing noise when we need to, but on those rare occasions when we find something indispensable through an ad—a great new camera, a better job, even a significant other—we’re glad those marketers found a way to deliver the message into our consciousness. Marketing Jewish programs to the unengaged requires the same kind of persistence, innovation and excellent end product, and it can be just as rewarding for both parties. So where do you begin?

TIP 1 Don't Promise What You Can't Deliver.

The Jewish community has much to offer those searching (actively or otherwise) for meaning. However, many unengaged people have had uneven experiences with the organized Jewish community. After being promised a safe

space, or a spiritual transformation, or a meaningful encounter with welcoming folks, they are often met with tepid content, cliquish social circles, apathy and, in the worst cases, hostility. After a few negative “tastes,” it’s difficult to bring these people back to the community. This might be why today *less than half* of all Jews participate in institutional Judaism. Even the best marketing can’t save an organization that needs to completely revamp its programming or “corporate culture.”

Luckily, effective marketing and effective programming both begin with the same step: understanding your audience. Who are you trying to reach? Why are you trying to reach them? And, what are you offering? Marketing can help attract people to your program, but if you exaggerate, and the participants come away disappointed, it becomes another negative contact with the community. Even if your program is great, and you engage many unaffiliated Jews in Jewish activity, if you fail to move them into deeper engagement with the community (or at least offer some kind of “next step”), it’s not successful outreach.

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TIP 2 Go Where The People Are.

At the Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI), “outreach” means engaging the unengaged *where they are*, rather than waiting for them to come to us. One of our activities is to help institutions move beyond their own four walls to conduct “Public Space Judaism”—free Jewish life programs in malls, bookstores, parks and movie theaters. The rationale is twofold: to find people who are not on anyone’s lists, and to offer them Jewish content in neutral, familiar settings.

Even if you are not quite ready to move your programming into the public square, you should still move your mar-

pected locations at little to no cost. For example, when a JOI-sponsored program in Baltimore wanted to reach Jews in their 20s and 30s, they secured permission to post flyers in the bathrooms of popular bars and clubs. It worked because it found its audience, and it found them at a time when they may have been particularly receptive to a message that suggested there’s something better out there (than drinking in bars).

TIP 3 Identify and Lower Barriers.

Outreach is about removing barriers to participation. The programs of “Public Space Judaism” mentioned above

address the hesitancy many unengaged Jews feel about walking into our institutions. But language can be just as powerful a barrier as any physical space. While Hebrew is an integral part of Judaism and has bound our people together across time and continents, using Hebrew words in the marketing of your program probably won’t help reach unengaged Jews. By and large, they don’t speak Hebrew, and therefore have no

idea what takes place at your *havdalah* program, your *kiruv*, your learners’ *minyán* or your beginners’ *chavurot*. These terms are red flags signaling to the unaffiliated that they don’t have the Jewish education they think is necessary to access our institutions.

Even in English, inclusive language takes on greater importance in light of the growth of intermarried households and our community’s mixed results in engaging them. JOI has worked extensively with this population. One interesting trend we’ve noticed is that the programs that attract the most intermarried participation are those that offer the same to *all* Jews—for instance, a basic Jewish education or a fun family event—rather than singling out intermarried families for special treatment (even if that special treatment is positive).

For example, marketing a free Intro-

duction to Judaism course by simply stating, “all are welcome” may send a very compelling message to intermarried families, because the Jewish community is not demanding that they first self-identify as intermarried before it will serve them. The label “interfaith” might attract fewer participants, since many intermarried families see themselves not as two faiths but as a Jewish family where one parent is simply not “officially” Jewish.

Unless a program deals primarily with issues surrounding intermarriage, you should ask if there are more welcoming and inclusive phrases that can be used. JOI consulted with one Jewish day school in Tucson, Arizona, that devised the slogan, “All families raising Jewish children are welcome.” That’s a beautiful and inclusive message.

These are subtleties, but they are not lost on the target audience. Just one word can sour an entire message. For example, the marketing phrase “Keeping our children Jewish” sounds defensive, and begs the question, “Keeping from what...or from whom?” Intermarried families will recognize the implication. If the word “keeping” is simply changed to “raising,” the phrase would *include* intermarried Jewish families rather than potentially chide them.

While words are important, images can have an even greater impact. One thing to keep in mind is assumptions about what Jews “look like.” More often than not, the assumption is: white Ashkenazi and heterosexual. What messages do the images in your marketing materials send to potential participants who are Jews of color or same-sex parents?

It may seem a daunting task to get your message out there when it has to compete with all the noise emanating from the giant marketing machine, but it is possible. The tips above are a good place to start. However, they are just the beginning. Sharing “best practices” among Jewish professionals is another step, and for that JOI offers a resource called JOPLIN: The Jewish Outreach Professionals Log-In Network, online at www.JOI.org/joplin. Through this and other venues, we hope to work across denominational and institutional lines to help us all “raise the volume” of our Jewish programs to reach the unengaged. 🌟

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keting there. Unengaged Jews are not reading temple bulletins or buying local federation newspapers. They need to be reached through secular venues, including mainstream media. That might sound expensive, but it doesn’t have to be. Most local papers have free events listings, especially the free city papers that reach younger crowds.

If possible, develop rapport with local newpeople. Like consumers, reporters will not be easily sold; you need to provide them with real, newsworthy content. The best way to do so is through human-interest stories. Is there an individual or couple greatly aided by your program? Also, invite reporters to your events. The process might take time, but one column about your program can be worth ten paid advertisements.

Another option is “guerilla advertising,” placing your message in unex-

Marketing New Bridges

Where would you hold a party if you wanted to attract 20,000 people? Try downtown, along three closed-off blocks. That's exactly what

Jewish food, performances, children's activities and Judaica artists, as well as areas for communal institutions to dispense literature about their programs. It attracts a large, diverse crowd by lowering barriers to participation and bringing Judaism to where the people are. And it tries to "bridge" potential newcomers to the Jewish community by making connections and listening to needs. For these reasons, the Walter and Elise Haas Fund asked Jewish Outreach Institute to provide programmatic and marketing consultation to help New Bridges achieve its outreach goals.

So how does New Bridges bring in the masses? The street fair's best marketing comes in the form of free publicity. The event is newsworthy, and therefore receives

happens each year in Palo Alto, California, thanks to an innovative outreach initiative called New Bridges to Jewish Community and its "Jewish Cultural Street Festival."

The street fair offers



New Bridges' marketing, much like its street fair, goes where the people are.

both pre- and post-event coverage in the local newspaper, which also co-sponsors the event. Even without that advantage, however, New Bridges would attract people to its program through its smart marketing campaign.

For example, the fair is called "To Life! A Jewish Cultural Street Festival." Two important marketing decisions jump right out.

Many Jews understand the deeper significance of the phrase "To Life," but by keeping it in English, it broadens the audience to include the unengaged who may not toast *l'chaim* as frequently. And by adding the word "Cultural" after Jewish, it neutralizes concerns about a religious agenda.

Posters advertising the Festival are clean and simple, and include only

essential information. The artwork, while distinctly Jewish, retains a "Northern California Folksy" feel. More importantly, they are plastered around town



weeks beforehand in such places as banks, storefront windows and take-out restaurants. They are even reproduced on the back of a local supermarket's brown paper bags.

New Bridges' marketing, much like its street fair, goes where the people are. That should be of primary concern for all outreach marketing.

— PAUL GOLIN