

## **10 Things Your Temple Web Site Needs**

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### **1. Broad buy-in and lots of contributors — not just from techie Webmasters**

A Web site that's a passionate activity from one or more "web gurus" but lacks a lot of support from the Temple officers, clergy, professional staff and committee/auxiliary leaders may shine for a while, but then will peter out. The Web site should have broad buy-in, and should have representation and discussion at all levels of synagogue life. It's important, by the way, to not oversell what the Web can accomplish. Your Web site can help congregants and community find information. It's not a "push marketing" tool that can replace your monthly newsletter, e-mail newsletters and mailings, postcards, or fliers in your temple foyer. The Web site augments your other communications efforts — it doesn't eliminate them.

### **2. Steak AND sizzle — that is, it should be good looking AND filled with useful information**

Nobody wants a boring Web site. But nobody wants a site that merely has lots of great photos of your building and clergy, and not much else. Think about WHY people visit your Web site, and make sure those visits are successful. Chances are they're looking for something. Do you know what your congregants are looking for? Is it there? Can they find it?

### **3. A mix of both timely content and static reference — and a clear separation of the two**

Some people are searching your Web site for that's new and timely, like what time Shabbat services are this week, the pictures from last weekend's celebration, the Rabbi's most recent sermon, whether Religious School is open next week. Sometimes they're looking for more static information, like permission forms, the office phone number, MP3 files of the Torah blessings, clergy biographies or list of donation options. A best practice is to lead your site with the timely and changing information. Relegate reference material to deeper pages, but just make sure people can find it.

### **4. A good editor and a sense of "less is more"**

People don't go to the Web site to read War & Peace. They go there to find out if they want to buy the book! Similarly, they don't want a long verbose explanation of your Friday night service philosophy, they want to know when Tot Shabbat starts and if you're serving mac-and-cheese this month. When it comes to timely information, people don't read, they skim. They want answers, they want information, they don't want novels. What they don't want is a page full of text. Be brief! If you're writing the history of your congregation, use single sentences where paragraphs would do. A picture is worth 1000 words. Use the photo, spare the words, and your members will be happier.

### **5. Interactivity so that congregants can engage your site, not just refer to it**

Forms are a great way to involve members with your Web site — forms to register for religious school, for example, or to RSVP for events. You can also set up forums, snap polls, and other resources so that your members can contribute to your Web site, as well as just reading it. Now, bear in mind that if you make a lot of interactive features, they may get low traffic at first. Don't be discouraged!

## **6. Ways to increase temple revenue — in an appropriate way, of course**

Web sites offer tactful and tasteful ways to raise money for your synagogue. For example, you can create simple donation forms, which let your members (and other interested people) make donations in honor of memorials, simchas and "just because." If you sell prayer books, you can offer them on your Web site. You can also make money by setting up an Amazon associates, so that congregants can donate every time they buy something — Amazon pays between 4% and 8.5%. You can even sell ads. It's up to you — and to your clergy and lay leadership, of course.

## **7. A bright fresh face — without outdated forms, events and photos**

Stores regularly change their window displays. Does your Web site change its window display — that is, the home page? It's tempting to make the top of the home page (the first screen you see without scrolling) a static area, with a picture of your building or clergy, and perhaps your mission statement, but imagine how that looks to a congregant coming back. It looks like nothing has changed. Use this most precious real estate for the most timely information. If you show photos on your home page, consider rotating them through a slide show. Also, remove outdated information right away. Get rid of the flier for a 2005 Chanukah Fair, and the 2006-2007 religious school sign-up form. Nothing makes a site seem stale more than welcoming visitors with your High Holiday 2007 schedule.... in January 2008!

## **8. A modern "Web 2.0" look, feel and functionality**

Many of your congregants — and not just the young ones! — are very Web savvy. They use Google, they shop online, they spent hours in front of a browser. They are acutely aware of when a Web site is using old technology, and they appreciate the latest advances. There's no reason for your synagogue site to look like a relic of the old stetl. You can easily incorporate modern features like blogs, RSS feeds (i.e., incorporate external data sources), and even audio & video into your site. Be sure, of course, not to let dazzle overwhelm you. Also make sure that you can continue what you start, as nothing looks worse than a blog that's not updated regularly, or seeing audio feeds of your rabbi's last sermon... in March 2006. However, when used effectively and consistently, Web 2.0 technologies can make your site exciting and compelling, and make your temple seem modern.

## **9. Search engine optimization so people can find you easily**

Some people will find information on your Web site by browsing to your home page, and by navigating through your menus. But many other people will find information by searching through Google, MSN, Yahoo, and other search engines. Think about the type of queries that someone might make to find you, like "jewish school miami" or "bar mitzvah lessons bay area" or "reform congregation denver." Does your Web site come up? You can improve the odds by engaging in search engine optimization. That's a combination of making sure that pages have the right keywords and content, and that you provide the right "hints" to the search engine themselves. It's a bit of work... but it can improve your temple's Web visibility, and maybe even help new members find you.

## **10. Good hosting software and solutions, so you can focus on content and presentation**

Even if you're in Silicon Valley, the software engineers and computer scientists who belong to your congregation want Jewish programming, not HTML programming. In other words, try to find a Web site solution that is easy and frictionless for your lay leaders or professional staff — maybe even your clergy — to use and maintain. If your Web site is hard to update, it won't get updated very often. If it's hard to add photos, you won't get many photos. Your temple is in the temple business, not the Web business. Solutions like RJ Web-Builder and RJ Web-Express can provide the platform, leaving you to provide and arrange the content. Check it out today!

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