



Social Media & Communication



Using Facebook, the King of Social Media

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“Social Media represents the largest shift in communications in human history.”

-- Mike Lewis, VP of Marketing and Sales, Awareness Inc.

Now *that's* a bold statement. “*Social Media represents the largest shift in communications in human history.*” If that's truly the case, we better know what we're talking about so we're all on the same page.

If you don't know what “social media” is, don't feel bad. It was just added to the dictionary in August of 2011. That new dictionary entrée defines social media as “forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (as videos).”

While we now know that social media is quite important, and we know its definition, it would serve us well to look at it from a perspective articulated by Jeffrey L. Cohen, Social Media Marketing Manager at Howard, Merrell & Partners. He said, “Social media is not a tool or technology. It's a real-time approach to communications and engagement.”

Please notice the “E” word: engagement. Engagement is *the* buzz word behind the “social media” buzz. Engagement is really what it is all about.

As Charlene Li, co-author of *Groundswell*, said, “Twitter is not a technology. It's a conversation. And it's happening with or without you.” Broadening that to include Facebook is certainly appropriate and applicable.

In one ten-word sentence, Katie Delahaye Paine, CEO of KDPaine & Partners, a PR and social media research company, lays it all out: “‘Social media’ is still about people. It's about having conversations.”

The bottom line is this: It is in your synagogue's best interests to be a part the conversation that your members and potential members are having, so that they can ultimately be more engaged with synagogue life.

In this evolving, lightning-fast realm of social media, there are examples of what has been effective, and there are some basic, common-sense truths and tips.

If there are many social media platforms, where does one begin? As Paine so succinctly suggests, “Fish where the fish are.” And with 800 million users and growing, Facebook unquestionably is the place to begin. After you conquer Facebook, you can then explore the tactical use of Twitter, YouTube and/or Vimeo, and the use of QR codes. But in this article, the focus is on Facebook.

Start a Facebook page for your synagogue.

Before launching their Facebook page in July of 2009, Temple Israel in Memphis did not tread lightly into the Facebook foray. A detailed S.W.O.T. analysis was completed, and after looking at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, it became crystal clear that the pros far outweighed any perceived or real cons. Facebook is where a great number of people are having their conversations and sharing their lives with friends and families. Many synagogues claim to be “warm and welcoming” and “an extended family.” If that's the case, then it follows that synagogues take advantage of the opportunity to show that in a platform built just for that!

Have more than one administrator of your Facebook page.

If there is only one administrator and that person is, for whatever reason, not there or able to take care of the site, then your synagogue would be in quite a bind.

Set your synagogue's Facebook page setting such that even those who don't have Facebook accounts can at least view the page.

Doing this completely removes the barrier for those who don't have a Facebook account to at least be aware of what's going on. While it's true that they would not be able to post a comment or “like” an item, non-Facebook users will have the opportunity to be included.

Frequently post interesting items.

Remember, having a Facebook page is about joining the conversation and engaging with members and potential members. *You have to hold up your end of the conversation.* Having said that, Paine makes an important point about *what* to post: “Interesting content is king.” So, it's not enough to post for the sake of posting. It's much more valuable to post *interesting* items. And whatever you do, take the advice that Larry Weber, author of *Marketing to the Social Web*, suggests “...people don't want to be

sold. What people want is news and information about the things they care about.”

Post pictures.

People like to see photos of themselves and people they know. That’s why Facebook includes a mechanism to share them. They call it “tagging.” Simply put, it gives you the opportunity to bring more people into the conversation. Also, keep the caption interesting and as brief as possible. Note: even if you post pictures of minors, do not identify them either in the caption or by tagging them.

Post videos.

While it’s important to post videos, keep the length brief whenever possible. The truism that “there is too much of a good thing” holds here. The exception to brief (under 45 seconds) videos is posting sermons from Shabbat services.

Reply to people’s comments.

Having a conversation in real life is a two-way street: someone speaks, and then the other person speaks or, at the very least, reacts. So, when someone posts a comment on your synagogue’s Facebook page, a reply is suggested. It’s common courtesy in face-to-face conversations, and it is common courtesy for online conversations.

Monitor the comments.

This comes naturally if you are indeed posting items frequently. Plus, Facebook does have mechanisms to notify you when people engage on your site, so there’s no excuse not to be aware.

This is only the beginning of how the ever-changing field of social media is impacting communications. We will continue to strive to be effective, efficient and excellent communicators. Synagogue leadership and managers will be looking for new and creative ways to get their messages out and engage their members. Keep up the great work each of you do.

