



Telling the Story: Synagogue Communications

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Introduction

This communications manual provides instructions for developing and implementing a comprehensive communications campaign tailored specifically for your synagogue. Not only are Conservative shuls different from those of other streams, but your shul, like every other one, has at least one trait that makes it entirely unique, unlike any other. This manual will speak directly to how Conservative synagogues should identify their own messages and implement their own campaigns. What might be incredibly effective for your shul in your community may be ineffective, or even detrimental, for another. Launching a communications campaign tailored to your specific strengths and unique characteristics is crucial to nearly all successful outreach efforts. Many shuls have similar messages, but yours must be different from others in some way; at least it must make it seem slightly different from other shuls in your community.

With this in mind, remember that you need not reinvent the wheel. You can look to the political, nonprofit, and private sectors to think of communications campaigns that have resonated with the public and demonstrated the uniqueness of the person or subject in question. President Obama's election campaign is a good example of an effective communications plan that created messages unique to one person. In the crowded world of Jewish nonprofits, organizations constantly try to identify and market characteristics that differentiate them from the competition. There is little point in taking the time and effort to articulate messages that don't distinguish the uniqueness of your synagogue – in other words, of your product.

As you move forward and use the tools and strategies discussed in this manual, you can think of your efforts as a kind of campaign. You are working to convince people to believe in what you offer. The following guidelines are proven techniques that have been used to do just that, whether in a political race or the private and nonprofit sectors. Your synagogue can implement its own communications campaign and realize its own successes.

Good luck.

Guide to Synagogue Communications

Discussions that center on publications that publicize an organization (your synagogue, in this case) tend to divide people into two camps—the first emphasizes publications’ physical attributes and the second stresses the number of messages actually sent out. While both sides in this quality-vs.-quantity debate make a valuable point, neither is entirely correct.

That’s because this argument ignores two essential larger points. First, while your shul’s publications are an effective means of reaching your intended audience, they are not the only means available, and second, before this discussion ought even to begin, a shul’s leaders must zero in on the overarching message they wish to convey to members and to the outside world — an umbrella message relevant to all media, no matter their physical attributes or frequency. This message, which often is called an elevator speech, mistaken as a mission statement, or dismissed as a bumper sticker slogan, is vitally important. Your members and staff must hear, know, and embrace this message before you can expect outsiders to buy into it.

Message Development

What is an umbrella message? A message is something more than a slogan – it’s a basic idea about an institution’s purpose that you should be able to express briefly and adapt to all facets of your congregation’s offerings. A traditional political message might focus on “working hard for people” or “creating change you can believe in.” A classic synagogue message probably would include something along the lines of “building bridges to your community” or “enhancing spirituality” or even “something for everyone.” Whatever it is, every synagogue needs to come up with its own brand, or overarching message, that speaks to its own strengths and goals and offers a clear sense of what it stands for.

And while each shul’s message will be unique to its own circumstances, such messages, if they are to be successful, also must have several elements in common. They have to be compelling and contextual, meaning they must fit the times and feel appropriate, not rather than out of place. They must not use outdated language or concepts; they must be believable; and they ought to offer some sort of contrast between your shul and the competition (which includes other synagogues and Jewish institutions and non-affiliation). Highlighting differences does not mean going negative. It simply means that you have to include something in your message that distinguishes your shul from other organizations, highlighting that which is unique or special about it, those characteristics that compel affiliation. For example, you can identify your shul as “a spiritual community” or emphasize that it’s “more than just a building.” If spirituality is your thing and you are in a town with only two shuls, your message might be that yours is “the only truly spiritual shul” or that yours is the shul “where spirituality matters”—these messages subtly indicate that you offer a real spiritual experience while the other doesn’t or does so less successfully. Synagogues should not engage in negative messaging; but where there is even friendly competition, messages must contain contrasts.



Following are some brief guideline for message development:

You message should be:

1. **Clear:** It must be written in easily-understood words that can be internalized and repeated by your spokespeople.
2. **Concise:** No more than a few sentences.
3. **Contrasting:** A message that does not contrast is incomplete. Every time your shul talks about itself, it is also talking about the competition. By explaining what your shul represents, you are defining the differences between it and other Jewish institutions or the choice of not affiliating at all.
4. **Memorable:** The message should be easily internalized by everyone who talks about the synagogue and by everyone who hears it. This means it must be easy to remember.
5. **Persuasive:** The message should convince the convincible and retain the affiliated. It will not, on the other hand, convert the heathen. In other words, some people are nearly impossible to persuade. Don't waste your time and resources trying to reach them.
6. **Believable:** A message can't be persuasive if your target audience won't believe it. In an ever-more-cynical age, people are increasingly suspicious. If your message sounds too good to be true, would-be congregants may well assume that it is not true.
7. **Consistent:** If you are not disciplined in how you convey your message, people will have trouble remembering what your shul is all about.

As it develops a message, a synagogue has to identify its *goals*, its *target*, and its *environment*.

Goals

What are we trying to achieve through our synagogue's communications? Are we trying to build membership? Retain membership? Increase participation? Generate gifts and increased support for the synagogue? Gain support for our external programs? Are we looking for community *kavod* (recognition) for the good work that we do? All of these are possible goals. And a synagogue's goals may include all or some or parts of the above. What's important to keep in mind in developing our overarching message is that different things we do and say are meant to engender different goals and responses.



Targets

Who are you trying to reach through your synagogue's communications? Current congregants? Would-be congregants? Communal leaders? The community at large? The world? Everyone?

Different themes are meant to reach different audiences. This isn't to say that a synagogue with many target audiences should say contradictory things. Remember, we must be disciplined in our efforts to project a consistent message. However, in projecting our message we probably will want to emphasize different points to different people—after all, we have different goals for different people and different parts of the synagogue will be attractive to different groups.

The Environment

What else is out there? Is yours the only synagogue in town? The only Conservative synagogue? Is there friendly competition with other synagogues and Jewish institutions? Or even churches? And what are we competing for? Membership? Participation? Money? Media? Other recognition? What is our niche in this environment? What are reasonable expectations?

When we examine a synagogue's environment, we should include an internal evaluation. It's important to consider all aspects of the synagogue's life, from prayer and spiritual opportunities to educational offerings. Do you have a pre-school, a religious school, a day school, adult ed programs? What do you offer in the way of pastoral support? Life cycle events? Social action? Events for different age groups and demographics?

Identifying your environment also means taking the measure of your competition. What do others offer that you don't? Is this deficit okay? How do you compensate? Or conversely, what do you have that others don't have at all?

Let's say the local JCC has a beautiful pool and a terrific health club, and your synagogue does not. Well, most likely that's okay, because that's not what your shul is about. What if another shul has a mikvah and you don't? Is *that* okay? That may be all right too; after all, there just isn't *that* much desire for a mikvah among your congregants (even if it is a point of pride and fulfills an important communal need). But say another shul has a sizzling singles program—and you really want one too. Your synagogue has to take stock of how its offerings compare to others and to determine how you feel about it. Emphasize your positives and differences, but at the same time be aware of your weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

Research

The more precisely targeted your message is, the more successful it will be in achieving the results you want. But how do you go about targeting it? In order to answer this question, you have to do what marketing people always do first. They gather information.



In determining the right marketing strategy, it is important to note that the marketing plan for a new brand of toothpaste is quite different from the marketing plan for a political candidate, which also differs vastly from the marketing plan for a synagogue. On top of that, while there are great similarities across the country, the marketing strategy for a congregation in Des Moines, Iowa, is likely to be very different from one in Brooklyn, and both of those will be different from one in Westchester or on Long Island.

As you begin, ask yourself the following question: Who are your members and potential members? It may help to use terminology from the business world. Instead of referring to members and potential members, let us use the terms “customers” or “clients.” Using this language will help us to visualize a relationship where (1) members are treated as people whose needs we must serve (that is, whose needs we must identify and meet) and (2) potential members are looked upon as people whom we must attract. In other words, we must remember that clients will not be won over by a pitch that emphasizes their obligations to us, but rather by a presentation that stresses what we can do for them.

In an ideal world, a shul could afford to survey its membership professionally, to initiate some process whereby it could learn about its own members’ wants, desires, and views on the shul with a high degree of accuracy. Through this process, the shul’s leadership would seek to learn what’s working; what attracted people; what congregants want more of; and what puts the shul at risk of losing its membership. They could ask congregants how they came to be members; why they remain members; how we risk losing them. And losing them to whom? Where would they go? Move to another city or another neighborhood? To independent minyanim? JCCs? Or just to is affiliation, because they were not adequately engaged with the congregation or were only affiliated through preschool or until their children became b’nai mitzvah? We could ask them about dues; giving to the shul; other monetary issues. We could ask them how they decide to participate in shul activities, and why.

While such professional polling is prohibitively expensive, online programs such as Survey Monkey are making it possible to do somewhat sophisticated surveys leading to an all-out baseline poll of all a synagogue’s members, or to informal or professionally led focus groups. This, certainly, would make identifying our goals, targets and environment easier, even if the polls weren’t on the same level as those conducted by Harris or Gallup.

An even greater luxury would be the ability to survey former members to find out why they left, along with other non-members to determine why they belong to another shul or to no shul at all. Why are they unaffiliated? What would lead them to affiliate? Where do they go for any of the kinds of things a synagogue typically offers? Why do they enroll their children in your nursery school even though they do not join the shul? Surveys of former members, which are frequently done, can provide informative answers to these questions.

This kind of research would help develop the kinds of messaging that could reach particular targets. Each target should receive slightly different information - or themes - that fall under the same larger umbrella message. A shul, after all, has many, many different things it wishes to convey, ranging from what time services begin, to what to do if someone dies, to what programs are being offered that week, month, or year. None of these is an

umbrella message but each is important to different constituencies, and projected properly each can help grow the membership.

At a minimum, each synagogue should attempt to conduct exit phone interviews with congregants who leave or let their memberships lapse.

What we convey to specific targets:

Now, having developed our umbrella message, we can return to our different targets to identify what's most important to convey to whom.

Members, for example, need to know specifics—what's going on in the shul: Mincha this Shabbat is at 5:45. We need Torah readers for the week after next. The Tu B'Shevat seudah is potluck this year. We have a new adult education program, and an exciting speaker the week after next.

For would-be members, though, we produce a broader message, highlighting certain events that reinforce our wider theme: "community," "the one Jewish institution where everything happens," "one-stop spiritual shopping," or whatever it happens to be.

We may wish to convey a particular theme about our shul to community leaders, and another theme to would-be givers. This latter theme might be a message highlighting our success while still emphasizing our needs.

All of our message must include examples that reinforce the umbrella message.

The Synagogue Member as Customer/Client

As we discussed above, it may be helpful to think of your members as customers or clients. Following through on this analogy, we might then say that satisfying your customers is the end goal of your work (of course we also seek to do other, larger things – like building community, celebrating Judaism, and preserving the Jewish people – but these are accomplished by satisfying our customers). You must realize that you will never satisfy everyone. For one thing, the message of your synagogue may be anathema to a particular group, which will need to look elsewhere for a better fit. In addition, financial resources can stretch only just so far — and a group that is looking for facilities or programs that it cannot afford might do better to go elsewhere over the long term. Finally, there are instances in which a synagogue must simply say no. For example, a member may have to be told that it is simply not permissible to take photographs at a simcha that occurs on Shabbat.

People do not join a synagogue the same way they do a sports club, for example. In belonging to a congregation, their attachment is religious, emotional, social, spiritual and in some cases political. Members have a real stake in what the synagogue does and are likely to take their engagement with the congregation quite seriously. The concept is not — or should not be — that they pay dues and receive their specified quota of services. Rather, we are talking about a deeper and more complex relationship and identification. Therefore, members must not be treated as anonymous callers, somehow interfering with the synagogue's regular work routine, but as customers, clients, or consumers. Indeed, it can be said that these interruptions *are* our work, as one synagogue exec puts it. Members are entitled not only to have their needs addressed but to be listened to at every level of their contact with you. The idea here is not to create a cadre of “bosses” who take it upon themselves to tell the synagogue how to function. Rather, the goal is to engender feelings of ownership, or partnership, among the members of your congregation.

There are three guidelines to keep in mind when we think about these issues (whether we deal with clients ourselves on a daily basis or have some influence over those who do):

1. Administration is a tool, not an end. Paper pushing is something we all have to do — but if no one reads our papers, if no one gets them or trusts what they have to say or believes that they are relevant to him or her — then what have we accomplished? You have to define your end goals and realize that your daily activities are merely means toward an end.
2. You must be initiators — it is not enough to wait to be called. Rather, you must actively seek to establish personal contact and personal rapport with those you hope to serve. In other words, once you have defined your end goals, you have to take affirmative action to implement them.
3. You need to build a climate of confidence. Unfortunately, those you want to help do not always think of you when they need help. Perhaps they do not know you offer a particular service. (That is where number 2, just above, comes in — that is, you call and tell them that you are available.) They do not have to end up calling the local

Chabad center or look to a for-profit funeral parlor: You can provide siddurim for a house of shiva. Or perhaps they do not really believe, for whatever reason, that there is anything you can do for them. It is imperative that you enhance your credibility by both offering and performing services, and by having people learn about them.

Aggressive Hospitality

Your customers may not always be right, but they should leave satisfied. You have to display aggressive hospitality when dealing with customers. This means going out of your way to see that you pay attention to a customer's deeper needs, not just the initial request.

In a restaurant, aggressive hospitality is displayed when your waitress comes over to you after you have finished your main course and rather than simply asking "Is there anything else you would like?" brings you a dessert tray and says "Which of these would you like for dessert?" Although you may not have intended to order dessert, now that you are aware of what desserts are offered, you may decide to indulge.

This same principle applies with a synagogue. Perhaps members are unaware that they may receive a special aliyah on a birthday or anniversary. Do parents of nursery schoolers know about adult education classes or guest lecturers at the shul? Do they know about Shabbat youth programs and about family Shabbatot? Holiday celebrations? Opportunities to participate in social action programs? Do families have to ask about these programs or — like the tempting desserts on the tray — are they placed before your members in a tantalizing way?

In this context, you must also determine whether you are user-friendly. Malls have information desks; national parks carry illustrated maps indicating "You are here," and popular tourist sites sport many visitors centers. What is your synagogue equivalent?

It is very important to realize that the person in contact with the client has more to do with the image of the organization than virtually any other factor. It is the bank teller, not the bank president, who has the most direct impact on the greatest number of customers. This must be drummed home repeatedly to all those who deal with synagogue members and members of the public on the synagogue's behalf — whether its the person on the phone, the voice mail, the emailer whose name is on the message, or the author of a newsletter article.

Returning calls, getting back to people when you say you will, following up on calls even when the other person is late getting back to you — all immeasurably enhance the good will in a relationship and set the tone for a successful interchange. Do the unexpected; be the Nordstrom of synagogues. (Note to the uninitiated: Nordstrom will do anything for any customer. You can return things a year later. The customer really is always right there.)

The person who can inject enthusiasm into a business telephone conversation automatically enhances the image of the organization he or she represents. It is the job of the synagogue representative to make your callers truly enjoy speaking with her and want to call your synagogue again. The best way to accomplish this? Train your staff!



Customer Complaints

One of the hardest things to do is to deal with customer complaints. There is, however, a tried and true procedure that can help placate even the angriest callers.

The first rule when dealing with complaints is: Do not be overly sensitive. Rather than heed your first instinct, which likely is to end the call as quickly as possible, look on the experience as an opportunity to solve a problem. After all, these callers are not angry with the person answering the phone. In most cases, they are angry because they feel that the synagogue has not been listening to them.

When dealing with clients' complaints, it is always important to listen. Listening presents you as sincere and opens the door to a wealth of interesting information. Over the telephone, particularly, the listener must appreciate the caller's opinions by providing feedback, even if this feedback is only an affirmation of what is being said or a simple "I understand." By listening to clients' complaints, we are able to provide a good outlet for correcting poor service. Also, this is an invaluable way to supplement the survey suggested at the start.

It may well be frustrating for congregants when they have to deal primarily with printed materials. Now that they have a real person on the line, they are going to sound off. Let them get it off their chests. Lend a patient ear. Sometimes this is all it takes to turn a lion into a lamb.

If you are able to help with the problem, assure your caller that you will do so immediately. If there is no happy solution to the problem, explain the reasons patiently and thoroughly. If the caller's anger is the result of a bad experience he or she has had with the synagogue, it is up to you to make amends. Avoid making excuses, looking for someone else to blame, or explaining how the error might have been made. Take full responsibility for the problem, regardless of whose fault it was, and apologize (then, maybe, have someone else follow up). Remember, you are your synagogue to that caller.

Once you have made a promise, do not forget to follow through. One more empty promise is all it may take to turn this caller away forever.

Be knowledgeable and firm. Know what the synagogue can and cannot do for congregants and others. Not every complaint can be handled in the same way. Learn synagogue policies and learn how to explain them to your callers in a way they can understand. And remember the famous story about the Nordstrom sales clerk who took back a pair of tires that a customer wanted to return – even though Nordstrom doesn't sell tires. Figure out a way for the staff person on the phone to have some authority to solve problems. Empower the staff to solve problems, then be supportive of their decisions (whether or not you feel they made the right judgment).

Message Delivery

“Message Delivery” refers to the tools at our disposal to get our message out to our target audiences. These tools include, but are not limited to: the synagogue bulletin, flyers mailed to synagogue members, advertising in the Jewish media, other paid advertising, free publicity, direct mail, the Internet, social media, events and guerilla marketing.

Message delivery can be divided up into several different categories: We can talk about paid media vs. free media, active delivery vs. passive delivery, or internal communications vs. external communications.

- **Paid media** refers to advertising and direct mail campaigns and possibly to viral Internet messaging. Free (or earned) media means getting programs and people into the news.
- **Passive delivery** refers to media that others must seek. They must look for your shul in some way. Your website is a good example of passive media. The outgoing message on the synagogue’s voicemail is another. The bulletin board at the shul is still another. Or let’s say Israel elects a new prime minister and a reporter calls the synagogue looking for a quote. This is passive delivery – a reporter is writing the story anyway, and now your shul can be in it.
- **Active delivery** includes media such as direct mail, automated phone calls, advertising, email, social networking, and aggressive use of internet search engines, and news stories in news media specifically about your shul, one of its programs, events or leaders. These are all active tools in which you identify something interesting going on in your synagogue that effectively exemplifies your message and actively work to disseminate that information. These types of stories, where you seek out the reporter rather than vice versa, are much more valuable when they get into the paper because they allow you an opportunity to drive your message, not to simply respond to someone else’s story.

There are several modes of internal communications tools available to synagogues:

- **The synagogue bulletin/newsletter:** Despite technological advances, the dead tree edition of the synagogue bulletin still remains an effective way to reach congregants. That being said, synagogues also should take advantage of new technologies where possible. Email is another good way to get an electronic version of your bulletin to members, as are links to and on the synagogue website.
- **Bimah announcements/Order of Service:** Announcements during services are a good way to reach active congregants who attend services regularly. The “order of service” or “Shabbat announcements,” as they are called in many shuls (which essentially are the printed version of the bimah announcements) is another effective way to reach shulgoers. It has the added benefit of giving them something to take home as a reminder. (But, obviously, only those people actually go to services receive these announcements.)

- **Postal mail:** Flyers, postcards, and other printed materials sent through the mail are yet another way to reach your in-house targets. But try to stay away from the stale letter-in-an-envelope or twice-folded flier formats that too many others use and too many of us simply throw away. Take a page from political direct mail and try four-color post cards. They stand out from the pile, are easy to read, and can be less expensive.
- **“Kid mail” or “backpack mail,”** sent home with students in any of your schools, can be a direct and very inexpensive way to reach out.
- **Email:** Not enough shuls are using email to reach enough congregants, but they ought to be. It’s a great way to reach large numbers of people quickly. Email can be used in different ways: there are simple text emails, enriched text, html, and emails that include links to the synagogue website or other sites of interests. Viral emails, which often are especially creative or include some humor, reach a very large audience, because the original recipient is enticed to pass it on to his or her network of contacts. If you don’t already have all your congregants’ email addresses find a way to get them, even if it involves a contest, petition, or some other way to get congregants to give them up.

A word of warning: Be careful not to overuse email. People tend to tolerate more junk mail in their postal mailboxes than in their email in-boxes. Remember that recipients can’t opt out of postal mail as easily as they can from email. We do not want people to unsubscribe from synagogue communications. That would be a clear sign that we’ve gone too far. And once that happens it’s very hard to get them back on the list.

- **Phone tree:** The phone tree may be old-fashioned, but in some cases it can still be extremely effective. Personal contact – never mind from someone you may actually know – will always be the most persuasive means of communication.
- **Automated calls:** Some synagogues experiment with automated calls, although most of those that do reserve this method of communication for very rare use or for emergencies. Most people insist they like these least, but they do listen. Robo-calls, as they are now sometimes called – as with so much communication – are all about who delivers the message. A rabbi’s brief high holiday message would not be a bad place to start.
- **Local Jewish newspapers:** At first glance, your local Jewish paper seems obviously to be an external communication tool, and indeed when your synagogue appears in your Jewish paper, it can be a source of *kavod* among Jewish community leaders and the Jewish community as a whole.

But the local Jewish paper also is a terrific additional way to speak to your own membership. If you’re a medium-size synagogue in a medium-size city, using the local paper to address your own membership is smart communicating. People tend to appreciate what they see there more than what they read in the newsletter — stories and

ads in these publications have the imprimatur of an outside source, lending them added credibility.

These local papers are least effective in building membership. That's because unaffiliated Jews do not subscribe to them; and since it is easier to get unaffiliated Jews to join your shul than to convince members of other synagogues to switch memberships, local Jewish papers and (other) internal communications tools are not particularly effective for membership building. Even so, articles in such publication can build members' pride in your shul, which is always a good thing, and oftentimes they will clip such appearances in the media and share them with non-member friends. And even if it only helps retain them as ongoing members, that's no small thing.

So, use your local Jewish paper, even if you think it's in no danger of winning a Pulitzer prize.

External Communication Tools

Step one in identifying the most effective tools that will allow a particular synagogue to spread its message is identifying the best messengers. Who, in other words, is speaking on behalf of the shul? At most shuls, the answer will probably involve senior clergy, the synagogue executive, and the lay leader, though not necessarily in that order. It might even be a particularly prominent member. And it might not always be the same person. It depends what story you're trying to tell. Maybe the rabbi talks about spirituality and prayer, the president discusses interesting programs, and someone else does fundraising. Where it can, a shul should carefully choose its spokespeople, and determines when they can talk without permission, and on what issues, particularly when it involves bad or controversial news.

There are a number of effective external communications tools that synagogues can use. As with internal communications tools, different tools should be used to reach different audiences.

- **Local mainstream newspapers:** Advertising in these papers is expensive, but the ability to get a paper to write a story about something going on in the shul is not. But simply being in the paper is not enough. There's an old joke about getting newspaper publicity: "I don't care what you say about me as long as you spell my name right." This no-publicity-is-bad-publicity approach is misguided. If you're mentioned in the paper but are off message that is not going to enhance or reinforce the synagogue's brand, and is not particularly valuable. Moreover, when a better, more on-message opportunity presents itself the next week, you may have used up your turn in that paper for awhile.

Just being in the paper isn't enough. Why you're in there matters. In a small community, a paper's religion writer might come to you for all things Jewish. But if there's competition with other Jewish sources, you need to choose what you want to talk about so that you brand the shul in a way that people will remember and that will distinguish it from other institutions. Just being willing to talk about anything can have very little value.

- **Local TV and radio:** it's hard to get your shul on local TV and radio news, but it's possible. Try.
- **National media:** This includes both international Jewish/Israeli media (JTA, the Forward, the Jewish blogosphere, the Jerusalem Post, Ha'aretz) and the mainstream media (The New York Times, USA Today). It is extremely rare for an individual shul to find its way into one of these international news media. You have to be extremely picky about pitching stories to these outlets. It is possible to do so, but these types of media do not really speak to your primary targeting goals, anyway. Rather, they address your largest and probably least important target – the global audience. Don't spend a lot of time thinking about USA Today or the

Jerusalem Post (and remember that they don't spend any time thinking about you). Concentrate first on your local metropolitan, community, and neighborhood papers.

Some basic guidelines for dealing with the media:

Respecting reporters means respecting their deadlines. Different types of media have different deadlines, but the general rules are the same for all: Do not wait until the last minute. Make sure that a reporter does not hear your pitch for the first time just before deadline. Be accessible; return reporters' call ASAP. There are different types of stories. Some are planned far in advance and report trends or profile groups and/or leaders. Other stories evolve on a daily basis. Still others are breaking news stories, those that come up as a surprise during the course of a news cycle. Others cover events and programs. And still others are tied to the Jewish calendar. Know your deadlines; know whom to call when and when each type of media decides what to cover.

P.S. Want to know who covers what issues at the newspaper? Read the paper. If that doesn't work, call the paper. You don't need a fancy media guide.

Daily Newspapers

Reporters at dailies have varying deadlines. Certain reporters write mostly features, and therefore have more relaxed deadlines. Reporters who cover specific beats — education, city government, cops and courts — generally write every day. It is important to target these reporters early in the day – or earlier in the week – to get on their radar screen as a source or as the contact for a source on that day's happenings. As a general rule, try to speak with them in the morning. The earlier you contact reporters, the better the chance that they will buy your pitch. Do not wait until 5 p.m. to call. More often than not you have already missed the boat, unless it is a serious breaking or developing story.

Lots of reporters might cover your synagogue from time to time but none could be more important than the religion writer, if your paper has one. You have to know him or her.

Breaking news follows its own rules. The minute you hear something, the clock starts. The sooner you speak to a reporter, the better the chance you will get in the breaking story. Do not worry if it is late in the day; just contact your targets as fast as possible. The paper will not truly close ("go to press") until late at night, as late as 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. Also, don't worry about the weekend, because if a real story occurs, they will cover it – even if they have less staff.

We often become too dependent on press releases when news is breaking. We spend so much time vetting the language and getting it perfect that we miss the media opportunity. Instead, pick up the phone, call the reporter, say that you'll have a press release within the hour and say what your official/source/president/exec would say if contacted. Some reporters don't rely too much on press releases at all and prefer an immediate phone interview; in other words, press releases aren't always needed.



Features reporters covering the big picture will have softer deadlines; they won't usually be rushing to print late in the day. Still, follow the general rules for contacting reporters: earlier in the day is better, because many of these writers also cover beats and produce daily stories.

Jewish Newspapers

The deadline for Jewish papers is generally the same across North America. These weeklies start layout, putting together the look of the paper, on Monday and go out the door to the printer on Tuesday night or Wednesday. Neither of these days is ideal to pitch or try to place a new story, but there are always exceptions. It makes sense, however, not to bother editors and writers on these days with stories for the following week. You can always send an email that you'd like to talk about an issue off deadline.

The optimal days to pitch to Jewish writers and editors are Thursday and Friday, when they start to get an idea of what next week's paper will look like. Be mindful of Shabbat and the accompanying early closing times on Fridays, particularly during the winter, when the sun sets earlier. Also be mindful of holidays, both Jewish and secular.

Features at Jewish papers are much the same as those in daily newspapers. The deadlines are softer, and reporters are less likely to be rushing to deadline. Still, follow the general guidelines for Jewish papers.

Also, it is wise to plan ahead: Have your Chanukah, Pesach and Rosh Hashanah stories and photos ready for the call far in advance.

The Wires

Wire services, which include the Associated Press (AP) and Reuters, among several others, do not have specific deadlines. Writers produce stories as the news demands it, and they sometimes update them as stories evolve. Even if you miss the first filing, there is still a chance that pitching a reporter will yield a mention in a later version of the same story. AP has bureaus in many big cities and state capital across the United States. Reuters has very few.

The JTA (formerly the Jewish Telegraphic Agency) widely considered the Associated Press of the Jewish world, is unlike other wires in that it produces briefs twice daily, at about 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. Reporters generally will file their briefs an hour before each deadline. JTA reporters are constantly filing news stories — even though they might not be posted on its Web site, www.jta.org — until 6 p.m. Although JTA publishes stories Sunday through Thursday, its load is much heavier on Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays, when the agency gets stories to its client newspapers just before press time.

Television Networks and Affiliates

When soliciting television coverage, whether dealing with a network or a local affiliate, the assignment meeting is the most important deadline to beat. That meeting, which takes place early each workday — generally between 9 and 10 a.m. — dictates where each producer, camera, and reporter is sent for the day. However, if you have breaking news, do not hesitate to call a TV station. Networks and affiliates always have cameras and on-air talent available for breaking news. Ask for the assignment editor.

As with any media, try to contact them in advance. Further, have a media policy in place: Are reporters and cameras allowed in the building on Shabbat? Do you discourage the filming of congregants leaving shul? Do you shield kids from photos without parental consent?

The Associated Press Daybook, which is a list of local events, and other daybooks that might be in your area are a great place to help secure television cameras for your event. Whenever there are cameras at your event that you did not ask for directly, usually they're there because someone learned about it on the Daybook. In most cities, large and small, the Associated Press distributes a daily listing of all events. This is THE most important target for an upcoming event. Every broadcast outlet, reporter and assignment editor reads the Daybook religiously (no pun intended). In many cities it is updated throughout the day. If you're not on the Daybook, you may soon learn the answer to every public relations professional's nightmare — if you hold an event and no media come, did the event really happen?

Each Daybook has its own rules, depending on who runs it. Some still prefer faxes, most want emails; call the Daybook coordinator and always follow his or her requirements. Sending a media advisory to the AP bureau is not always the same as sending to the Daybook. Follow up by phone with the Daybook editor to ensure that your event is listed.

National and Local Cable Television News

These outlets operate at much the same pace as news wires like the AP and Reuters. As news happens, they report it in almost real time. There are two different types of coverage on these channels, planned programming and dayside/nightside coverage. Planned programming shows air at a specific time, either daily or on certain days. They have booking and planning producers who handle only that show. Depending on the timing of the show, you should call these producers at appropriate times. Some national cable shows book their guests the day of the show, but some book a full day or two, or even a week in advance.

Dayside and nightside coverage are the basic ingredients of cable news. Anchors sit at the news desk or in the studio and report the news, lead discussions, and introduce other segments. Each network or station has its own team (the size of that team is dependent on the size of the network or station) that manages guests and news stories. They also have separate teams that work the weekends. Be timely, and only call these people if there is a pertinent story to pitch, and talk fast because they are going to rush you.

Radio news functions in much the same fashion as cable television news. There is a constant barrage of information and therefore there is no true deadline. As is true with other types of news outlets, the earlier the better. Be sure to recognize the affiliations of your local news radio station. Different stations may pull at least part of their news feed from a central source, such as CBS Radio or AP Radio News. They may not even have their own news reporters. And not all radio news is found on all news (and talk) radio. They may have the biggest staff commitment to news, but a surprising number of music formatted radio stations have their own news reporters.

Blogs and Other Web Outlets

These online outlets, particularly Jewish and local ones, are becoming increasingly important and are a great medium to use to garner coverage of your event. Some of the outlets, such as Tabletmag.com, are essentially Jewish newspapers or magazines online. Journalists at these publications abide by many of the same rules – deadlines, beats, and so on – as journalists at print media. Other sites may be smaller blogs, administered by just one person, and are more likely to follow their own set of rules. These sites may have a community calendar section that you can update yourself to promote your event and generate coverage. Also, some journalists who work for major media outlets also may have their own separate blogs. This is a great resource to use. Identify the local Jewish blogs and other outlets that are interested in your events and make sure to pitch them when appropriate.

Making News

Synagogues are vibrant organizations and should not simply wait to react to something going on in the outside world before getting in touch with the media. Indeed, synagogues can make news. However, they must be careful about what kind of news they make, and what kinds of stories they pitch to different media outlets.

When can synagogues make news?

Understanding how news is made is the first step to all media approaches. As in the earlier discussion of communications tools, virtually all news fits into one of two categories, proactive or reactive. Proactive news is a story that would not appear had you not taken the initiative, and while reactive news is something to which you react or something that will happen without your taking any steps to make it happen – all you have to do is wait.

Proactive:

1. A story you've pitched and placed
2. An event you've organized that attracts media coverage (it might have been designed to do so, or it may be inherently interesting)
3. A story that is calendar-related.

Reactive:

1. A response to outside events or breaking news.
2. An attempt to place yourself into a story that you learn is already being written.
3. A reply to media questions.
4. An annual event that you know is covered every year – for example, there will always be a story about the high holidays or other dates on the Jewish calendar.

As you can see, synagogues have a number of opportunities to make news. Let's get a little more specific:

- **Holiday stories:** Stories about with the *chagim* are a good way into the media. Even some of the lesser-known *chagim* offer a good shot to get noticed. But remember, a picture of kids decorating a sukkah, while undoubtedly cute, might not be the bite of the apple you want. Does your synagogue have a nice event other than services or does your rabbi have something of note to say?
- **Synagogue events:** a noteworthy speaker is visiting your shul; you're hosting a social action day; you're putting on a "Torahthon" and hundreds of people will be attending. You get the idea.

- **Trends:** your synagogue offers an approach to Jewish life that is interesting or different or noteworthy. Perhaps you offer a special style of prayer; or there's a particular phenomenon in your shul you think is significant or representative of a larger movement; or the synagogue has an unusual way in which it interacts with young people or older people, different from what others do. Reporters love these stories.
- **Reaction to news:** something important or interesting happened in Israel, or closer to home, and your spokespeople have something interesting to say about it.
- **Your rabbi:** The rabbi can be a frequent newsmaker or commentator on issues in the community and in the Jewish world. Learn what your rabbi(s) most want(s) to talk about and if they'll be available to speak to other inquiries, as well.

But when trying to make news, always remember that what you pitch to media has to be part of the message you seek to convey and the brand you seek to market. Further, it has to be the kind of thing that the organization you're pitching might reasonably go for. Don't be the boy who cried wolf, pitching your congregation's Shabbat dinner to the New York Times. It may be a great event, but the Times doesn't care. Conversely, though, don't leave money on the table: Local Jewish papers might have different standards than national or mainstream publications. They could very well go for your Shabbat dinner story. Or not. Do your homework before you go out pitching.

Publicizing a synagogue event

Effective efforts to get the word about synagogue events will involve publicizing them before, during, and after the events.

- **Before:** Before the event, send a press advisory to members of the media who you think might be interested in the particular occasion. (There is more below on preparing press advisories.) Send this advisory only to the cadre of reporters you think realistically might cover your program.
- **During:** At the event itself, you ought to make yourself available to any journalists who do show up, offering them enough background materials to write their stories. But remember – don't inundate or annoy them. It's a delicate balance between getting them all the information that you'd like them to use in preparing their articles and being a nudnik. Make sure you give them enough room to decide what to write on their own.
- **After:** Once the event has ended, think about how best to publicize the event for those journalists who did not come. You can do this by sending them photographs, along with detailed captions and photo credits, or through a press release. (There is more below on writing press releases, which are not the same thing as press advisories.) You might also think about posting audio and/or video recordings of the event on the synagogue's website. Your synagogue's website is a powerful medium for effective communications. As the web increasingly has become the first place

people turn to for information, a strong web presence is becoming an outright necessity. True, information posted by the synagogue itself on its own website does not carry the imprimatur of a true news source, but it certainly is better than not having it available at all. You might also post video on a video sharing site such as YouTube or write about it on the synagogue's facebook page or twitter site.

Websites

A synagogue's website should start out with generic descriptions of a synagogue's programs, features, options, clergy, services, etc. As events occur, the synagogue might consider covering them itself, much as a news organization would. Thinking about it this way, a synagogue creates a terrific opportunity to enrich its website with coverage of its own events. That allows you to go beyond the initial generic descriptions of your offerings, offering more in-depth reporting on what you do. So, for example, while you might start out with a general description of your USY program, you can flesh this out with a feature story about a recent USY event, including, perhaps, pictures, a video of the event, and a testimonial from a participant explaining why it was so important to him or her.

1. **Driving people to your website:** Not only do you have to think about the content of your website, you also should think about ways of driving people to look at it. After all, if they don't know it exists, they'll never be able to take advantage of what you're offering on it. If you have a good website, you always should look for ways to encourage people to use it, whether or not they are members. One good way to reach people is through interesting email. You might, for example, send out rich-text email or other types of online communications that include links to the synagogue homepage or other portions of the website. Most importantly, though, the ideal email piques readers' interest enough that they not only want to read the entire thing, they also want to go ahead and learn even more. Indeed, the ultimate email is one that's so compelling that the recipient wants to share it with friends. That's called a viral email; it spreads like a virus, but in a positive way. Viral emails are particularly effective with non-members. It's easy to reach members with a single email. It's harder to reach the non-members who might want to take part in a service or a program—and the best person to send them an email about the event is not a synagogue official, it's a friend or a relative. And so viral email is not only one of the best means of communication (because it come from the best messengers); it is also nearly free. You should also be aware of where your website appears on various search engines, even to the point of paying for very specific ads on an engine like Google.
2. **Social Networking:** A discussion of viral emails leads naturally to online social networking, in which people share information they think is interesting with their friends and relatives. Having synagogue members and leaders share information with their networks — creating event and program pages on social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace, or by using Twitter, for example — is a powerful way to publicize our synagogues and their events. Once you've set up a website, you might also think about creating chat rooms there, where people interested in different aspects of the shul's offerings can communicate with each other.

Several essential components of a useful synagogue website:

1. An About Us section with details on the shul's history and activities, and perhaps its mission statement.
2. An FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section that asks and answers typical questions about your shul.
3. Bios of clergy and other staff.
4. Reports on activities of groups within the shul: USY, sisterhood, etc.
5. A schedule of services and other events.
6. Your membership brochure.
7. Your most recent annual report, if it's available.
8. Your synagogue bulletin.
9. A Press Room section that includes your most recent press releases and an archive of older ones, along with contact information journalists can use to get in touch with your spokesperson.
10. Photos, photos, photos!
11. An easy way to contribute to the shul.
12. Information for prospective members.

Photos

**Jewish newspapers are very likely to accept your photographs for publication if they are good and if they look the least bit like a news photo. What does this mean? Most papers don't want photos of subjects posing for the photographer. They want action shots, pictures where the viewer can get an idea of what the event is about before you read the caption. That is the ideal photo. Make sure to identify the most obvious people in the photo and to credit the photographer.

If your congregation is involved in an unusually important community event, the photo editor of your local newspaper may be willing to send his or her own photographer to the scene. Be sure that there is something worth photographing when the photographer shows up.

Here are some general hints in planning successful pictures:

- Avoid static poses; have the subject do something.
- Group poses ideally should include no more than 3 or 4 people.



- Keep the group as close together as possible.
- Just about any newspaper now prefers photos to be emailed. It generally is best to send them as JPG attachments between 500K – 1MG. Newspapers almost always prefer candid action shots.
- If you are submitting hard copies of glossy prints, ideally they ought to measure 5” x 7”.
- In mailing photos, place a piece of cardboard in the envelope and mark the outside of the envelope “PHOTOS: DO NOT BEND!”
- If you are sending in an advance story and wish to have a photographer cover the story, mark the top of the release “PHOTO EDITOR PLEASE NOTE” and then follow it up with a phone call to the appropriate editor.
- But all this is old school. Email the photos with accompanying information.

Never write a caption on the back of a photograph. It could damage the photo, which then would reproduce poorly. Instead, type the caption on a separate sheet of paper and leave about two inches of space at the top. Paste the on the bottom of the back of the photo. Be sure that names, addresses, and titles are accurate, both in the body of a release and in a caption. Also, be sure the “left to right” order of appearance indicated in the caption is correct. Finally, paste an identification tag on the back of your photo, citing the synagogue as the source of the information.

Press Advisories and Press Releases: What’s the difference and how do I write them?

****A press advisory** advertises an upcoming event or a program. A press release describes and event or an issue that already has happened.

Advisories: An advisory is fairly short – one page or less – and does not include a great deal of background. The press advisory includes a very clear summary section at the end indicating Who, What, When and Where.

****A press release** is written in news-story style with a hard lede (that is, an introductory sentence or paragraph in which the main point of the story is very clearly articulated), background information, and attributed quotes from people in the synagogue. The very best press release is no longer than two pages and is written the way some self-respecting journalist might have written the most favorable story possible about the synagogue or issue. In other words, a good press release reads like a very positive news story. It is not over the top. The first words are not the name of the synagogue.

How to prepare the release:

- Print hard copies on standard 8 1/2" x 11" paper. Use your congregational letterhead if possible. Print on one side of the sheet only.
- Leave big margins, both right and left.
- Double space throughout. Triple space paragraphs.
- Put your name and phone number – some include email addresses –in the upper left-hand corner so that the editor may contact you if he or she needs further information or clarification of the story.
- Put such information as RELEASE AT WILL or FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE or RELEASE (date) in the upper right-hand corner.
- If the release is longer than one sheet, the word “more” should be at the bottom of each page, as appropriate. The final paragraph should be followed by an end mark such as “30” or **** or #####, to make it clear to the reading editor that the story is finished.
- Email, email, email. Just not too much nor too often.

Every day, hundreds of pieces of copy come to the office of the average newspaper — whether as hard copy, faxes, or most likely, email. The business of sorting this copy and putting it in the proper shape is a tremendous job. Working against deadlines, a newspaper will give preference to copy that is immediately ready for editing. If the copy is not well prepared, it stands little chance of surviving the process of elimination. Copy that is difficult to edit and not readily understandable soon finds its way into the first convenient wastepaper basket or delete folder.

You also should conform as closely as possible to the style requirements of the particular newspaper for which the release is being prepared. It might be helpful in the beginning to clip out examples of various types of stories run by the newspaper and follow their pattern when a similar situation arises for which you must prepare a story.

And try to learn the names of the people at your local newspaper who handle religious news and try to meet and establish a relationship with them. Find out on which days they prefer to receive your news. Material left for publication in the name of a specific person will receive a great deal more attention than copy addressed to no one in particular. If you do not know the name of the person, address the envelope to the “Religion Editor.”

The Synagogue Bulletin

Synagogue newsletters are produced in a wide variety of formats. Some are produced on word processors, some on desktop systems, and others are professionally printed. Some synagogues print only a few copies of their newsletters, and some don't print any at all.



Instead, they either email the whole newsletter or they post the newsletter on the shul website and email the url. No matter how your congregational bulletin is produced, it is necessary to address the following issues: How are the articles presented? Are they all in-house items, or do they vary in range and content? Are they thrown together or grouped under an appropriate heading? Is there an attempt at artistic presentation? Interestingly, it's just as easy to create uniform columns and an attractive block effect as it is to run articles one after another without any attempt at a more consistent layout.

Getting Started:

Before we begin, it might be valuable to discuss how to create a synagogue bulletin if you do not already have one. The following guidelines may be helpful even if you already have a newsletter.

****Determine who will do the work.** Generally the editor is appointed by the synagogue president, but no one can, or should, go it alone. Therefore, the editor should immediately try to gather together a committee, following up personal contacts and recommendations. (Do not forget the postcards you sent out with the membership forms inviting members' participation in synagogue activities. Now is the time to call their bluff!) You also will want to use the skills of as many people as possible, from the secretary in the synagogue office, to the member (or member's child) who is a computer buff, to the graphic designer or artist who belongs to the young couples club, to the professional editors and writers who are active in the men's club, to the retired seniors who belong to the congregation. It is very important that you decide in advance who will do what job (graphics, typing, labeling, going to the printer, etc.) to ensure that the operation runs smoothly and that no one is taken by surprise.

****The committee should meet with the executive director, rabbi, and president to discuss the synagogue's image and the bulletin's goals.** Once again, you will have to identify targeted groups and pinpoint the messages you would like to send. You also will have to decide whether or not you will accept advertising and if you do then you must determine an acceptable percentage of ads to other material.

You may want to brainstorm about the columns you will include – perhaps a rabbi's column, messages from the president, executive director, and cantor, reports from committee chairs, news from the arms of the Conservative movement, a nursery corner, USY update, social action projects, and so on.

Also, make sure you adhere to deadlines. A newsletter received after the events it announces are over is not only useless but a poor reflection on the organization. Finally, focus on upcoming events. Don't make the newsletter the historical document of past events. Mix up the types of articles you include – some can be human interest, some straight promotion, etc.

****Set up a communication network that will ensure regular submission of the information you require.** For example, if you determine that you want to publicize the



work of your different committees, contact committee chairpeople. It is important to remember that you can get a good deal of timely information from the United Synagogue.

****Establish your working rules and inform your writers.** You will have to determine — and they will have to know — frequency of publication (based on your budget and the amount of time you can afford to spend on this project); the contact person who should receive the articles; deadlines, which, if you are going to use hard copy, must be calculated to provide enough time (usually at least one month) for editing, typing, printing, labeling, and mailing (a minimum of one-month lead time); the form in which material should be received (electronically, most likely, or typed, double-spaced, etc.); and optimal length of items. You also will have to set a policy about what can and cannot be accepted. Some material will be inappropriate in a synagogue bulletin (for example, blatantly non-kosher restaurant reviews or descriptions of great family activities that involve traveling on Shabbat).

****Determine the method of production based on expense, availability of equipment, etc.** Consider the following: Does the synagogue or a committee member have a desktop publishing program? Can the bulletin be generated using a more basic word processing program, like Word, which is more than enough for a standard publication? Will the job be printed in-house or outside? Can you accept photographs? If so, does this include color as well as black and white? Perhaps a local printer will give you a discount if you run an ad in the journal for his/her shop.

****If you can only afford to run a certain size journal, decide whether you will want to include stuffers, such as flyers on programs or activities, a calendar page, listings of donations, reprints of materials from the United Synagogue, etc.**

****Go through other synagogue bulletins looking at graphic features and content. It may be helpful to get on the mailing lists of other synagogues.**

Layout and Production: Some Helpful Hints

Even using the simplest means of production, it is possible to produce neat, visually interesting material, with simple graphics or logos integrated into the text. For those who cut and paste, there is clip art available online, with both Jewish and secular images, although it is a good idea to use it sparingly, because it can be too cheesy. You can also scan images.

One relatively easy way to enhance the appearance of your publication is to create a distinctive title, logo, and masthead. Not only will this add an interesting graphic element but it will also provide an identification tag so that people will recognize the bulletin as soon as they get it. While the variety of potential designs is endless, you should keep it clean and simple, and the masthead of your bulletin should never be cluttered. All you really need is a logo (or that of the United Synagogue, if you haven't got one), the name of the synagogue and the name of the publication itself. This might be finished off by adding a horizontal line, below which you can insert the date and the volume number.



We suggest that you lay out the articles in block fashion, each story constituting a unit, with carry-over kept to a minimum. While column size should be uniform, some stories might be run over a two-column space, with single columns appearing next to and beneath it, for variety. You might also want to box some stories for emphasis or for graphic interest. If you can afford to print in two colors you might consider adding a screen to some boxes, running a light shade of your second color as the background to the text. Color printing is not nearly as expensive as it used to be.

When you are dealing with relatively cheap paper, it is safer to stick with very light screens, ten percent or below. Even if you are printing only in black and white, you might consider adding a gray tint to some of your items. Another inexpensive technique is to use the element of reverse, so that the text runs white on a colored background. No matter what graphic elements you use, make sure there is plenty of white space so the reader's eye is not overloaded with images.

Submit the bulletin to your printer electronically – email it you can; if you can't put it on a disk.

Content:

As in all publications, some kinds of articles are more interesting than others. However, most bulletins contain a standard mix, including a note from the rabbi and a schedule of services, as well as information and guidelines for upcoming holidays and some hands-on ritual information.

But you can do much more. Properly selected, bulletin articles can go a long way toward helping to define and promote the synagogue's image. But remember: You will be very well served by some forethought. Plan out every issue in advance.

Many congregational bulletins include the following kinds of material:

- Information on upcoming programs, fundraising events, scholars-in-residence, calendar of events (sometimes an actual copy of a calendar page). It may include community events as well, such as an upcoming Jewish film festival.
- New books in the synagogue library (or a "Critic's Corner" to review a new Jewish book)
- Social: upcoming weddings, b'nai mitzvah, etc.
- News from the nursery school, Hebrew school, USY, Kadima, sisterhood, and men's club
- Donations made in honor of smachot, or in memoriam.
- Substantive articles: For example, introduction of new Jewish newspaper; coverage of synagogue events; excerpts from media articles on Israel; news on programs for the disabled; pleas to support Operation Isaiah

- Congregants of the month; welcome to new members
- Reports from and on affiliated Jewish organizations: USY, United Synagogue, Koach, Women's League, Men's Clubs.
- Jewish programming in the media – blogs, other internet sources, radio, TV, cable
- Message from the cantor or president, or from the adult education department
- Message to college students (don't forget to ask for college addresses so the synagogue can keep in touch)
- Letters from congregants
- Helpful information on what the synagogue can do for its members (for instance, if you are out of town for the holidays, where you can daven, eat, etc.)
- Progress reports on membership and fundraising drives (possibly including some graphs)

While there is no hard and fast prescription on what to include in your bulletin, the items you choose should all consciously reflect the image of the synagogue that you are seeking to project.

The Membership Bulletin

Here we go again. Before you can produce a membership brochure, it is vital to ask yourself just what it is that you want to convey about the synagogue. Whose needs are you meeting? What are your strengths and weaknesses? What do you offer that potential members cannot get anywhere else? Is your nursery school particularly dynamic? If you are an older congregation, how do you meet the needs of your seniors? Only after you have addressed these issues can you determine if a projected brochure successfully conveys the message you are looking to disseminate.

You also will have to decide how and where to distribute this material. Will you send a yearly update to members and ask that they share it with friends and potential members? Perhaps they also might provide you with a list of families or individuals who might be interested in receiving this information. Will you leave a stack of these booklets in the synagogue lobby as well as in the lobbies of other organizations, such as federations or JCCs? Will you include them in a package designed for new members of the community? Will ushers hand them out to the thousands of worshipers who join you on the high holy days? Distribution of materials should not be random. Give careful thought to where you are most likely to reach your target audience and how you will best be able to reach them.

Membership application forms also may be used to help define your public image. A membership application form can gently but clearly let applicants know something important about the synagogue at the outset of their relationship. For example, a form

might say that only the Jewish spouse in an interfaith marriage is eligible for membership, but the non-Jewish spouse is welcome to attend all synagogue events. Such wording not only helps convey the synagogue's agenda, it also saves a good deal of unpleasantness down the road. Such policies should be clearly stated, not left to be inferred.

Another way to show who you are is make sure that your material for new and potential members lists the opportunities available to them at the synagogue, whether as contributors to the newsletter, members of a mitzvah corps, or fundraisers. The kinds and variety of activities you present to prospective members may help them determine whether you and they are a suitable match. It also lets them know that you actively seek their participation. And this should not be done as an empty exercise. You must follow through and invite interested members to participate in the activities they specify. Otherwise you have a sound bite without the substance.

One way to list your participation opportunities inexpensively and increase your chances of getting a response is to itemize them on a postcard (if possible, postage pre-paid). It is possible, among other things, to distribute these postcards during the high holidays, giving both new and old members the opportunity to review the synagogue's services and to resolve to participate during the new year.

In producing the bulletin, seek the assistance of professionals in your congregation – printers, computer whizzes, publishers, graphic designers, editors, and public relations people. Do not forget pictures — especially those focusing on teenagers participating in some lively or socially beneficial activity.

Op-Eds/Letters to the Editor

The page opposite the editorial page of newspapers is one of the key vehicles to reach influential people and those who follow our issues closely. By the time a newspaper sets aside space for its staff and syndicated columnists, there is very little space left for op-eds by readers, academics, clergy and newsmakers. That's why they must be compelling and timely and stand out from the pack. While there's never a guarantee that you can place an op-ed, here are some tips to give your piece the best chance of making the cut.

- Know the style.
- Know the length — usually less than 800 words.
- Stand out by being unique.
- Find a local angle.
- Do not use op-eds to respond to an article, your message should respond indirectly.
- Include a few-sentence pitch that summarizes the op-ed and includes the most newsworthy points.

- Include weekend and night contact numbers.
- If you had an op-ed printed within the last six months find someone else to sign it.
- Offer it to the newspaper as an exclusive.
- Call the editor a few days after emailing it.
- Many large dailies almost never run unsolicited pieces. Call the editor and pitch yours before sending.

Op-eds can be a very effective way of making a point, either generally or on a particular issue. Most newspapers have specific policies about what they will print. Find out what these guidelines are, and do as much as you can.

Finally, don't forget letters to the editor. Organize teams of volunteers and other supporters to keep a steady stream of letters flowing to the newspapers in their areas. For best results, letters should be short, timely, and factual. Many smaller papers will run almost any letter they receive. In larger dailies, letters have to respond to specific articles or come from community leaders to have a good chance of getting published.

Conclusion

As you now work to develop your own communications campaign or build on an existing one, use these strategies and tactics in the manner suited specifically for your shul. Identify your shul's needs, hammer out messages that differentiate your shul, and work toward those needs.

While a communications plan initially may feel overwhelming, essentially it is a menu of tactical options and at times a series of steps that build towards one overarching end. It's important to choose what works best for you and plays to your shul's strengths. Find the messages that resonate and the media outreach strategies that work in your community and emphasize them. Always keep the big picture in mind so you do not get distracted and bogged down with tactics that do not contribute to your ultimate goals.

The communication guidelines provided in this manual have worked in a variety of fields when they are implemented properly. Again, think of yourself as part of a campaign or as offering a product to a consumer. With this mindset, clearly defined goals, and an organized media outreach campaign, your efforts will yield positive results for your shul.