

PEJJE

Partnership for

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Jewish

Education

Preliminary Edition

An Introduction to Marketing for Jewish Day Schools

By Jessica Rubinstein
Mercier Rubinstein Associates

חורים אלו מלמדי
חינקות באמונה
חרוזים אלו התינקות

*Teachers and school children—
precious jewels of our community*

MIDRASH RABBAH, SONG OF SONGS

AN INTRODUCTION TO MARKETING FOR JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

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Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education

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STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS

The Importance of a Well-Designed Marketing Program

The decision to send a child to a Jewish day school is a difficult and complex one for most parents. It is a choice that will profoundly affect the lives of their children, and has serious emotional, social, spiritual, and financial implications for the whole family.

Marketing encompasses the actions you take and the messages you send, to guide consumers toward choosing a product—in this case, to help parents decide to send their child to your school, donors to give money to your school, and media to give publicity to your school. Given the significance of this choice, it is logical for day schools to take marketing at least as seriously as a beer manufacturer or insurance company does. Yet day schools traditionally treat investment in focused marketing efforts as an afterthought, less worthy of systematic planning and adequate funding than curriculum, teachers, books, or gym equipment.

It is understandable: without a quality education to offer, there isn't much to market. On the other hand, without students, no one will use (or pay for) the books, teachers, etc. Since a "marketing last" attitude is at the very least, limiting, PEJE is providing this overview of marketing strategies and techniques to help you to create and implement a realistic marketing program for your school. Reading it should help you to:

- **Understand the broad issues that must be considered in marketing.**
- **Understand how to think through marketing issues and get answers to important questions.**
- **Provide you with a grammar of marketing. As the saying goes, "to name is to create."**
- **Enable you to recognize all the communication resources available to you and use them appropriately.**

The Value of Research

Most people involved with day schools feel that they already know who their customers are, and what they are looking for in a day school. The reasoning is quite logical: in a highly secularized culture like ours, and particularly at a time when religious-based schools are perceived as isolating, only families who are highly committed to a Jewish life would begin to consider day school for their children. It follows that these families are already participants in the community: synagogue affiliation, Federation contributions, and so on. Their names must be on a list somewhere, right?...Wrong, actually. You probably only know half of them.

There are several probable reasons for this, one of which may be that the cultural pendulum is swinging in a day school direction. Consider: TV shows feature angels helping suffering humanity; pop gurus demonstrate the spiritual necessity of accumulating wealth; books show how your favorite hobby—fishing, gardening, cooking, whatever—is a route to inner peace.

Along with everyone else, many American Jews are seeking a firm moral center. And so, all along the spectrum from lapsed Orthodox Jews to that notorious 48% married to non-Jews, there are people who aren't looking for you specifically, but may embrace your contribution to their family life as one answer to their search.

A 1990 survey of the Jewish community in Columbus, Ohio illustrates the point (Chart A, B). A surprising 19.8% of respondents from existing lists (Chart A) said they were "very likely" to send children to a new day school. But interestingly, *even more* Jewish people located through random calling said they were interested!

Attitudes Toward Jewish Day School—Columbus, OH 1990

	Very Likely	Very Unlikely	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	Other
Random	21.8%	37.5%	3.5	20.8%	14.9%	60.8%
Federation List	19.8%	42.7%	6.6%	28.9%	16.5%	48.0

Chart (A)

A second point worth contemplating, visible in both Charts (A) and (B), is a trend among people who identify themselves as Jewish, seem to be searching for a kind of school—even a way to identify themselves as Jews—outside the traditional denominations. Chart (B) illustrates a trend (although not a dramatic one) away from traditional denominations between childhood to adulthood. But a look back at Chart (A) shows a very significant preference for day schools with a philosophy "other" than the traditional approaches, particularly among those Jews who did not come from the Federation list of "known" community members.

Changes in Religious Self-Identification, Ages 25-44—Columbus, OH 1990

	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	Other	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	Other
Random	8.2	36.8	38.3	4.7	4.6	30.5	35.7	6.9
Federation List	17.6	38.2	2.6	2.6	9.3	35.8	47.5	3.6

Chart (B)

What do these statistics suggest for you, as a marketer of full-time Jewish education? They don't give you any clear direction, but they strongly imply that it is unwise to assume *anything* about the families you might attract. Many Jews, even those who identify themselves as part of a particular denomination, are searching for something different, something "other" than what they already know for their children. Your school may be the perfect "other" for any number of them—but they can't find you unless you make yourself visible to every Jewish family in your area.

What Research Can Tell You

You don't need your own research to discover whether there are potential students for your school who are outside your obvious target market. Take that as a given. Citywide visibility helps parents, board members and donors see the school as having status as a credible educational institution in the larger context of the secular community.

However, you DO need to find out what your potential customers are looking for, if you are to create a compelling, productive marketing message and strategy.

Following are some of the questions you should have answers to—every community is different! It may be a good exercise to write your own guesses at the answers. But remember: unless you do formal research of some kind, you're operating in the dark.

- What do Jewish parents in your market area think of when you first say Day School?
- What is the attitude of parents toward Jewish education in your market today?
- What percent of families identify themselves as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or "other"?
- Where do Jewish children live?
- What percent of Jewish families with children belong to synagogues?
- What elements of a day school education are most appealing?
- What elements (perceived or real) of a day school education are barriers to choice?
- Families likely to consider your school would otherwise attend what other school: public or secular independent school?
- How would parents rank the importance of the following elements of their child's education?
 - ◇ Academic quality
 - ◇ Jewish studies
 - ◇ Social adjustment
 - ◇ A nurturing environment
 - ◇ Opportunity for prayer in school
 - ◇ Learning "positive" values
 - ◇ Arts education

Basic Approaches to Research

There are two kinds of research: *quantitative* and *qualitative*.

Quantitative research collects responses from a large number of respondents, and applies sophisticated analytical tools to come up with a detailed picture of the target audience. There are a number of methods for collecting responses, including phone surveys, mail surveys, and in-person surveys in venues such as malls, in front of your Sunday school entrance, etc.

The costs of quantitative research are usually prohibitive, however. If your Jewish community as a whole understands the importance of this knowledge for building Jewish continuity and commitment into the 21st century, it may be willing to invest in professional quantitative research.

Alternatively, a research professional with ties to your school or the Jewish community may be willing to help you with a program of *qualitative research*, which collects in-depth, free-form responses of a small number of people for consideration and analysis. The most usual form of qualitative research is the “focus group,” in which a professional facilitator discusses the product with carefully-selected groups of 10 to 12 respondents. For a day school, for example, you might want to have a group of “undecided” parents of pre-schoolers; a group of parents who have had students in day schools but later withdrew their children; a group of parents who are happy with day school; a group of young marrieds who are thinking about having children in the next two to three years.

Note that research done without the help of a professional is not usually productive. Respondent selection is a sensitive process; the precise phrasing and order of questions can skew answers; facilitation of groups is harder than it looks; and today’s analytical tools are not accessible to non-professionals. Nonetheless, it is always sensible to ask questions and keep your mind open to the comments of potential customers. Just don’t believe everything you hear.

What to Do With the Answers

The Coca Cola Company had extensive research to show that the American public was ready for a “New Coke.”, you know the rest.

The point of reminding you of this famous marketing debacle is not to suggest that research is bogus, but to demonstrate the importance of using your own good judgment when deciding how to use the answers.

One common example is being faced by a number of new community day schools which are based on a philosophy of denominational inclusiveness. These schools will create Judaic curriculum and prayer services to reflect their multi-denominational perspective. But when such a school has a clearly dominant group, research may suggest that it would be best to lean toward that denomination. In this case following the research will cause you to abandon the core vision which identifies what is special about your program.

You can use your research, however, both to adjust your program in non-core ways to meet the needs of the community, and to express, through your image and message platform, a “brand promise” to deliver the kind and quality of education that it is your mission to provide.

Build Your Brand

The term “brand” probably reminds you of Kellogg’s Corn Flakes and Budweiser, or some other consumer item. Yes: you are more serious and significant than that. Branding simply refers to the process of building a more or less complex set of associations and assumptions about your product (in this case, your school) that come immediately to mind among your target market whenever they hear your name or see your logo.

Your brand is built partly from the actual experiences people have with your product, but it is also powerfully communicated by the way you look, the overall “tone” of communications, the underlying associations created by your logo. Research can help you avoid assuming what people will understand through your communications, and judge what they will really perceive.

For example, it is a common assumption that communications that are too costly or professional-looking make potential families or donors think you are wasteful. Unless you are pointlessly gaudy, the opposite is likely to be the effect. No one wants to put their trust in an organization that is amateurish, sloppy, cheap-looking, or apparently unsuccessful. This doesn’t mean you can’t be cost-effective, but it does mean you need to be true to your brand image at all times, in everything you do. And that image should be clean, clear, strong, and indubitably your own.

Here’s how to begin creating your brand:

1. *Articulate Your Position.* Once you have identified your key competitors (local public schools, other day schools, etc.), clearly articulate your position relative to those competitors. For example, compared to public schools with outstanding academic qualifications, you might want to focus on extra personal attention, never being lost in a crowd, the value of living and learning Jewishly, no matter what the subject, etc. If you have found that your market demands the highest academic quality as the *sine qua non* of school selection, to succeed you will need to position yourself as offering the required high standards PLUS.
 - “Positioning” does not mean being defensive. You are simply establishing the elements of your school that set you apart, and would be the basis on which a family might choose you instead of a competitor.
 - Rarely, if ever, will your *positioning statement* become part of a public communication. Your clearly-stated position exists to guide your design of actual communications.
2. *Create a Mission Statement.* As briefly as possible, keeping your position in mind, state the overall GOAL of your program: who you serve, and what will they get from you. A mission statement never includes any details about strategies or tactics, etc., but it does address itself to the parents’ most fundamental question about your school: *are the goals of this institution consonant with my own goals for my child?*

Here are examples of a mission and positioning statement for a non-profit foundation. This organization is like your school in that it is not directed at earning money, but only at providing service. Like you, they have “customers” to recruit: they seek to attract excellent grant proposals.

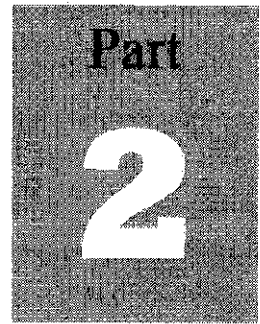
Mission

The Columbus Dispatch Charities was established in 1937 to help the Central Ohio community build the future, by providing financial support to organizations that foster the physical, intellectual, and moral/spiritual health of children and young adults from birth through age 18. In addition, a small number of scholarships and grants in specific areas are made to individuals, to reward outstanding achievements by talented young men and women.

Position

The Columbus Dispatch Charities funds ongoing activities and special projects designed to help children living in the Columbus metropolitan area to reach their highest potential.

3. Create a *Look and Feel*, including a logo and, if you want one, a tag line. Your logo and it can simply be a type treatment of your name (logotype) is the most important visual object in your communication program. As you build brand awareness in your community, you want everyone in every target group parents, donors, community opinion leaders, local press, etc. to know a communication is from you without having to read your name. Here are some tips:
 - Don't be overcomplicated. You want people to recognize your logo the way they recognize your face: instantly.
 - Don't be illustrative. This common logo mistake creates a complicated graphic image that ends up fighting with evolving styles and messages over the years. Besides, an illustrative logo has to be printed large enough to be clear, and eats up a lot of precious real estate in ads and flyers.
 - If it has colors, be sure it works in black and white as well. Don't be talked into a 4-color logo the cost is rarely worth it. (We would say never, except we never say never.)
 - Choose a reasonable color palette and stick to it. Unlike your logo, you can change this from time to time to refresh your look...but remember that the colors you choose create an emotional environment in your piece. Emphasis of one color from your palette over another can be used to identify different types of communications.
 - Choose a headline typeface and a body typeface. Stick with them for ALL official communications.
 - Protect your logo. Trademark it, and make sure that everyone understands that it only goes on OFFICIAL school documents. Not on committee communications, not on parent organization flyers.
 - Make sure the logo, or at least your logotype, is ON EVERYTHING that is an official school document.
 - Taglines are essentially brief (4 words tops), memorable statements of your position, that help people register your unique offering. They take up a lot of space, so be sure your tagline actually accomplishes something before you invest yourself in one. Taglines are good for changing when you need to reposition yourself, but their importance is generally over-rated. Certainly, avoid developing a tagline before you have thought through the basic strategic premises of your marketing message—that's what the tag should reflect.



BUILD A PLAN

Set Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

1. Your *goals* are the end results you wish to achieve. These are similar for any independent school:
 - add X students in grades X, X and X
 - maintain current students
 - raise \$X,000 to \$XXX,000
 - attract top-quality faculty
2. Your *objectives* are the steps you must take to achieve those goals. These may vary depending on the mission and positioning of your particular school. The following examples are given with their strategic purposes.
 - Reach Jewish parents who are not on existing lists, from every denomination and no denomination. Expand your market base by creating a general “buzz” that validates parental interest and donor perception of a significant project.
 - Educate the community about your unique approach to integrated education that includes academic subjects, arts, and Jewish studies. Position the program in relation to other day schools. Attract outstanding teachers with the idea of a creative, innovative program that offers the ideal combination of support and flexibility.
 - Build image of “connectedness” to general community. Counter the “isolation” barrier.
 - Begin to build presence on a national level. Appeal to parents and potential donors based on recognized significance of the program

3. *Strategies* and *tactics* are the ways you plan to go about achieving your objectives. Strategies are plans to select and use the most efficient and effective communications channels to reach your audiences. Tactics are the specific ways you use them. Your strategies can't include *all* possible elements of a campaign, but you should try to consider leveraging several of them, so that your target audiences end up hearing about you from more than one source.

Identify your audiences

- Opinion leaders
 - Media
 - Potential parents
 - Current parents: the essential component of your word of mouth advertising, current parents are always potential ex-parents. Of all people, they should be constantly reminded of the values that brought them to the school in the first place. The children's work shows them the ways in which the mission is accomplished, but unless you ARTICULATE the larger purpose and vision of classroom activities, they are unlikely to see the Big Picture behind a child's drawing or essay.
 - Teachers. A major key to word of mouth communications, both to parents and the general community. Teachers are the first to be approached for "inside" information about rumors of change, plans for the future, and especially any negative information such as complaints from an unhappy parent.
4. Refine message platforms (aka "brand promise") as they apply to each audience.
 5. In view of budget and objectives, use a variety of communication channels to reinforce the messages from different directions, and to find the best way to reach each audience .

Communication Channels Available to a Day School

Table 1: Public Relations

Channel	Values	Challenges
Public Relations	“News” has high credibility, wide distribution, and comparatively low cost.	Little control of final story; labor intensive; uncertain results.
Jewish local media	Easier to get stories, targets community directly.	Implicit bias/less credibility than gen’l media. Creates image of insularity.
Jewish nat’l media	Excellent for donors to see significance for national Jewry.	Necessity to create news of high enough level to pitch. Learning curve for most people.
Gen’l local	Shows parents, donors, significance of school as contributor to a larger educational community, recognition of value in wider terms. Major importance for EVERY day school.	Labor intensive, somewhat frustrating, esp. TV. Pitfall: important to wait for the right story. Overpitching can damage credibility; once you have an article it’s a long time till you get another.
Gen’l nat’l	Same as above, only bigger.	Same as above only harder, and costlier. Not a likely positive result, but keep thinking of your stories in national terms; someday, one may be right!

Table 2: Paid Media

Channel	Values	Challenges
Paid Media	High visibility with control of content, image. Some level of advertising is essential for brand awareness. Build “buzz.”	High cost can be regarded as waste (ie, paying for audience you don’t care about)
Print gen’l	Targetable outlets can control costs: community weeklies, parents magazines, etc. Ensures image of taking one’s place outside a confined community.	Expense makes metro dailies prohibitive; others vary.
Print, Jewish	Political value/integral part of community.	Once you establish a presence, withdrawal can be noticed.
Radio, TV	Explore potential for PSAs, especially surrounding special events, holidays, etc.	

Table 3: Direct Mail

Channel	Values	Challenges
Direct Mail	Targeted, full control of message and context. Potential for long-form communications such as newsletters. A good job means the whole community knows something about you; parents are validated with "I heard that's a great school!"	Potential to send typos, unclear photos and bad design into thousands of targeted households --be careful! Dependence on lists often means returns, plus double/triple hits on some hh's; you look wasteful. Costs: design, copy, printing, postage.
Sub-genres: invitations	Potential for multiple readership Target to potential parents. Cost effective, personal, trackable	First, you need an event. This can be a school tour, a 'parlor meeting,' an opportunity to hear an expert on child development, etc.
Correspondence	Letters to parents, board members, and others are a fast, responsive way to create the aura of keeping in close contact and reinforce your image of professionalism and clarity. Especially valuable for crisis communications, such as notice of security measures.	Too easy to do without appropriate care; notes from the school office to parents COUNT.

Table 4: Personal Contacts

Channel	Values	Challenges
Personal Contact	Essential element of student recruitment strategy. Personalized, customized, best way to develop lists, etc.	Most effective if not first exposure to name of school. Labor intensive, lack of control of on-site communication by volunteers.
Presence at events such as book fairs, pre-schools, Sunday schools, day camps, etc. Sponsorships, such as JCC kid sports, children's authors etc.	Good image builder for caring about kids, being associated with excitement, things kids enjoy, providing useful information for families, etc. Consider pencils, T-shirts etc. where appropriate	Permission to take part in some activities may become political: set up carefully. Need to look good: organized, nice banner, etc.
Phone calls	Follow-up from invitations, etc. often necessary to move from consideration to action.	Avoid cold calling. Important to organize and TRAIN parent callers. Provide scripts.
Your own events: from parlor meetings for prospective parents, to major fundraisers.	All the benefits of above, with added ownership (no conflicting messages) and control of the environment.	Full responsibility: costs, coordination, operations, everything. Know what you are getting into before you start.

Table 5 Parent Communication

Channel	Values	Challenges
Parent Communica-tions	<p>Parent communications are essential for retention, as well as for word of mouth. Part of parent communication is just directing their attention to general marketing that is being done for the school: news coverage, event presence, etc. But you also need to address this group's special interests separately</p> <p>Here are some ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —make sure there is regular written communication, such as a weekly newsletter, about the whole school & its program. EG. We went to the bee farm to learn(what? how does it fit program). —make it an axiom that parents are the first to know of events, good and bad. Bad news is MUCH worse when parents see it in the newspaper first...but DO word communications carefully! No panic, no blame-casting, etc. —meet regularly with teachers and staff to discuss issues and ideas about the school, help them understand the importance of their role as communicators of first resort. Help them find positive ways of talking about things. 	<p>It is easy to regard parents as “family,” and allow communications to be overly informal, even sloppy-looking. By all means build family spirit, but always maintain your credibility as professionals in everything you do. Nothing messy. Everything bearing the look and feel of the school brand. No official communication without the logo and the right typeface, etc.</p>

A Few Notes About the Widest Channel of All: Word of Mouth

FACT: Every message, no matter how targeted, has the **potential to reach unintended audiences**. Parents may hear fundraising messages, and potential donors may find themselves reading a grandchild's weekly letter home from the teacher. Every constituent is potentially exposed to every message. It takes discipline to insure that your messages to different audiences never become inconsistent or confusing.

RULE: *Nothing* goes out that does not adhere to the brand image.



FACT: **Word of mouth** remains one of the strongest communication channels in the universe.

RULE: Train everyone who can be seen as representing your school.

- Provide your Board with written copy points, a basic press release, and an annual training session to discuss ways to describe events, programs, and policies they may need to talk about.
- Provide faculty with copy points on sensitive issues parents may raise, such as how tuition support is decided, how the admissions process works, what are discipline policies for unruly children, etc. Most will be ways to refer the question upstream without seeming uninformed or under orders to keep quiet.

- Provide parents with positive experiences (parties, participation in activities) and excellent written communications that they can share.

FACT: Media relations depend on personal communication, as well.

BEST APPROACH: Put together a **“media kit”** in a school folder that includes a 1-page “fact sheet,” plus the background on your school and the local Jewish community that a reporter might want to fill out a story, and copies of past stories about your school. Then take the show on the road: identify and contact all key reporters on education, religion, and general “feature” materials. Identify TV reporters who seem to have a penchant for stories about kids. Then, make appointments and familiarize them with your school—if you can get them on a tour, you’re a hero. Provide a list of “story ideas” they might want to use, including hackneyed ones you know work, such as what Jewish kids do during Christmas, special stories of kids “doing good,” etc. Then be sure to keep in touch with your media contacts from time to time throughout the year.

REALITY: Even most businesses are not as organized and persistent in their PR efforts as described above. However, aim for the ideal, and you will likely get results. But remember: when you pitch your story to a journalist, you need to be providing information the journalist can use, not a sales pitch!

HOW IT ALL FITS TOGETHER

A Sample Calendar

The best way to describe how a program might work is to see an example. This one begins in June, because that's when a new marketing cycle begins: as soon as your current marketing cycle ends. You may choose other start-points, based on your fiscal year or the close of each year's student recruitment campaign in March or April.

You don't need to do this much, especially to begin, and you should be communicating your own, unique atmosphere and spirit by creating stories and events that reflect the best of who you are, and what your potential parents are interested in.

Note: A website is, or can be, an important element of a total communication package. It is not mentioned here because of the magnitude of a website project that is done well: it would take another paper of equal length to cover it. However, if you embark on a site, remember that it is easier for amateurs to "publish" in this medium than any other, and that creates an illusion of doing up to date marketing on the cheap. Be true to your school: remember that more people can see a website than any other communication you produce.

June

- Final newsletter of the school year is mailed to your "Jewish community" list. Message: We'll be around all summer; look for us.

July/August

- Participate in summer activities: sponsor a kids team, have an information table at day camp events, etc.
- Try to meet with Rabbis to update them on the school's activities and contributions; have updated materials for them.

End of August

- All-School picnic. Put a story/picture in your local Jewish paper, possibly neighborhood weekly.
- Work with local Parents Magazine to be their Jewish Holiday story.
- Establish committee to develop event schedule for tabling, sponsorships, etc. during the school year.
- Draw up a general marketing plan and budget for the year, including any new or updated materials (like your brochure) you may feel you need.

- Arrange for High Holiday flyers/"bookmarks" in synagogues.

September

- Community-wide Newsletter (give it a distinctive name!) covers the start of school, holiday activities.
- Holiday ad in Jewish paper.
- Plan general image media buy in Parents magazine and city magazine.
- Read editorial calendars for relevant special issues.

October

- Plan parlor meetings and Chanukah event for families and friends/potential students.
- Press release to your whole media list: find a hot topic!
- Make sure your media kit is up to date. Make sure your fundraising committee coordinates with your marketing committee, to make the most of all materials. For example, your media kit becomes a fundraising kit with just a few additions. And the day of a good news story is a good day to call a prospective donor.

November

- Ads: Parents magazine, local weeklies in key neighborhoods. Work for interview on local public radio.

December

- Holiday Community newsletter.
- Kick off tours and parlor meetings with your Chanukah event.
- Be sure to make a visible contribution to holiday charity work in general community.
- Make sure family follow-up committee is in place and scripted.

January

- Begin tours and parlor meetings. Implement your media plan, and send an invitation to every potential family you can identify.
- Run ads to increase tour attendance.
- Consider a Teacher Appreciation event to bring parents together so you can remind them what a great school yours is!
- Send out parent letters encouraging them to sign their contracts early.
- Martin Luther King Day, Kwansaa and Ramadan are all potential outreach/peacebuilding platforms.
- If not scheduled by the organizations, create an opportunity for a "report to the community".

February

- Same as January, only more intense.
- Implement an "each one, reach one" campaign.

March

- Work hard to complete contract renewals.
- Purim party for current and "almost" families, including sibs and best friends.

April

- Get the Mayor or a US Rep or Senator, or even your governor, if you are in a significant electoral district, to participate in your Seder. Work hard to get TV there.
- What's all this about hunting for matzot and a spirit who visits every Jewish home for a drink, the way Santa goes to deliver gifts? Is there a fun cultural story in that? Do you have a local columnist who goes for that kind of material?

May

- Recruiting for next year is about over. Focus on fundraising; is there a business story you can tell?
- Final community newsletter can be short and sweet.
- Have you found out what summer activity you can put your name on? Supply T-shirts to a baseball team?
- Be sure your students leave school with a "summer tee" they really love, so they'll wear your name wherever they go. This can be a fundraiser: tees needn't be free.

General

- Current students bring home weekly newsletters with general story and teacher notes for each class.
- Other in-school events and activities (such as birthday books and other fundraisers) involve parents and grandparents when possible.
- Talk to your local Chamber of Commerce, Realtors association, and/or Realtors with a special focus in your target neighborhoods. Give them your media kit, talk about the school as a community resource, and ask if they would be willing to include your brochure in their Welcome Kits for new residents.
- Check for various community directories, such as an annual issue of your local city magazine or business newspaper, parents publication, or Jewish newspaper, and make sure you are listed there. Because of their long shelf-life and broad distribution, these are an excellent place for an ad, if you can possibly afford it.
- Pediatricians are great contacts, but they can be a bit crusty about using their offices to market things. See if parents are willing to ask their own pediatricians if they would be willing to have brochures in their waiting rooms.
- If you have never had an educational visit with each of your local rabbis and pre-school directors, start any time! Your director should make these appointments personally, and attend the meetings. Additional attendees are up to you. Your aim is simply to make sure they know who you are and what your mission is.

In general, look for creative ways to build positive visibility in the community at large, adding to the credibility and comfort level of your school for the general population. Base this on actual strengths in your program, so you are both compelling and portray yourself accurately.

Do You Need a Professional?

We hesitate to say “yes” unequivocally, because marketing professionals, like everyone else, come at varying levels of competence and interest in what you are doing. Certainly, for logo design and the creation of your basic identity formats, a professional look makes a big difference, no matter how much design software your parents and board members may own. And, for public relations, you need to think honestly about how much time you have to develop relationships with reporters and work with them to develop good stories.

Don't make cost your first criterion: look for someone excellent who might have a reason (such as being Jewish, for example) to want to help you at a low cost. The offer of free service can be tempting, but the old cliché about getting what you pay for will soon become true: over the long term, an excellent professional cannot sustain a high level of service for free. And if you are lucky enough to have an executive in a large ad agency among your constituents, by all means look that gift horse in the mouth. In larger agencies, pro bono projects end up on the desks of very junior people.

If you do hire a professional, here's an important caveat: *do not abandon your responsibility for the product*. Trust your instincts and intelligence to tell you when a recommendation is simply wrong, and remember that you are the client. At the same time, try to bear in mind that what you “like” is not an appropriate criterion: judge your professional's product as you would your own, according to how well it helps you convey your “brand,” and advance your mission.

It's Not That Hard!

Marketing can be complicated and time consuming, requiring a certain level of education and creative talent to bring off well. However, the application of basic principles and common sense can guide you to an effective program. Here are my top three rules for marketing a school:

1. Put yourself in the mind of potential parents. Tell them what they want to know, in the order of importance they want to know it. Don't duck potential objections: make sure you pre-empt them with positive information.
2. Always adhere to your brand image. Check out the materials of one or more local private schools with an outstanding image for academic excellence. Analyze the elements of their “brand” and note how consistent they are with it. Remember: the decision to send a child to your school has HUGE significance for parents. The more professional you look, the more comfortable they'll feel about your competence.
3. Keep your eye on your mission, and keep your messages clear. Never try to respond directly to statements from competing schools. Just make sure your marketing makes a clear statement about your mission and your excellent program.

If you are targeted, professional, consistent, and clear, your marketing message will be an effective one.

About the Author

Jessica Rubinstein is a principal in Mercier-Rubinstein Associates, a full-service advertising and public relations firm that opened in Columbus, Ohio in 1989. Jessica's particular expertise in day school marketing has evolved over three years of experience with The Columbus Jewish Day School, beginning a year before the school opened. A native New Yorker, she graduated from Queens College, CUNY, and earned an MA in English Literature from Emory University. Before opening MRA, she was a writer and then creative director in two large agencies in Columbus.