

## Education

# Day Schools Learn To Sell Themselves In a Competitive Educational Market

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January 14, 2005

When Michael Raileanu moved to Forth Worth, Texas, in 2003, he was shocked to learn that many Jews there were unaware of the Fort Worth Hebrew Day School, the only Jewish academy in town. Raileanu was personally troubled, and for a good reason: He had relocated from Los Angeles to become the school's new director.

"Two Saturday mornings in a row at shul I was introduced to important members of the community, and two weeks in a row, quite literally, these important members of the community said, 'Oh really, I thought the school was closed,'" Raileanu said in a recent interview with the Forward. "It occurred to me that maybe we needed to do a little bit of consciousness raising."

Raileanu wanted to increase the visibility of the school, which had gone through four directors in five years and had experienced a drop in enrollment from more than 70 students to only 21 in kindergarten through fourth grade. Coincidentally, Jonathan Schreiber — an old acquaintance from Los Angeles — was launching a boutique-marketing firm focused solely on Jewish day schools and nonprofit groups. Soon Fort Worth Hebrew Day School, despite its tiny size, had a sophisticated marketing campaign that went out to the entire local Jewish community via a series of postcards featuring provocative slogans, such as: "Do we instill a sense of multiculturalism or Jewish identity? Yes." The campaign helped bring several new families to the school this year, Raileanu said, and helped make last spring's fund-raising drive more successful than previous efforts.

According to experts, Jewish day schools are increasingly seeking out partnerships with marketing professionals to cope with a difficult economy, increased competition and the rising expectations of parents. "They're competing with all the other key leading independent schools," said Marc Kramer, executive director of Ravsak, a network of Jewish community day schools. "Schools need to continue to expand their repertoire of what they know about being a leading private school, and that includes marketing."

Ravsak's annual conference, to be held next week in Irvine, Calif., will include a marketing panel featuring Schreiber and educational consultant Rheua Stakely, as well as Sacha Litman, a former business consultant with the prestigious firm McKinsey & Company, who is now advising Jewish nonprofits.

For Schreiber, who has a master's degree in Jewish education as well as a master's of business administration from the University of Judaism, working with Jewish schools comes as a mission. After working for six years at Passion Marketing for Issues and Causes, a Los Angeles-based public relations firm with clients that include the Ford Foundation and Hadassah USA, he became increasingly frustrated that smaller groups could not afford the firm's hefty fees. Three months ago, he officially launched Out of the

Box Advertising ([www.ootba.com](http://www.ootba.com)), with the goal of producing top-quality campaigns at bargain prices that small groups can afford.

"This is the faster, better, cheaper approach," Schreiber explained. "This is the democratization, on some level, of advertising, of marketing."

A typical campaign — which includes templates for several advertisements, postcards, a direct mail envelope and an invitation kit — costs about \$3,500, or one-tenth the price of a custom-designed campaign. Schreiber can offer such savings, he said, because rather than create a unique campaign for each individual school, he offers a handful of prepackaged campaigns that schools essentially lease from him for several years. In any single metropolitan area, a given campaign will be sold to only one school, guaranteeing that schools stand out in their local areas while benefiting from economies of scale.

But the true promise of Schreiber's work lies beyond bargain prices and slick design. Most of all, he is selling a strategy for convincing the most finicky of parents to take a second look at Jewish day school education. His campaigns are meant to dispel their most common fears — one ad asks rhetorically, "If Leslie is a gifted student, would a Jewish day school make the grade?" — and play to areas of perceived strength. The "best of both worlds" campaign, for example, stresses the dual nature of the day school experience. A young boy with a notebook tucked under his arm smiles for the camera, and the caption reads: "I know all about the slaves that were freed in the South. And in Egypt, too."

The ads' messages, Schreiber said, come from his personal experience within the Jewish world and from polling 20 schools about their most common challenges. They also echo the findings of a study released last fall by The Day School Advocacy Forum of New England, one of a number of consortiums that have sprung up in recent years to help day schools pool resources. Titled "Understanding the Needs of Jewish Parents in Greater Boston to More Effectively Market Day Schools," the report groups parents, based on more than 500 telephone interviews, according to their most prominent concerns. Eighteen percent, for example, fell into the "best of both worlds" group — those who want their children to have a Jewish education but are unwilling to sacrifice the quality of other programs. Only 14% qualified as "believers," who place the greatest value on Jewish culture and Hebrew language education, whereas nearly one-third of respondents qualified as SATs — that is, secular academic trackers — who are most concerned with the quality of academics and with getting their children into the best colleges.

The most fertile group for outreach, the study concludes, are those parents who are "believers" or in the "best of both worlds" group because they believe strongly in Jewish education, despite some concerns or misconceptions.

These are precisely the parents that Schreiber promises to reach, and so far, schools seem eager to climb aboard. In the last few months alone, at least four groups have bought his campaigns, while he is in discussions with a dozen more. According to Rabbi Jim Rogozen, headmaster of Gross Schechter Day School, near Cleveland, the campaigns' positive tone is particularly compelling. "[It] ties into the concept of 'Parents want something, and we have it,' not 'You're anxious that you're not going to get it,' which is a negative," Rogozen said. He views the marketing campaign as one step in an overall recruitment effort — as much an inspiration to parents and teachers who want to be ambassadors for the school as an invitation to new parents to come for a visit.

Meanwhile, Schreiber hopes his work with Jewish day schools will be the first step in making high-quality marketing materials available to everyone who needs them. "Jewish day school is the first destination," he said. "The goal is to keep growing the base of materials that are available for people and then to make

people aware that there's going to be a place that they can get something at a lower price and a higher quality than they would maybe be able to do on their own."

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