

JEWCY

Religion & Beliefs

Thoughts On Mapping The Network Of Jewish Websites

By [Jacob Harris](#) / October 29, 2010

This piece appears in response to an article by Professor Ari Kelman, which can be read [here](#).

First, I should say that I agree with nearly everything Ari has to say, but I think we need to zoom out. To my mind, Jewcy and United Jewish Communities (UJC), which is now called [Jewish Federations of North America \(JFNA\)](#), have very different functions. JFNA represents the body of Jewish communities that raise and distribute more than \$3 billion per year for social welfare, social services, and education. Jewcy is a web platform for the ideas that matter to young Jews today. We don't feed the hungry or heal the sick, although we increasingly do have better and better chicken soup recipes. Moreover, from our bat cave, we can see that Jewcy actually has 60,000+ links in, and is at least 10 times more popular than JFNA – but I digress, that's really not the point.

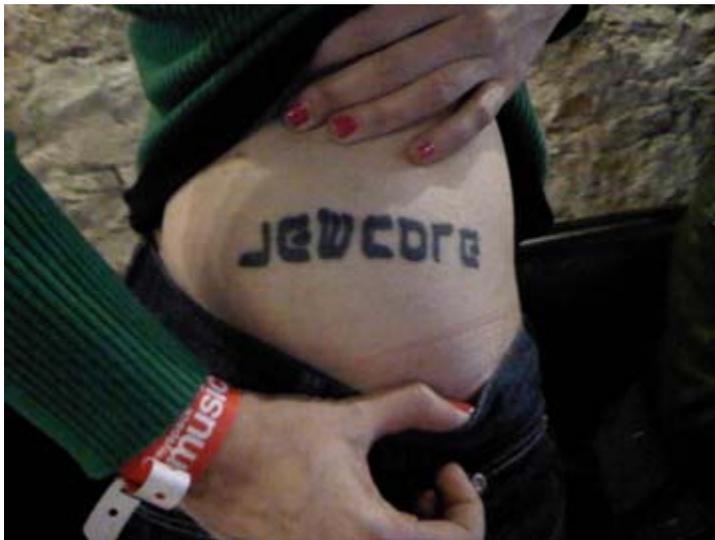
The point is structure must follow strategy.

Quick quiz: how many websites do you actually visit per day on a consistent basis? The experts agree on a range at least, and the answer is an average of five to seven. So in fact, our world wide web is quite small. If you take a social network, such as [Facebook](#), out of that equation, as well as a news site, and maybe a web based email client – well, you guessed it – the answer is really three or four. This has been expanded slightly by the app market and a generation of kids who don't know what a library looks like, but still, not by much. Bottom-line: we've mostly settled into our internet usage, and when we find something we like, we stick with it, until we find something better to fill the time between pretending to work and all the other stuff we have to get done.

So what does this mean for Jewish websites? Well, in our view, it all depends on what purpose the website serves. For us, it's simple really. We're dedicated to our audience. I'm not just saying that – we are our audience and we really like you too! We serve our mission of forging vibrant connections to Judaism through providing free content on a consistent basis from an expanding spectrum of voices. Some of it's funny, some of it's edgy, some of it's dead serious. I disagree with Ari on the implication that the network is equally important as the content – it's really all about the content, and if you have great content, network development becomes much easier to navigate. Accordingly, I wholeheartedly agree that an “increasing number of people

turn to the internet as the first source of information about Jewish life.” Our only secret (ssshhhhh) is that we know they’d rather read about

leftover brisket, [intermarriage](#), [Israeli porn](#), and [imaginary kosher animals](#) than local Israel rallies, consortiums of people they don’t know, and a daily dose of not-so-shocking, yet still highly depressing anti-Semitism. This is not to say that the latter topics aren’t important. They are very important and I read about them every day. BUT they don’t sum total Jewish life...and thus we have a whole lot of traffic and a whole lot of links. Incidentally, our Jewish website also has a ton of very smart and savvy people loyally reading it, who magically often figure out for themselves how Judaism fits into their lives. For some, that involves donating to the very worthy causes JFNA represents, or participating in an American Jewish World Service trip to Uganda. For others, that involves getting a tattoo.



Our structure (both on the web and organizationally) follows our strategy of expanding the definition of community. It is surely more inclusive, fluid, self-defined, diverse, and complex than your average Jewish institution, but that doesn’t mean it is any less meaningful, relevant, proud, and real.

So in considering what a Federation or synagogue website should be or should do now that the internet has changed the communal conversation for the next generation, my question is what’s the objective and really what’s the strategy that is going to get you there? What are you going to focus on? ...and most importantly, who is going to care? If you can’t honestly answer these questions with evidence, it may be nearly impossible to figure out what you should (or shouldn’t) be doing on the web.