

# Understanding the Jewish Community Center Marketplace: a Celebration of Volunteerism and the Voluntary Process

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*. . . what usually gets emphasis is "selling," not "marketing". . . the difference between marketing (and selling) is . . . selling focuses on the needs of the seller, marketing on the needs of the buyer. . . what (is) offer(ed) for sale is determined not by the seller, but by the buyer . . .*

*The companies (agencies) with the "courage of their convictions" resolutely stuck to the corner store philosophy. They kept their pride but lost their shirts.<sup>1</sup>*

## I. Preface

To explain (but not apologize) in advance, I will be using social welfare, marketing and business jargon and phrases interchangeably. Language, phraseology and its context, is critical in presenting concepts and perspectives. They also tend to encourage the development of, as well as to reflect, certain views and values. I believe that borrowing some language from other professions will bring as much insight to our field as their borrowing from our field has been helpful to them.

It will be helpful for us in social welfare to try to avoid viewing these phrases with the connotations we tend to bring to them, and to remember that each profession and field of work has its own high morality and ethics. The articulated values of each field are usually in consonance.

I am also aware that terms such as "marketplace," "marketing," "profit," "customer" tend to trigger negative reactions among many of us. Yet, the jarring difference may also be useful if perspectives are to be redirected.

## II. Some Population Facts

For over a decade now, demographic studies from nearly every part of the country have been suggesting profound shifts in the make-up of the Jewish community.

Our agencies are heading into a very difficult period, largely because there are (and will almost certainly continue to be) fewer Jews. We will be going after a shrinking and a changing market. We will increasingly compete with other vendors who (in the minds of many of our potential customers) offer similar products.

In order better to establish the need for a more planned marketing approach, it is important to understand and to remain current in our knowledge of our markets. Consider the following:

a. In the last 50 years, the U.S. Jewish population has declined by over 25 percent in relation to the overall population which is currently about 2.7 percent compared to 3.7 percent of total population in the 1920's. With Negative Population Growth well established, this trend should continue at least through the 80's.

b. Sidney Goldstein of Brown University makes the following observations:

—Jews are now about 40 percent less fertile than other white Americans (the smallest families of any other religious or ethnic group.)

—Only 62 percent of the Jewish population over the age of 20 lived in the same city in 1970 as they had in 1965.

—Jewish singles have become a much more important component of the Jewish community than has ever before been true.

—Higher educational levels for women have generally led to independent careers, making them less available for programs or volunteer

<sup>1</sup> Theodore Levitt, "Marketing Myopia." *Harvard Business Review* (HBR Classic) Sept.-Oct. 1975.

work.<sup>2</sup>

**c. In regards to our Singles programs, William Novack observes that:**

Roughly 20 percent of all young Jewish women are not going to marry a Jewish man because there just isn't one available.<sup>3</sup>

**d. Jews are at least a decade older than their non-Jewish counterparts.**

**e. Again from Sidney Goldstein**

—the impact of mobility is felt in the absence of roots. It may take 5 or more years for a household to “settle” into community life.

—persons who know they are “on the move” are less likely to affiliate.

—a college degree increases mobility, from the time that person leaves home for college.

Beyond its impact on population size and age, low fertility has one other serious implication for the Jewish community. Participation in community organizations . . . is closely correlated with the presence or absence of children. Lower rates of parenthood and the faster passage through the child rearing stage of the life cycle associated with small family size are likely, therefore, to significantly affect levels of Jewish organizational activity not only on the part of children but of adults.<sup>4</sup>

The conclusions are self evident. To maintain Jewish membership stability in JCCs will require making continually deeper penetration into this market.

In addition:

—Enrollment for preschool and children's programs will need to be viewed differently than 20 years ago.

—Singles of all ages and persons over 60 numerically, if not financially, are rapidly becoming a dominant segment in the potential market JCCs serve (even more true if childless couples are included in this group.)

—Since Jewish programs tend to correlate with family programs and family involvement, what are the implications for these if the

numbers of families decrease?

—How will these population changes affect the normal family oriented dues structure?

—As competitors increasingly set their fees on an individual basis and on a monthly pay basis, will the JCC be able to continue its annual dues concepts and insist that members join in categories rigidly defined by JCCs to serve a market more reflective of the 50's and 60's?

The statistics also suggest a widening gap between what agency boards, staffs and community funding bodies perceive as what is being “sold” and what members may be “buying.”

Since JCCs can neither create nor maintain a service for which there is not a legitimate consumer (or consumers) to help pay the cost, the role of the marketplace and marketing becomes more clear. Within this context they offer exciting and new challenges.

### III. The Marketplace In Which We Operate

A recent article in the Rocky Mountain News commenting on health care services noted the following:

. . . health planners . . . were alarmed at how quickly health spending was increasing in the city. The specialists knew these costs could be cut by offering alternatives . . .

. . . “One” plan has grown from 2,800 members in 1969 to more than 104,000 by . . . 1979. Some of this growth has been attributed to competition from the (other) health plan . . .

“Competition is what makes the health maintenance plan approach to health successful,” says Jon Christenson, an analyst for (a) . . . research firm who conducted a recent study of Denver's health costs.

The tricky part is getting one health maintenance organization into an area. Once you do, you've broken the ice. This allows others to come in . . . the competition is good for them and for the patients.

. . . Blue Cross/Blue Shield . . . is also changing with the times—partly in response to competition from the health maintenance plans and partly in response to subscriber

<sup>2</sup> Sidney Goldstein, “A Demographic View of the Jewish Community in the 1980s” presented at the National Jewish Welfare Board's Greater Northeast Convention, April, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> William Novak, “Are Good Jewish Men a Vanishing Breed?” *Moment Magazine*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Jan.-Feb. 1980), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Goldstein, *op. cit.*

demands.<sup>5</sup>

Most of us have grown up professionally being taught to avoid "duplication of services" or competition in our work. Even trying to avoid any appearance of service duplication or competition, it seems to me, is unrealistic. In addition, I would contend this planned attempt to avoid competition and service duplication is an important contributor to inefficiency and uneconomical practices and often leads to less than optimal services. Competition, I believe, tends to keep us more alert to our marketplace and more customer-oriented and usually increases volume.

Over a period of time I have become intrigued by many board members, persons often successful in their own highly competitive businesses, who would probably agree that competition has sharpened them, helped them to produce a better product at a lower cost and still provided them a very good living—far better than the average citizen. Yet, some of them will go to great lengths in order to support those of our colleagues who argue against duplication of services in our field as the most efficient method of service delivery. This approach, of course, is directly contrary to the way their own businesses and industries are run.

In a voluntary society, such as the United States, populated by citizens in voluntary communities who use JCC services voluntarily, Milton Friedman's "open marketplace" concepts and Friedrich A. Hayek's thoughts on free market economics seem most appropriate for our "industry."

Both Nobel Award winners in economics accurately describe an environment in which JCCs operate. They recognize the voluntary aspects of the "marketplace relationship" in a democratic society, where the customer has choices among a wide variety of alternatives.

They advocate a minimum of controls,

<sup>5</sup> Pamela Avery, *Rocky Mountain News*, January 8, 1980.

contending that interference with the "free" market process tends to drive up costs, create more bureaucracy (public and private) and create additional and unnecessary barriers between the supplier and the consumer. While there may be some differences in their views, both point to the consumer as the ultimate determiner of needs, product, quality and price.

Let the market alone. . . Listen to the music of the market. It knows things and senses relationships that even the most elaborate data processing system couldn't handle.<sup>6</sup>

Milton and Rose Friedman spell out this theme more explicitly in their recent book, *Free To Choose*.<sup>7</sup> Paraphrased, they advocate:

—a wide variety of services to meet a wide variety of needs. Clientele will determine the number, variety and quality of services. They, not the service providers, determine the quality and quantity of service.

—If the consumer doesn't care for the service in one organization—be it profit or not for profit—then that consumer is free to find another provider—and he usually will.

Rules, controls and regulations tend to interfere with the maximum efficiency of this process. With a minimum of interference, this process can and should lead to better and less expensive services.

Taken to its ultimate, it would mean that any group or any individual may offer any service, and, so long as there is a favorable consumer response, that service will continue to exist.

They contends further that all vested interest groups such as business, labor, government, and, I would add, social welfare, have a tendency to close and to protect their systems, either among themselves through monopolies, cartels, and the like, or by urging the government to set up protective systems for them.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Minard, "Free-Market Economics Wave of the Past? Or Wave of the Future?" (An interview of Friedrich A. Hayek). *Forbes Magazine* Reprint. p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free To Choose*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1979.

There are also protected monopolies such as utilities. In each instance, they argue, the consumer "loses" by paying higher, not lower, fees as well as increased taxes to support regulatory bureaucracies. The level of service is usually reduced. Eliminating or decreasing these artificial interferences of what Friedman views as the natural market process will be in the best interest of the consumer.

There are obvious interferences in these concepts for the current social service system. The same "protective" tendencies, as noted, exist. Attempts to operate the social welfare industry as a "protected monopoly" also lead to problems, such as reduced motivation, mediocre service and other inefficiencies which we associate with any other protected industry. In addition, it will virtually ensure the extension of social welfare services into the "profit" sector as soon as a market develops. Either that, or as we see in the Early Childhood Education "industry," regulations and bureaucracy extend further and further into the system creating continually higher built-in costs.

Friedman's faith in our clientele would do us justice. His is an advocate of client integrity.

Obviously, not everyone will win equally . . . The market guarantees liberty and equal opportunity—not liberty and equality.<sup>8</sup>

In these times the views presented above speak to certain aspects of our market environment that need to be considered:

a. The JCC is part of an integrated series of voluntary systems. The word "voluntary" is associated with "free will." "Free Will" implies both the availability of choices and the wherewithal to choose between options.

b. By emphasizing the voluntary nature of any client's relationship to the JCC it recognizes that in order to exist agencies rely upon clients even more than clients rely upon agencies.

c. In emphasizing the voluntary nature of clientele and their options, it is a reminder that today even the poor have choices for services. With the availability of public and private funds for services to "the needy," most potential clients, regardless of income, can choose from a variety of agencies which may be designed to meet their needs more adequately.

d. It exposes the "profitability" factor in serving certain groups over others. Be they wealthy or be they poor an agency will provide service to a population largely to the degree it fits also into the needs of the agency. The partnership between service provider and service recipient needs to meet the needs of all involved parties.

Witness the growing number of grants writers who seek public and foundation funds for agencies to serve "the needy." Serving that group has become profitable for social agencies and, consequently, that market has expanded. Were funds to become less available, serving this group would become unprofitable and most programs would diminish or disappear. Today, more than ever before, it can be said that "services follow funding."

e. To some degree the foregoing also helps to explain why social agencies are forced to operate within a certain range of qualitative service levels.

The seeking of funds in certain markets (i.e., United Ways, public funds) causes the agency (service deliverer) to tailor its services, including the quality level, to the expectations of the provider of the funds, or "buyer." Predictably, then, services will not be permitted to fall below a certain level, but neither can they be permitted to become so "good" that they appear to parallel that of customers who enjoy a broader range of economic choice for fear of losing the particular funder or major market. By definition, then, they are "mediocre" services.

In a voluntary system much of what we have discussed becomes even more com-

<sup>8</sup> Minard, *op. cit.*

plex, when the uniquely voluntary aspects of the Jewish Community come into play.

#### IV. The Jewish Community Marketplace

Perhaps most unique among consumers with options are the members of the Jewish community itself. It was first in America that Jews had available to them the full choice of whether and how to relate to the Jewish community. An important feature of today's Jewish social services is that for what may have been one of the first times in Jewish history they developed as part of a free system—one where Jews could move in and out of the Jewish community as they chose.

They did not necessarily feel obligated to help to pay for services they did not wish to use. They could no longer be taxed by the Jewish community. They were Jews by choice. If they chose to, they contributed voluntarily.

This "right" to associate voluntarily, as much as any other factor, has helped to shape the nature of our institutions.

A Federation raises funds by the power of persuasion, not by legislation. Synagogues offer choices and vie with each other, not only because of specific theological convictions which they may represent, but also because they offer differences, often subtle, to a clientele which insists upon having choices.

In this voluntary structure, clientele use their choices, and through their wishes demonstrated by their purchases, support those services that meet their needs. If a Jewish person (customer) wishes to affiliate (purchase a membership) in the American Jewish Committee rather than the American Jewish Congress, the purchasing principle is no different than whether a person chooses between a Lincoln Continental or a Cadillac. Both offer first class transportation but are different in terms of customer expectations.

In the voluntary Jewish community

system, as with other systems, the choices are there because the consumer supports them. These services will continue to survive only so long as the clientele is satisfied with the available choices, otherwise they will create additional choices. The most sophisticated community planning and coordination can neither limit nor expand the choices beyond the will, needs and desires of the individuals in that community. Attempts to control this process and to limit choices will only lead to more expense, less service and increased competition from other sources outside of the "organized system."

Remember Hayak!!

... listen to the music of the market. It knows things and senses relationships that even the most elaborate data processing system couldn't handle.<sup>9</sup>

#### The Jewish Community Center Market

For the Jewish community center there are still additional market realities to consider. Only the JCC tries to serve all elements in the Jewish community: from the poorest to the wealthiest, from the least to the most educated, from the least to the most religious, from the youngest to the oldest, and much more.

In addition, most JCCs attempt to serve both Jews and non-Jews equally well. It attempts to provide certain necessary social services for the needy while striving to provide services which are also appealing to the wealthy in any community.

Whether JCCs like it or not there are very few services which are not also provided through other sources in the community. Even moderate-sized communities offer alternatives to such activities as the JCC's camps, health clubs, theatres, tennis programs, educational services, handball and racquetball courts, nursery and day care services, programs for the elderly and swim programs.

<sup>9</sup> Minard, *ibid.*

To further complicate matters, the JCC often offers services to gossamer segments of the community, such as: outreach to college campuses, providing a "Jewish" environment for singles, providing programs for Jewish teens, providing services for Jews in the military.

Predictably, the response to some of these services is uneven (a synonym for "usually bad"), at least in part because the needs to be met are those of a different segment (community), rather than the segment to whom the specific services are targeted, the individuals.

Among the JCC's wide range of clientele many probably do not put as high a premium upon being served in a Jewish place as upon other factors. They tend to expect a nice place and good services first. Only if the Jewish agencies meet this first expectation will they then be used as a *Jewish* place, both by the community and by the individual.

Less than "the best" services may keep many affluent persons out of the JCCs because they can afford to look elsewhere. Since the JCC views this group as an important market, it is faced with the dilemma of how to include them among the service users.

The JCC, then, continually has the very difficult marketing problem of maintaining its facilities and services so that they may appeal to the highest economic echelon in the community, while at the same time pricing itself to attract the "broad middle class" and still continuing to "welcome" and to serve the poor, or disadvantaged.

To whom do JCCs appeal? What should be its service level? What and who are its markets?

Facing up to the foregoing competitive realities and marketing dilemmas are critical if the JCC is to use these realities and dilemmas in order to enjoy a marketing advantage over competitors and preserve (or expand) its market segments. Conversely, operating under the myth that

there is no competition places JCCs at a distinct marketing disadvantage.

## VII. Some Aspects to Consider in JCC Marketing

While this is not an article on marketing, I would like to offer a very few marketing principles based upon two articles written by Theodore Levitt, Professor of Marketing at Harvard University. I believe these principles should help us better to understand our every day working environment and, perhaps, encourage us to explore further the applicability of marketing to our work.

He outlined some thoughts which appear in my view to be highly relevant to and congruent with Jewish community center practice and approaches.

Levitt distinguishes between "marketing" and "selling" in the following manner:

**A.** . . . Marketing . . . views the entire . . . process as consisting of a tightly integrated effort to discover, create and satisfy customer needs.

(Selling) is not concerned with the values that the exchange is all about . . . the customer is (viewed as) somebody "out there" who, with proper cunning, can be separated from his loose change.<sup>10</sup>

As I review the above, I would be proud to be associated with an organization totally committed to the approaches described as "marketing." This appears to be remarkably congruent with what our profession is all about.

Levitt adds:

What gets shortchanged are the realities of the market. Consumers are unpredictable, varied, fickle, stupid, shortsighted, stubborn and generally bothersome. This is not what the . . . managers say, but deep down in their consciousness it is what they believe. And this accounts for their concentrating on what they know and what they can control . . .

. . . If management lets itself drift, it usually drifts in the direction of thinking of itself as producing goods and services, not customer

<sup>10</sup> Levitt, *op. cit.*

satisfaction.<sup>11</sup>

Despite best intentions it is too easy to slip into the pattern described as "selling." At least occasionally, we do drift and develop annoyances towards customers. For what are essentially illusory short-term advantages, we often place ourselves into the "selling" posture. In my experience, professionals too often work upon committees and committees upon staff to promote, publicize and "sell" a product viewed as important by the "seller," without giving enough consideration to consumer needs. Even a "community customer" need (i.e., one funded by or perceived as important by a Federation or United Way or the JCC board itself) can only be viewed as having a successful response if the individuals in the community agree by voting with their feet and/or pocketbook that it is also necessary to them. No program, regardless of relevancy, gets into trouble when individual consumers attend in large numbers. However, even the activities most highly valued by a board, Federation or United Way will run into difficulties if there is poor attendance or response.

Levitt comments further:

**B.** The view that industry is a customer-satisfying process, not a goods-producing process, is vital for all business to understand.<sup>12</sup>

I identify this comment as confronting JCCs with two of its greatest dilemmas. I refer to the wide variety of customers and market segments that are served through the JCC system—as well as the often conflicting values and goals reflected in the JCCs various market segments. Not only are they very often at odds with each other, but in the JCC's dynamic marketplace the relative strength of these forces are in continual flux.

The JCC may be viewed as a gathering of marketing segments or groups. While any one segment may view the JCC as an established entity to which they relate, that segment is, in effect, reacting to the other

segments. Whether by cash, influence or some other means, each segment must have a "buy-in" (clout)—some means of impacting upon the other segments. To a great degree this impact can be measured by this "buy-in" factor.

Consider some of these interacting segments:

*The Board of Directors*—for the JCC to function, this segment not only needs to know about, but to "feel good" about the services and how they are delivered. It is almost impossible to implement programs against its strong objections and wishes. While, in theory, this segment is supposed to "represent" all of the others, in reality this is a most formidable task which is rarely achieved.

*The Jewish Federation*—because it is one of today's symbols of the organized Jewish community, its actual effect may be measured in large multiples of the actual cash "buy-in," a significant customer indeed!

Probably more of the impact may be viewed as coming from the effects of overlapping (interlocking) directorships and overlapping constituencies which effectively relate to each other. Impact can be measured and predicted more by this overlap than by dollars.

*The United Way*—certainly an important market segment, but one whose impact upon sectarian agencies continues to be far less than its actual cash "buy-in."

I believe this to be caused by the extremely minimal overlapping of boards and constituencies, virtually eliminating them from the arena where their influence may be felt. This phenomenon would indicate that impact cannot be measured by dollars alone any more than foundations can have an impact upon institutional priorities through their dollars.

This may in part help to explain the "funding of services" or "funding of agencies" dialogue so much in vogue today. Possibly buying services would help the

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Levitt, *loc. cit.*

United Way to become a more potent customer of the agency.

There are also the more traditional segments, some of which are: singles, the elderly, women, families, children, youth, the poor, the middle-class, the religious Jewish community, the entire community and so on.

The paid staff, as well as singularly influential individuals, are, at times, extremely important segments. In addition, staff has assigned to it as one of its primary roles, the task of monitoring this state of "dynamic tension" which exists among these segments. Should an intolerable imbalance develop, the pressure is upon staff more than the other groups to re-establish a more liveable state among the other forces.

Through understanding the various, many and often conflicting market segments wishing to impact simultaneously upon the JCCs market it may become easier also to understand why the JCC is often at the "center" of so many conflicts. The conflicts are not usually with the JCC but among the various segments. The resolution of these conflicts, such as they may be, is dependent upon the relative strength of the various segments as they impact upon each other as well as the staff's broker role.

Taken ever further, institutional views and values are developed in a similar manner. To take the position that institutional values are constant and irreversible does not reflect what really happens in the JCC marketplace and in the Jewish community. Even though each segment may feel that it comes to this "marketplace" with its own values, the process of impacting and interacting tends to develop a mutually acceptable accommodation, even though this state of balance may be temporary.

To cite a few examples, consider: community traditional attitudes towards singles before they became a significant segment, Saturday openings at the JCC before a

significant segment demanded it, and that under no circumstances would a JCC have let its facilities be used by an Egyptian-Moslem group ten years ago whereas today, they are solicited.

The JCC, then, must be viewed internally as a system of dynamic tensions operating within and interacting with a galaxy of other systems, most of them with their own market segments and internal tensions. Evolving values are more clearly understood within this shifting system.

While this may be more closely akin to situational ethics, group and institutional values continue to be determined by this process of interaction among the segments.

C. It (has) done what survival always entails, that is (change).<sup>13</sup>

As previously stated, I believe no institution in the private sector (profit or not-for-profit) attempts to serve so diverse a market, with such divergent, often "opposing," needs and with such conflicting views and goals as does the Jewish community center.

All things considered, JCCs must be remarkably tuned into their markets in order to have evolved in the 1980's. In this sense, JCCs have to be viewed as an outstanding marketing success.

. . . the whole thing (the marketplace) is a communication system which has arisen without man understanding it but has enabled man to bring about an adaptation of every man to millions of events . . .<sup>14</sup>

And, still more Levitt:

D. They were production oriented instead of customer oriented. Hollywood barely escaped being totally ravished by television (because) it thought it was in the movie business when it was actually in the entertainment business.

Look for the generic product.<sup>15</sup>

The March of Dimes recognized this when it redefined its market mission as "health research"—not just the conquering of polio.

<sup>13</sup> Levitt, *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Minard, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Levitt, *op. cit.*



A JCC is fortunate in that it has several usually non-conflicting "products" to sell (or offer) which helps to explain its appeal among many market segments.

—Jewish association or identification is a more generic product (my apologies if sensitivities are aroused by using the term "product" in this context) than Jewish education, or Jewish culture, or even Jewish religion. It can be associated with each (or none) depending upon current market conditions.

—Recreation is a more generic product than hiking, camping, handball, bowling or what have you.

—Serving all ages and both sexes is more generic than serving only children, adults, seniors or youth. It allows the JCC to serve any and/or all ages; either/or both sexes, and in any combination of age or gender.

These are marvelous marketing advantages which continually are utilized and exploited. It allows JCCs to stay current (would the phrase "responding to fads and fashions" be equally appropriate?) and to solicit support from a myriad of market segments.

to continue growing, companies . . . must not bank on the presumptive longevity of their products . . .<sup>16</sup>

E. (Detroit) never really researched the customer's wants. It only researched his preferences between the kinds of things it had already decided to offer him.<sup>17</sup>

Within this context whose need or vision is it to promote the entire Jewish community center as one institution? Probably not one single major market segment—with the possible exception of some board members and some staff—is interested in the JCC as a total institution or concept. Yet, most JCCs tend to promote the total institution and its activities as part of the total institution. This is akin to General Motors promoting General Motors rather than each of its divisions promoting themselves and developing their own identities. More Chevrolets are sold by promoting Chevrolets to those who may be interested

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

in buying Chevrolets because it allows greater concentration upon a specific market segment. Most Frigidaire buyers don't know and don't care that it is a General Motors division.

It is also easier to target in on one group in helping to achieve greater customer satisfaction after the product purchase. Remember, not only do we want them to buy, we should spend some time and energy after the purchase in helping them to feel good about what they bought.

Perhaps JCCs should rethink marketing approaches and interpret products differently to different segments. This approach might help to develop an approach based upon the needs and interests of each group, and, except for limited instances, not interpret the JCC as a whole. Even community purchasers such as the Federations or United Ways are more interested in what their dollars buy, than the total scope of JCC services. JCCs often recognize this by "slanting" presentations to each group in order to make it easier for them to buy based upon their interests and needs.

Levitt says even more:

F. What the railroads lack is not opportunity, but some of the same managerial imaginative-ness and audacity that made them great.

The best way for a firm to be lucky is to make one's own growth.

To survive, they themselves will have to plot the obsolescence of what now produces their livelihood.<sup>18</sup>

If agencies are responsibly to meet their goals then they must maintain an up-to-date product line, recognize that probably none of the JCCs specific activities is permanent; and always plan to update or replace them with a "new or improved" product. This is even more valid if JCCs really accept the competitive climate in which they operate and that customers do compare various (duplicate) services to select the one which most closely fits their needs.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

There are also implications in how JCC buildings are designed. Plants that are too specifically designed to meet special, but usually temporary needs run the risk of early obsolescence in those portions of the building.

### VII. Marketing the JCC's Uniqueness

As noted, very few products, in their generic sense, are available only at the JCC. For example, gymnasiums, health clubs, nursery schools and other items are found in many different settings—private and not-for-profit. They are offered to persons of all budgets and in a wide range of quality.

Synagogues compete with JCCs for youth, singles, families—and loyalty. There are any number of outlets for persons seeking to enrich themselves through various forms of adult education. How, then, does the JCC make its product unique—different? What catches the eye of the consumer?

Theodore Levitt stresses the importance of making the product appear unique.

There is no such thing as a commodity. All goods and services are differentiable. . . . In the marketplace, differentiation is everywhere. Everybody tries to consistently distinguish his offerings from all others. . . . In short, the offered product is differentiated, though the generic product is identical.<sup>19</sup>

Medicines, whiskies, gambling casinos—virtually everything—are available in a basic “no-frills” form. Something needs to make them stand out as different from the others and appealing to specific buyers, whether it be quality, price, image or any combination of many, many perceived attributes.

The Jewish community center is in a very enviable position in the arenas served by it. It claims to serve a “total” Jewish community. No other organization can make that claim. In a more particularistic sense it

<sup>19</sup> Theodore Levitt, “Marketing Success Through Differentiation—Of Anything,” *Harvard Business Review*, Jan.-Feb. 1980.

can differentiate itself from synagogues, which by nature, must limit themselves to only one market segment, or from similar products offered in the general community.

Activities are offered as either “in a Jewish setting” or priced differently (usually lower than available elsewhere). Better instructors may be available at the JCC; the location may be more convenient. In some way, what is offered must be perceived as unique, and, at least during the moment of choice, more suited to the customer’s needs. There are even some clients who choose the JCC because it is perceived as being “good enough” for their needs, even when there may be “better” services available, usually at a higher fee.

Creative use of the JCC’s outstanding staff (stars), cleanliness, staff courtesy, methods of payment, decor—each add to the uniqueness, even though the basic product may be similar to that offered by other vendors in the community.

. . . the product is a promise whose commercial substance resides as much in the proposer’s carefully curried reputation (or “image”) and in the proposal’s meticulous packaging as it does in its physical content.<sup>20</sup>

In the JCC’s customer’s view, is what is offered (or promised) actually delivered? Are activities of the quality inferred? Are facilities as available as the purchaser was initially led to believe? Was it easy to enroll? To pay? Where were the customer’s “hassles?”

To the potential buyer, a product is a complex cluster of value satisfactions. The generic thing is not itself the product; it is merely, as in the poker table stakes, the minimum that is necessary at the outset to give the producer a chance to play the game. It is the playing that gets the results, and in business, this means getting and keeping customers.<sup>21</sup>

Professor Levitt’s observations on marketing differentiation are at least as appropriate to JCCs as to other businesses. Customers (God Bless ‘Em) can normally

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

be attracted to the JCC easily the first time. Too often, however, what has been promised is not delivered. Not all staff—or internal systems—are always equally tuned in to customer satisfaction. The customer's frustrations can very easily exceed the customer's satisfaction. When this happens, the customer leaves. Probably even more debilitating for staff and for other members is when satisfaction only barely exceeds frustration (maybe, 55 on a scale of 1 to 100), and the member stays, remains frustrated and complains to all, both in and out of the JCC. Hardly a way to develop customer loyalty.

A customer attaches value to a product in proportion to its perceived ability to help solve his problems or meet his needs. All else is derivative . . . The product . . . is the total package of benefits the customer receives when he buys.<sup>22</sup>

The JCC then, even for the most casual user is more than a specific activity (product) to which the user is attracted. The total service from the first contact—whether it be an easily negotiated parking lot, switchboard, or the receptionist—to the last contact is part of this “differentiated product.” The degree of satisfaction and promises (spoken or unspoken) kept will help to determine both retention and customer loyalty.

### IX. Conclusion

While I am aware that this presentation has questioned some traditional assumptions, we would be poor colleagues indeed if we did not exchange views and knowledge as a means towards improving our practice.

I do believe that we operate in a competitive marketplace. It ought to help

sharpen skills, improve services, keep costs down and help the agencies focus more truly on the clients' needs. I also believe that we have tools and skills to thrive more effectively in that market, through the planned introduction of professional marketing concepts.

Not only are the concepts of marketing congruent to our work, but the language can be helpful to us in developing new concepts, new approaches and new understanding of issues.

It may also be concluded from this presentation that if JCCs lose customers to other services in the community, be they profit, not-for-profit or public-supported, it is not because those services also exist but because somewhere, somehow, a different service met or fulfilled a need the JCC failed to meet. Either they did something better, or we did something worse. The only legitimate response can be to expend more effort and to provide a better service.

Certainly a more sophisticated and aggressive use of marketing can be useful both in helping to understand and to respond to some of the issues and problems facing JCCs. It can help the JCC realistically to view its ability to deliver the services it strives to offer.

Finally, I conclude by again quoting Theodore Levitt:

In order to produce these customers the entire corporation must be viewed as a customer-creating and customer-satisfying organization. Management must think of itself not as producing products but as providing customer-creating value satisfactions. It must push this idea (and everything it means and requires) into every nook and cranny of the organization.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Levitt, “Marketing Myopia,” *op. cit.*