

Brand X increased over sales of Brands Y and Z, then the ad agency could claim success. But consumers have become much more sophisticated, and advertising has changed to accommodate that sophistication. Now the best commercials don't try to convince us openly to buy a product. They take a subtler tack — a captivating television commercial where we have no idea what is being advertised. The goal of such ads is to create what advertisers call "buzz" — excitement, curiosity, and interest. They attempt to link the product, the brand, or the logo with positive feelings in the consumer's mind. Instead of telling us that Brand X cleans better and costs less,

they try to create a link between Brand X and happiness, or power, or sexiness, or fun. If it works, eventually we feel good every time we see the Brand X logo. That means that the immediate pay-off in sales will be harder to spot. What the ads are trying to affect, initially, is not our buying patterns but our attitudes. This approach takes patience.

The Jewish community has historically been unwilling to spend large sums on advertising, and it has been impatient. If we are committed to the long-term success of Jewish life, we must be willing to spend the money, hire the best creative talent available, and be patient.

Marketing Undermines Judaism

Jay Michaelson

"Advertising signs that con you
Into thinking you're the one
That can do what's never been done
That can win what's never been won
Meantime life outside goes on all around you."

- Bob Dylan, It's Alright Ma

ADVERTISING IS, at its heart, about the deceitful exploitation of desire. You don't really want the new car, but you see the sexy, sleek images on television, and you want that: the power, the glory, the speed. And then, by sleight of hand, the message sinks in subliminally: the car will give you power. To the extent that we succumb to marketing of this type, our deepest yearnings are being cynically manipulated. We consume instead of exercising real (political) power, or manifesting real (intimate) sexuality with our loved ones. As Nike has shown, even revolution can be used to sell shoes.

To "market" Judaism, as Andrew Silow-Carroll and David Nelson suggest, contradicts exactly what makes Judaism worthwhile. Consumption co-opts our loves and energies to enhance our selfish desire (the *yetzer hara*), but Jewish practice reins in our selfish desire so that we can love and serve better. Marketing asks us to sublimate yearning into consumerism; Judaism asks us to restrain our consumerism and open up to yearning. From *tzitzit* to sexual morality, to laws against charging interest on loans, halakhah, in large part, is a laundry list of reminders that our time is short and that, in Goethe's words, "what

matters most should never be at the mercy of what matters least."

Our own individual answers to "what matters" will vary, but the essence of branding, marketing, and image — and I say this as vice president of marketing for a software company — is precisely to press what matters most (deep values, needs, etc.) into the service of what matters least (consumption). When Jews witness an awesome sight of nature, they are asked to pause and open themselves to wonder, to make a blessing to the Oseh Ma'aseh Breishit, Maker of the Works of Creation. But in advertising, our feelings of awe and wonder are directed toward buying services and products. As Rabbi Nelson says, advertisements "try to convince us that there is some mysterious link between Brand X and happiness, power, sexiness, or fun. If it works, eventually we feel good every time we see the logo of Brand X."

This is idolatry, however widely practiced it may be. Judaism cannot use power/sexiness/fun as tools to sell itself; Jews need to recognize that the Source of All Blessings, sexy and otherwise, is precisely that which cannot be reduced to a logo. I know that some say we have to be "realistic." We live in a society of constant marketing, they say, and to not participate will make Judaism a religion without adherents. And Judaism has always marketed itself, from the original purpose of the Hanukkah menorah to Chabad's use of it in American public squares. But we undermine Judaism by dumbing it down,

dressing it up as "cool" or oversimplifying what Silow-Carroll calls the Jewish vision of "success." We can and should invite Jews to learn about and love their tradition. But to treat Judaism as something to be consumed is to start down a spiritual path on the wrong foot. A real religious life is not something that one buys or sells. If Judaism is to transform, it will require full participation, a yearning heart. If you can buy it, it's not holy.

Some might argue that, even if marketing Judaism may be duplicitous or patronizing at first, the new "customers" will see the true and deep value of Judaism in the end. This echoes an old Jewish teaching that something done at first for the wrong reasons will eventually be done for the right ones. When applied to marketing religion, however, this duplicity is both ethically repugnant and unlikely to succeed. As a baal tshuvah, and as someone who counts among his friends and associates dozens of committed-Jews-by-choice, I don't know a single person who was attracted by a "marketing" campaign. On the contrary, the people I know who made Judaism an important part of their life did so precisely

as a reaction to such commercialization and cynicism in the broader American society. One such friend said, rather bluntly, that seeing ads for Judaism on the subway makes him want to puke.

We have already seen the recent increase of Kabbalah Centers and how they and others have distorted the Jewish mystical tradition to cater to the desires of "customers." Instead of offering a pathway to higher awareness, Kabbalah is being peddled as self-help. But Kabbalah is not about self-help; it's about selftranscendence. Perhaps the Kabbalah Center attracts celebrities and other people interested in this or that spiritual way to feel good. But if this kind of shallow spiritual consumer is the sort of person we want to maintain Jewish continuity, we are gravely mistaken. A fad will not last to the next generation. To market Judaism is to make it a commodity, to make it something that pleases rather than transcends the consumerist ego, and the only people you'll attract are people who want to be consumers — not committed Jews. In the marketplace, goods are judged by how well they please us. God is the opposite.



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This Is Not Your Grandfather's Oldsmobile

Amy Wagner

THERE HAS BEEN much recent attention — and action — in the area of professional recruitment and retention within the Jewish community. Among the specific concerns is the need to increase the number of young people entering the field. There is no lack of qualified and available young people, and there are plenty of open positions. Our challenge is to present a compelling case to our target market — making the pitch and closing the sale.

Over the past few years, we have found moderate success in the recruitment arena for several reasons. Feeder programs — like Hillel, birthright israel, and domestic and overseas volunteer programs — are creating a cadre of enthusiastic and capable young leaders. The Internet bust and struggling economy has decreased the number of high-salary, high-prestige entry-level positions in the forprofit sector. And the combination of the tragedy on September 11, 2001, and the situation in Israel has presented this generation of young Jews with its first feelings of insecurity and the

realization that the world is in need of repair.

That being said, our task is still not easy. How do we take our collective knowledge as a community and craft a message about the value of our field that is sophisticated and persuasive?

If we are looking to attract intelligent, charismatic, passionate people to the field, then we must recruit in kind, utilizing the same profile of professional. Enabling our "best and brightest" to serve as *shlichim* provides a message to young people that a career in the Jewish community will be comfortable and that they will be surrounded by like-minded individuals.

Much of Jewish professional life is a "behind the scenes" business; while young people know that people work in Jewish organizations, they are unaware of what they do every day at work. Jewish communal professionals need to reach out to young people in their local communities, offering prospective recruits a lens for viewing the variety of career options within the organized Jewish world. Since we