Editor’s Comments

At the heart of NATA are our members: a group of about 450 dedicated synagogue professionals serving congregations as Klei Kodesh, Holy Vessels. Collectively we struggle to maintain the delicate balance between synagogue finance and spirituality, between facility management and community needs, between bread and Torah. NATA provides an organizing structure as we guide one another along the path of doing right while doing the right thing.

If our members are NATA’s heart, then the NATA Journal is NATA’s face. A series of interviews with leaders throughout the Reform Movement sensitized us to the critical role that the NATA Journal plays as a communication and teaching tool for the broader Reform community. The NATA Board accordingly took time to reimagine this publication and then dedicated NATA resources to allow the Journal to flourish.

I am proud to present you with the results of the Board’s vision and privileged to have had the opportunity to interact with an Editorial Board made up of dedicated professionals and friends to see this through. Thank you to Nancy, Mark, Ellen, Robin, and Harvey who have made this venture such an enjoyable experience. Thank you to Ed, the Executive Committee and NATA Board for your foresight and commitment to the Journal.

We are all indebted to the Senior Members of NATA who have focused their considerable experience and expertise on technology – the special topic of this edition of the NATA Journal. Our goal was to not only cover the topic but also to uncover it. To that end, you will find a wide breadth of articles as well as a variation in depth. This was done intentionally in hopes of providing value to congregations that are both well versed in the ever-evolving field of synagogue technologies as well as those who are just getting started.

Chag Sameach, wishing you a very Happy Passover,

Marc
From The President

Where people truly wish to go, their feet will manage to take them.
– Sukkah 53A

It gives me great pleasure as part of this edition of the NATA Journal to formally roll out the new Mission Statement for the National Association of Temple Administrators.

This statement (which appears on the inside back cover of this publication) represents the end product of months of hard work undertaken by the Mission Development Task Force, the Board of Directors and, indeed, the entire membership of NATA who had the opportunity to review this statement at the 2007 Cincinnati Convention. My thanks to everyone involved in this process; we now have a Mission Statement that clearly defines NATA and the important role members and the organization play. I believe that NATA knows now where it wishes to go and, with everyone’s support, we will indeed fulfill our mission.

I have always been a strong proponent of Mission Statements – I believe they represent a roadmap for any organization. It is extremely rewarding to know that NATA will be focusing on supporting our members, education and training, access to our resources, advocating for our profession and serving as a partner with the Union for Reform Judaism. To fulfill NATA’s mission, new database software will enable us to stay more closely connected to our members, the Membership Committee will be annually calling every NATA member, there will be enhanced educational opportunities at conventions and the NATA Institute, and a more professional approach will be taken to more effectively advocate for and market our profession.

One of the most important ways NATA will be fulfilling our new mission is imbedded in the pages of this NATA Journal. As everyone is aware, the Journal has experienced some bumps over the last couple of years. But thanks to our new Journal Editorial Board, we are back on track and ready to serve you by providing important articles and information to assist both colleagues and other Jewish leaders in their daily work. It is my hope that you like the new look of the NATA Journal. We are committed to working hard to bring you the best publication possible. So now I invite you to sit back, enjoy the articles and be assured that NATA will always be striving for the highest standards of service delivery.

L’Shalom
Ed

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Join Us! Please mark your calendars for the
Joint Conference of NATA and North American Association of Synagogue Executives (NAASE)
at the Ritz Carlton in Atlanta, November 16-19, 2008

This will be the first joint conference of synagogue executives from both the Reform and Conservative Movements in the United States since 1984. This year’s theme will be “The Synagogue as a Welcoming Community: Putting Out the Welcome Mat.” Ron Wolfson, co-founder of Synagogue 2000 (with Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman), currently president of Synagogue 3000, and the author of *The Spirituality of Welcoming: How to Transform Your Congregation Into a Sacred Community*, will be our scholar and guide. Ron is a well-known catalyst for excellence, empowering congregations and communities to create synagogues that are sacred and vital centers of Jewish life. During the conference we will also hear from experts outside our field who will share their expertise in customer service.

We look forward to gathering with old friends, new friends, and Conservative and Reform colleagues alike. Get ready to be refreshed and reinvigorated as we study, pray, eat and laugh together.

You’ve Got Questions, We’ve Got Answers

**What does the NATA Placement Committee do?**

The NATA Placement Committee is responsible for supporting the process by which URJ congregations (and a few conservative congregations and Jewish organizations) engage with NATA during their search for an executive director or other top-level administrative professional. Individual committee members are liaisons to congregations interested in hiring an executive director and in posting such a position on the NATA Web site. They work directly with the search committee to discuss the job description and the salary and benefits being offered, and try to make sure the search committee understands what an executive director is capable of doing for the congregation and what his or her role can be. The Committee is also working on materials to aid in this process, including job descriptions (already on the Web site), a how-to manual for congregations beginning the search process (or amid it) and salary and benefits reports (to come from our upcoming database project). We do not match colleagues to positions. Committee members are Ruth Cohen, Betti Greenstein, Bob Isaacs, Fern Kamen, Hilary Leboff, Michael Liepman, and Livia Thompson. Kathy Small, from the National office, provides ongoing support to the congregations and to the Committee.
Convention Reflections
Betti Greenstein is Executive Director of Isaac Mayer Wise Temple in Cincinnati. Marc Cohen is Executive Director of Congregation Shalom in Milwaukee.

It always starts the same: a phone call from the president. “Hello, (insert name here), I have a wonderful opportunity for you.” And so begins the journey that those who have become members of this special convention club know well. For those who have had the experience of being a convention co-chair, it can be likened to the nine-month labor of love and eventual arrival of a child – the result outweighs the effort.

As we think back on our time in Cincinnati together, certain highlights emerge: the awe we felt on entering magnificent Plum Street Temple and standing at the bima where Isaac Mayer Wise preached, the emotionally gut-wrenching presentation by Alyssa Stanton at the Freedom Center, the day spent on the HUC campus, the grandeur of the historic Netherland hotel, and the opportunity to share, learn and build friendships with colleagues. And of course, Graeter’s ice cream.

The positive feelings and support we felt from our NATA colleagues throughout the week, along with the warm memories of a great experience, blur the year and a half of work and effort. And yes, we still chat at 5 a.m. This for us is what the Cincinnati Convention will always hold.

We look forward to seeing you in Atlanta, as we spend time with all of our NATA colleagues and meet our NAASE colleagues, November 16-19, 2008.

First time convention attendees come together for a NATA orientation.

TECH FLOPS DON KRISS Executive Director of Congregation Shaare Emeth in St. Louis

Each week I send to our congregation of 1,860 an e-mail and, on Rosh Hashana, a special New Year greeting. Two years ago it said, among other things, “May you all have a blessed new year.” I sent it off to be proofread. It came back to me as follows: capitalize “New” and “Year.” I followed directions and hit “send.” Soon, I started to receive e-mail responses that to this day stick in my memory. What I had done in my corrections was capitalize the “N” in new – so far, so good – but accidentally I capped the “Y” in year with an “R.” What the congregation received was “May you all have a blessed New Rear!” in 24-point bold and in color. That evening at services, the next day, through Yom Kippur, into Sukkot, through Simchat Torah, for days if not weeks afterwards, I received pleasant reminders and jabs from folks asking me how my New Rear was. So, with best wishes and good intentions, may I wish you all a blessed New Rear!

Taking Care of Business: NATA CONSULTING

Representing the combined expertise and experience of hundreds of professional synagogue Executive Directors, NATA’s consulting service offers member congregations of the Union for Reform Judaism experienced professionals to assess and make recommendations in a variety of areas, including finance, governance and personnel. The consulting fee of up to $750 is waived to URJ member congregations, which are required only to reimburse for the consultant’s expenses. For more information, contact Debbie Coutant, Executive Director of Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos Hills, Calif., at execdir@betham.org, 650-493-4661.
External Signage As A Reflection Of Our Temple

By Saralouise Reis, FTA
Executive Director, Temple Emanuel of South Hills, Pittsburgh, Penn.

For many institutions, external signage is addressed only during initial construction or in periods of reconstruction or renovation. Although integral to the identification of its beliefs, in the case of religious institutions such as the temple, external signage is frequently minimized, forgotten or eliminated due to budgetary restraints. It is only when those making deliveries have difficulty locating the building or guests at simchas arrive habitually late due to poor signage that lay leadership is motivated to create or resurrect plans.

What are the motivations for erecting external signage? Many of our leadership see signage as purely a marketing tool for religious school registration or an annual fundraiser. But external signage can be used for many other reasons, as well. It can act to inform members, invite new members, identify association with denomination, highlight events, thank sponsors and serve the community. Effective external signage communicates not only the basic facts of the temple, but its image as well.

Perhaps the first synagogue signage can be found in Exodus 40:38. Our ancestors traveling in the wilderness built an intricate sanctuary to God. This was a communal venture. Contributions were collected from each tribe. Artisans carefully wove, carved, hammered, and molded the various elements of the Mishkan, which B’nei Yisrael would use during their journey. Though Bezalel and Oholiav crafted this moveable sanctuary according to the Eternal’s instructions, something was missing. Even when the tablets from Sinai were placed in the Mishkan, it was incomplete. Only the Eternal could add the signage necessary – a cloud by day and a fire by night.

Just as the cloud and the fire that surrounded the Tabernacle represented God’s presence, so, too, must external signage depict God’s presence in our synagogues. Since that time, well-developed external signage has reflected both the spiritual image as well as the physical structure of the Temple. Even today, this is its mission.

(This article is excerpted from Reis’ FTA thesis of the same title, available on the NATA Web site at http://natanet.org/resources/index.)
# TECHNOLOGY SURVEY of NATA congregations

NATA members were sent a 10-question survey on how and when synagogues accept credit cards.

Total Started Survey: 83
Total Completed Survey: 83 (100%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your congregation accept credit cards?</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>85.9%</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is there a minimum dollar amount you will accept on a credit card? If so how much?</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Minimum</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$18</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>$25</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>$50</td>
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<tr>
<td>$75</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Payment of fees/tuition at one time</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you take credit cards for:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Membership Fees/Dues</td>
<td>83.3% (65)</td>
<td>16.7% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious School Tuition</td>
<td>81.8% (63)</td>
<td>18.2% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery School Tuition</td>
<td>67.2% (41)</td>
<td>32.8% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day School Tuition</td>
<td>25.0% (7)</td>
<td>75.0% (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Holy Day/Annual Appeal</td>
<td>80.3% (57)</td>
<td>19.7% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>81.1% (60)</td>
<td>18.9% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>82.7% (62)</td>
<td>17.3% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Pledges</td>
<td>76.4% (55)</td>
<td>23.6% (17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What percent of your congregation is using credit cards (an estimate is fine)?</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 10%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-25%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-100%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you give discounts for cash?</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>91.4%</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you accept credit cards for:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online payments</td>
<td>28.8% (21)</td>
<td>71.2% (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person payments</td>
<td>84.4% (65)</td>
<td>15.6% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone payments</td>
<td>79.5% (62)</td>
<td>20.5% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatic monthly payments</td>
<td>72.4% (55)</td>
<td>27.6% (21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the size of your congregation?</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 300</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301-500</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-750</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>750-1000</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-1250</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1250-1500</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500+</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you do not accept credit cards at this time, are you considering it?</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less than 9% of the respondents give a discount for cash.
SYNAGOGUE TECHNOLOGY: WHAT CAN WE EXPECT IN THE FUTURE?
A society is a network of interconnections – person to person, individual to institution, institution to individual, business to business, government to government. Technology has changed the nature of each of these connections – increasingly, they occur online, in the ether. The Internet is changing the nature of “community,” as well, the very core of what defines a synagogue. Jews of all ages – from young to old – are actively participating in online communities, e-mailing, blogging, chatting, learning, sharing, and more. In order to continue to offer ways to build community, modern-day synagogues must embrace today’s new technologies and the lifestyle they’ve engendered.

**Information is “In”**

Today, innovation information is the currency; the way we acquire information is key to our way of life. We demand that information be delivered to us based on our interests and customized to the way we prefer to digest it. Synagogues will be expected to offer their membership similarly customized information. No longer will communication strategies based on one-size-fits-all, printed monthly synagogue bulletins work.

Synagogues will need to move away from the static TempleAnywhere.org Web sites to a customized MyTempleAnywhere.org model using powerful content management systems and database solutions that may or may not be tailored specifically for synagogue use. Congregants will customize their views into their communities through the use of RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds and interest surveys so they can see at a quick glance all the news and information they care most about.

Synagogues need to review their needs – relationship building, worship, education, and community – to identify how they can be addressed through online applications.

**Social Networking Brings People Together**

Social networking – online communities that allow for the sharing of information – are the hottest area of innovation on the Internet today. Companies offering social network services have become part of our everyday nomenclature. Membership in online communities such as MySpace, Facebook, LiveJournal and Friendster allow individuals to communicate with each other through blogs, message boards, journals, and chats, and offer rich multimedia
experiences. They include search features that allow individuals with common interests or backgrounds to find each other.

When online communities first came on the scene they were used primarily as a vehicle to keep in contact with people you already knew face to face. Today these community services are providing a venue for meeting and building relationships with people previously unknown outside the electronic medium.

Some synagogues are beginning to use groups and blogs to communicate with their congregants. If online communities continue to build momentum then every aspect of synagogue communities will also need to exist on the Internet – worship, learning, community, social action, and administration. Synagogue staff and boards will need to develop the skills to manage and participate in these communities.

Online communities offer an endless array of opportunities for the core “business” of the modern synagogue.

**When Worship Can’t Wait**
Webcams along with low-cost and high-performance video streaming can be used to allow worship to be conducted over the Internet. We see the hint of this today in some synagogues using phone conferencing or podcasts as a way to allow people unable to be present to experience communal worship. Broadcasts of weekday morning minyanim are another possibility and would allow the smaller number of regular worshippers to know each other, creating a more “intimate” online worship experience.

**Learned Learning Online**
Online learning is nothing new. Innovations such as low-cost, high-performance video streaming, along with low-cost Internet conferencing services, allow smaller organizations like synagogues to delve into this arena. Supplemental online educational units can be made available to children and can be especially effective when designed into a curriculum from scratch. Multimedia and animation can make course materials fun and engaging. Gaming software frameworks provide the technological foundation for interactivity, which can heighten the experience when students are simultaneously online.

Adult learning can capitalize on all of these technologies, too. In addition, lectures can be streamed live to an online audience and archived for future viewing and reference. Informal adult learning models such as the chevrutah are an obvious candidate for moving online. It is easy to imagine a synagogue that matches individuals with similar learning interests and provides the online infrastructure and staffing to make that effective and enjoyable.

**Community Building is on the Rise**
Support groups abound on the Internet – cancer, menopause, weight loss, depression, addiction, co-dependency – and they are widely used. Synagogues can offer support and solace to their membership online in this same way, couched in the context of our tradition and texts. This type of online support can also take us back to our roots, encouraging a community where congregants support and tend to one another rather than overly relying on clergy and staff.
Using groups or blogs, synagogues can put structure around the interests of their membership. From child-rearing forums to genealogy research to social activism – connections between congregants can be strengthened through interactions around their interests. The number of staff or the variety and frequency of programs that staff can initiate need not limit the interconnections among the membership. Expertise among the membership can be readily visible to all; clergy and staff can offer comments that perpetuate a Judaic context to all the online activity.

**If online communities continue to build momentum then every aspect of synagogue communities will also need to exist on the Internet – worship, learning, community, social action, and administration.**

The work of the congregation can also take place online. Committees can set up groups or blogs for discussion, planning and debriefing, no longer relying solely on those volunteers willing to give up their evenings to do this work. Even congregational meetings could take place online, perhaps allowing for larger turnout and the necessary quorums for congregational votes.

Today synagogue membership is defined by geography – people affiliate within driving distance from their homes. As people become increasingly mobile and move to different locales, and as synagogue communities become increasingly present online, the very nature of affiliation may change. If spouses can be found online, and friendships found and maintained, why not congregational loyalty and affiliation? Imagine the Jewish destination trip of the future being a visit to the “brick and mortar” of your synagogue!

**Overcoming Challenges**

The move to new technologies will take time, expertise, and money – it cannot be done on a whim. Synagogues will have to determine how they will use technologies to further their mission, who will be responsible, how will it get accomplished, how much will it cost, and what will be the timetable. Synagogues should consider forming standing technology committees, if they haven’t already, composed of lay and staff representatives.

When discussing using the Internet for worship and community-building, our natural tendency is to laugh and downplay its viability. After all, how can our online experience be as intimate as face to face? It can’t be. But it may be a wonderful adjunct, allowing people to build deeper relationships not dependent on physically being together. We all recognize that the invention of the phone was a boon to forming and maintaining relationships, so it shouldn’t surprise us that the Internet will be a similar tool.

Issues of privacy will be of supreme concern to our congregants and need to be addressed. It’s important to design in privacy protections from the start, rather than as an afterthought. Technology committees of our synagogues should work to formulate privacy statements and work to insure that the policy is adhered to as online projects are undertaken.

All synagogues use computers as part of their everyday operations; membership databases are also in common use. Some vendors provide these database solutions customized for use in a synagogue “business.” These solutions are called “vertical” because their target customers belong to one particular industry. Software solutions that are more general in nature are called “horizontal solutions” because no customization is required. As synagogues venture into the online world they should, as much as possible, strive to adopt horizontal (i.e., generic) software solutions. The advantages of being part of a larger customer base are many – greater choice of vendors, lower cost, more reliable, easier-to-find support experts, and faster time to market. Watch the early adopters for clues as to which software solutions can work for your synagogue.

Technology will continue to change the world we live in. Synagogues can use new technologies as an opportunity to reach and engage more Jews in even more meaningful and life-changing ways. The challenges are significant, but as technology use redefines the very definition of community it may lead to a turning point in the history of Judaism in the Diaspora.

**Debbie Coutant is Executive Director at Congregation Beth Am, Los Altos Hills, Calif. She holds a masters in computer science from the University of Arizona and has held software engineering, management and executive positions at Hewlett-Packard, Apple Computer and OpenTV. She has also consulted with various Internet companies, including e*Trade. She was the chief executive officer at Taligent, Inc., a subsidiary of IBM Corp. She holds two software patents.**
Redesigning a Synagogue Web Site

What you need to know to ensure positive impressions – both real and virtual – of your sacred community

By Marc J. Swatez, Ph.D., FTA
Executive Director, Congregation B’nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim (BJBE), Glenview, Ill.

Your synagogue Web site is a critical communication tool for your congregation. Internally among staff and congregants, it can be an important source of information within the temple community – service schedules, upcoming programs, school announcements, etc. Externally, nonmembers might use it for membership information, driving directions, and inspirational messages.

But many synagogue Web sites, while well-intentioned, have grown over the years without any predetermined vision – new features may be added as they become available or needs change, but within a preexisting structure. This may result in a Web site that isn’t as useful or compelling as it could be. Ensuring relevance by keeping up with both the technological advances and the growing expectations of all site visitors is an important effort that may require congregations to continually review and, when necessary, redesign their Web presence.

Before overreacting and initiating a redesign, however, first evaluate your site.

What are your technological needs?
Every congregation functions around a variety of critical platforms within the administrative office. Central among these are your temple calendar and membership databases. It is increasingly important for these platforms to integrate into a congregation’s Web site. Additionally, you must determine if congregants should be allowed to register and pay for programs and services online.

Newer technologies include video streaming, podcasting and virtual tours. Users may also expect real-time communication and scheduling capabilities. Finally, consider the depth of security your site requires: What level of privacy do your congregants expect you to maintain in trust? Is a password-protected, members-only area required?

When responding to these questions, be ruthless. While the good intentions of those who created your site initially are to be appreciated and respected, technology and the needs and expectations of your users change quickly.

Selecting A Designer
If, after this review, you’ve decided that a redesign is necessary, choosing the right designer is critical. In contrast to early Web sites designed and maintained by synagogue staff and volunteers, today’s synagogue Web site creation has become increasingly professionalized. Selecting your designer may be as simple as a single phone call to a known or recommended contact or as complex as a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) sent to a variety of designers or design firms.

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First, consider which type of designer is right for the job. Designers tend to fall into three categories: solo practitioner, companies that specialize in synagogue software packages, including Web sites, and Web design companies that create state-of-the-art Web pages for clients in both the for-profit and nonprofit world. Be sure to choose the designer appropriate for you.

Closely tied to the decision of what type of designer to employ is cost. In addition to the expenses of hosting and access that are already built into your synagogue budget, a professional redesign may be expensive. Exact costs will vary extensively between designers and will be impacted by a variety of factors, including the size and current state of your Web site, the creative process requested, content needs, and required integration with existing platforms. If new platforms such as online payment are required this will add additional expense.

**A redesign is not an end in itself – all Web sites need to be designed with an eye towards their long-term maintenance...**

It is a fair assumption that the least expensive method will generally be the solo practitioner. While completely reliant upon the knowledge and expertise of the individual, this is also perhaps the simplest and quickest option. Companies specializing in synagogue Web sites will likely prove to be the next option in terms of price. They commonly have a preexisting model for synagogue Web sites that can be modified to any synagogue’s specific requirements. The most expensive option will often be the larger Web design companies that will bring their full creative resources to bear upon your site, stretching as far as your budget will allow.

Redesigning a Web site takes time and is more often delayed on the synagogue side than by the professional designer. While acknowledging the tremendous value of the Web site, we as synagogue staff and volunteers are often faced with multiple critical tasks and are forced to choose between the “urgent” and the merely “important.” We must recognize that resources may need to be diverted to keep us focused on the Web redesign project. As a result of this balance, the duration of an extensive Web redesign may stretch from as little as a couple months to well over a year.

An often unanticipated benefit of hiring a professional Web designer is that they may offer services never independently considered by the synagogue, including applications such as search engines, multimedia programs, social media capabilities, and site visitor analysis. Additional related services such as “branding,” logo design, on-site photography, and direct mail may be offered, as well. The decision to take advantage of these services will have an impact on both the expense and timing of the redesign.

**Redesigning and Maintenance**

Once a Web site designer or company has been selected, they will work with the professional staff and volunteers as specified in the contract. Some arrangements may involve the Web designer being completely reliant upon us for all information and resources. Other contracts might include a survey of the membership by the designer so they can make independent determinations as to the needs of the congregation. You will need to appoint a group to oversee the process with a single contact for the professional designer. It may be beneficial to run the final design through your leadership on a “mirror site” not openly available to the public before launch to work out any final issues.

A redesign is not an end in itself – all Web sites need to be designed with an eye towards their long-term maintenance along two fronts.

The first front is the information itself. Several different approaches exist for keeping information current, including hiring a professional webmaster, who may or may not be a part of the professional design team, to gather new information and update it; appointing and training a member of your synagogue staff or a very reliable volunteer to maintain the Web site; and designing the Web site so that it is manageable in sections by a variety of volunteers and leaders, each responsible for their own content area.

The second front to keep an eye on is shifting technologies. We know that new capabilities are introduced almost every week. It is fair to assume that what is state-of-the-art today will be mainstream tomorrow and antiquated sooner than you think. You must therefore constantly assess and reassess your Web presence and repeat this entire redesign process every few years to ensure that the image you are projecting through the increasingly important Internet is appropriate to your congregation’s real and virtual needs.

It is impossible to anticipate the needs and expectations of each user’s visit to your congregation’s Web site. However, with some forethought and planning, you can do your best to ensure that each of these visits will be easy, successfully navigated, and a positive addition to each visitor’s experience with your synagogue.

Marc Swatez is the Executive Director of Congregation B’nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim (BJBE) in Glenview, Illinois. He has been a temple administrator for over 10 years. Marc holds a Ph.D. in sociology from Northwestern University and was previously an assistant professor at the University of Richmond’s Jepson School of Leadership Studies. He lives in Skokie, Ill., with his wife Elise and their three children, Joelle, Josh and Micah.
I introduce a discussion of the technique of podcasting with the question above not because of any animus toward the written word or any prejudice against those glossy monthly publications (although I admit to chagrin when I pay the rather hefty bills for printing and postage), rather to draw attention to the ever-growing arsenal of technical tools that are available that can alter and enhance the ways we reach out to our members (and allow them to talk back to us!).

So podcasting... (The name is one of those semantic phenomena where a brand-name – iPod – comes to stand for a generic product.) Simply put, podcasting is a way to transmit audio-content information via the Internet. The receiver listens to a broadcast either on a computer or a portable media player, such as an iPod. Listeners can find podcast programs on Web sites or subscribe to them on sites like iTunes to receive them automatically. In fact, to be precise, podcasting is defined by the user’s ability to subscribe to a program in the same way one would subscribe to a magazine. The advantage to your temple members is that they can listen to the program at their convenience, replay it as often as they wish, and even archive it.

Podcasts are referred to as “productions,” but they need not be elaborate or dauntingly costly. Aside from recording equipment, most of the software used is available free online or for a modest cost.

Basically, three steps must be undertaken to produce a podcast:

**I. Create the recording**

Equipment needs:

- **Microphone** – a quality microphone minimizes background noise
- **A portable recording unit with mixer** – to convert analog signals to digital signals
- A laptop computer
- A headset to monitor the recording as it’s being made and, later, edited

Once all the equipment is arranged, hit the record button when the program begins. You will want to use a software tool for enhancing the quality of the recording both during the recording session and for editing afterwards: adjusting the volume, deleting silences, eliminating extraneous noises and adding music or other effects.

Examples of audio applications software include:

- Audacity, a free, open-source, recording and editing tool for Windows (http://audacity.sourceforge.net/)
- Recordforall also is simple to use (recordforall.com)
- GarageBand for Apple

**II. Post-Production**

After the recording is made, additional fine-tuning can be done, such as adding an introduction and music. Because the podcast is a public publication, it is important to be aware that without written permission only “podsafe music” – music in the public domain – may be used. The audio software you’re using also may enable you to insert chapter markers, making it easier to navigate to different portions of an episode.

The file then is exported to a standard download format such as MP3 (or MMA – Apple, or Ogg Vorbis) using a software tool such as Publish. The end file will contain a data tag that provides key information about the program, such as publish date, titles, and accompanying text descriptions of the series and each of its episodes.

Finally, the file is uploaded to your Web site’s server with an RSS feed (explained below), which holds the directions for sending the file when a user’s program requests it.

**III. Publishing/Subscribing**

An audio file becomes a “podcast” when it’s made accessible on a syndicated basis. The essence of podcasting is automatic transmission of a program to the user. This relies on two innovations introduced by this medium several years ago: catalogued directories that can “push” out requested files and
“podcatcher” programs that alert the user to new editions of a predesignated program.

Podcasting directories such as iTunes, Yahoo Podcasts and Podcast Alley enable you to announce the existence and availability of your program. This is accomplished by attaching the recorded program to a news feed, known as RSS (Really Simple Syndication). The RSS file contains the “directions” that link your podcast with the directory, which in turn is searchable by the end user. Some software applications that create the RSS feed are FeedForAll (Windows and Mac) or Feeder (Mac).

Podcast users will have a podcatcher program (such as iTunes, iPodder, Zune Marketplace, Juice, Doppler) running in the background of their computers, which scans at regular intervals the feed to which they have subscribed. When the podcatcher detects a new publication, it will download the desired program, which then will be available for easy play by the user or for transfer to a portable, handheld device. The process is automatic, alleviating the user's need to manually check a Web site to see if new content is available. Thus, the programs you like are delivered regularly to your virtual door.

Applications
The possibilities for temples are limitless and include worship services, sermons, Torah commentaries, adult education lectures and courses, book discussion groups, Hebrew-language instruction, teaching prayers and songs for the Sabbath and festivals, religious school instruction and special programs, confirmation and post-confirmation forums, and readings of books for the visually impaired.

Admittedly, podcasting in and of itself will not replace the temple bulletin, but it is yet one additional tool to make the temple more accessible to members. It is a dynamic communications medium that empowers producers and users with a powerful new voice and which, in time, will lead us to additional creative expressions of content. ■

Mark W. Weisstuch is Administrative Vice President at Congregation Emanu-El in New York, where he has labored in the urban vineyards of the Lord for nearly 23 years. He also pursues his abiding interest in teaching, a vestige of his prior professional incarnation, by offering courses in synagogue management, synagogue governance, Jewish history, the history of the Holocaust and, most recently, The Dead Sea Scrolls. Mark has a Ph.D. in theatre history from City University of New York.

RESOURCES

Step-by-step description of podcast creation:
http://radio.about.com/od/onlinepodcastcreation/Online_Tools_and_Software_ForCreating_Podcast_Feeds_and_Posts.htm

Information about search engines and directories:
www.masternewmedia.org/podcast_directory/

How to create and promote podcasts:
http://www.podcasting-tools.com/how-to-podcast.htm

Discussion of copyright issues:
www.feedforall.com/rss-copyright-debate.htm

Fair use issues:
www.podcasting-tools.com/fair-use-and-podcasting.htm
Taking a systematic approach to choosing membership management software will not only benefit those tasked with the responsibility but the entire congregation. Such an approach is based on four elements: 1) identifying requirements and including special modules needed, like Yahrzeit, reserved seating, and calendaring; 2) budget; 3) technology considerations; 4) and selecting a vendor.

**Identifying Requirements**

Identifying your requirements for a membership management package is job No. 1. Start by listing the functions you have and are using with your current software. Next, create a list of functions that you would like in the new package and prioritize where possible.

Some basic functions you should expect in a membership management package include:

- Billing
- Yahrzeit tracking
- Letter generation (birthday and anniversary)
- Membership queries
- Calendaring
- A/R interface to an effective accounting package

Other functions that may be needed and are more complex include:

- Reserved seating
- Facility rental tracking
- “Full function” fundraising

There are still other functions that can be added depending on the level of technology you seek and can afford.

It’s worth the effort to create an RFP (Request for Proposal) requirements document so a consistent set of requirements is available to give to multiple vendors for competitive bids. Even if you have a smaller operation, seeking a far less complex package, a list of requirements is important for comparison purposes when shopping for a “complete” package from vendors commonly used in our industry.

**Software Budget**

It is important to establish a software budget based on what your synagogue can afford while requirements are being identified. Divide the budget into two parts: the initial cost of installation and the ongoing full-year costs in subsequent years (including maintenance and consulting fees). Installation costs should include the initial cost of the software, such as licensing fees (usually better to have the license fee based on the number of concurrent users rather than a per-user fee or license fee associated with a specific user), the cost of implementation (conversion of files and setup), the cost for training, and the cost of hardware (with supporting system software), including server(s) and workstations.

Although you may have hardware available, you must ensure that it can support the operating system, memory requirement, and file space required by the membership management software package selected. Initial installation costs should include training costs (depending on the vendor) while ongoing costs must include the backup of files.

**Technology Considerations**

The level of technology supported by the software package should be based on your requirements. The world is and will continue to go electronic. This means electronic communications via e-mail and the ability to perform membership support functions by linking a software package to your Web site. Electronic interaction with your membership, such as the electronic distribution of statements, is near, along with acceptance of electronic payments via your Web site and online maintenance of your membership database by your membership. Your software selection should put you in a position to offer these advanced technology-based functions.

The package selected should result in a product with the technology base needed to last for the long term – changing software is a
major decision and requires significant effort for any synagogue. Although technology can be expensive, the expense may be offset by a savings in labor or mailing costs.

Selecting a Vendor
Selection of a vendor should be based on competitively reviewing multiple vendor alternatives using a consistent list of criteria to ensure an “apples to apples” comparison. Important criteria to be considered include the cost of software, package fit, technology base of the software package, ongoing support availability and its cost, and vendor reputation.

Cost of Software
Normally a correlation exists between the breadth of function in a software package and its cost. You may be able to keep down cost by limiting the number of modules (each module is associated with additional function) purchased. Cost can also be controlled by limiting the number of concurrent users since vendors provide a cost schedule tied to the number of concurrent users, often referred to as “seats,” for each licensed module of software. Pricing can begin with one to five concurrent users as the base licensing fee, going up from there as the number increases. It’s important to determine the minimum number of concurrent users required based on the size of your operation. For example, if there are two employees handling business office operations, a three-concurrent-user license may suffice as the third license would be available for occasional users to query the membership database; occasional users should understand that they sign off when not requiring access to the database, making it available to others.

Package Fit
The fit of a package is based on its ability to meet your requirements, function by function. To determine fit, first list all your expectations. Then, check off all the functions that are performed by the package. Finally, assign a rating system - giving more weight to items higher on your priority list. Remember the 80/20 rule: if a package can handle 80 percent of your requirements, it’s worth considering versus having a package custom designed and coded.

After reviewing all the modules and function in a package and checking the ones you’ll use, create a list of missing functions and one of unnecessary functions (but in the package). Use this as your list for comparison purposes to what other packages offer. The package with the highest number of modules/functions included and used and least number of missing modules/functions is, obviously, the best fit.

Technology Base
Before selecting a new membership management package it’s important to understand the technology that it’s based on. Without getting technical, the database should be based on a current open database technology such as Microsoft SQL Server. The package should be able to interface to your Web site so that when required, congregants can acquire and pay their bills electronically and at some point be able to update their critical information (name, address, telephone numbers, e-mail address) directly by going through your Web site to the membership database (firewall protected).
Again, this kind of capability may not be needed immediately because of its current cost, but you may want the capability there for future use. As labor costs continue to rise, one way to keep expenses down is to reduce staff by automating and using these kinds of capabilities.

**Ongoing Support Availability**

It is important to obtain a quote for ongoing support for covering the licensed software modules proposed in your RFP. Support may come in the form of a help desk at the most basic level, for which there may be a charge. More technical, programming and database support will likely have a higher per-hour cost. Try to negotiate a support package at a fixed price with the vendor or at a reduced hourly rate based on specific number of hours. It is critical to have this support during the first year after installing a new software package.

**Vendor Reputation and Longevity**

We have an obligation to select replacement membership management software that not only best fits our synagogues but can serve our synagogue over the long term. Longevity is closely tied to the success and reputation of a software vendor. Determining this requires that inquiries be made to find out how long a software company has been in business and how many customers it supports. In addition, look at the number of complaints a software vendor has against it, perhaps by going to the Better Business Bureau in your area. You may also try calling NATA colleagues and the vendor’s customers to determine the vendor’s responsiveness to problems.

Establish a project team that includes your business office manager or financial manager, your receivables/bookkeeper, a lay leader (e.g., chair of finance committee or clergy representative). It’s a good idea to include funds in your budget for the cost of all licensing and regular support, extra installation support, and a 10 percent contingency at a minimum.

Going through this process will ensure that you have looked at each important consideration in selecting your membership management software and, in the end, have made the right decision.

Joe Elbaum became the Executive Director at Congregation Rodeph Sholom in New York City eight years ago following a 30-year career with IBM, including over 20 years in technical management positions, in the areas of manufacturing, programming, sales, education, strategic planning, finance and administrative operations. He lives in Brookfield, Conn., with his wife Ann of 37 years, has two grown daughters and a two-year-old grandson.
An E-mail About E-mail “Netiquette”

FROM: Larry
TO: Bekki
SUBJECT: E-mail

Hey, Bek. I’ve been thinking a lot about e-mail communication lately since, as members of our synagogues’ senior leadership, you and I generally communicate with congregants about sensitive issues dealing with health, money and family, to name only a few, and yet few guidelines exist regarding e-mail “netiquette.”

I don’t know if you have any horror stories to share, but I can think of a few good juicy ones. For instance, a while back I wanted to share a photo of a cemetery headstone that simply said “I told you I was sick!” — no name, no date — with my friend Lisa, a funeral director. Very amusing! So I hit the forward key, typed something like “I thought you would get a kick out of this photo. Pretty funny!” Then I typed in an “L” and an “I” into the address field, the name popped in, and I hit send. Little did I know that it was not Lisa’s name that popped in, but rather a congregant with a similar name whose father had died the day before of pancreatic cancer.

Then there was the time I shared an e-mail correspondence with my NATA colleagues about membership dues. The e-mail caused a lot of discussion throughout our profession and people asked me if they could share it with their boards and staff, which was fine with me. But the e-mail string somehow was forwarded to an Israeli newspaper, which published the entire conversation, word for word, on its Web site, complete with an online discussion group to talk about the correspondence. This was troubling since it’s one thing to have a discussion among colleagues and quite another to have it made available to the entire world.

As I think about these and other challenges e-mail presents, I wonder if there are simple rules we could follow to have better, stronger control over what we do and send. Your thoughts?

FROM: Bekki
TO: Larry
SUBJECT: E-mail

You’re right - this is a tremendous challenge since, for better or for worse, e-mail has often replaced face-to-face or phone conversations. When it comes to that string of e-mails the Israeli paper published, it might have helped if your messages regularly include a copyright disclaimer, something along the lines of “This e-mail, including attachments, may include confidential and/or proprietary information, and may be used only by the person or entity to which it is addressed.” While that may not stop someone reprinting it or forwarding it, at least we have a leg to stand on when we confront the offending body.

There have been several high-profile lawsuits with multimillion dollar penalties concerning the contents of corporate e-mails; we, too, need to be aware that by using e-mail we are exposing ourselves to legal threats. Synagogues are not immune from this. If one is sued for the contents of an e-mail, it’s not certain whether an e-mail disclaimer provides protection from liability. However, it may well prevent the actual occurrence of lawsuits against your synagogue since the mere presence of the statement might deter most people from seeking legal compensation. It’s my understanding that the use of disclaimers is always recommended. There are six general legal threats that disclaimers can help protect against: breach of confidentiality, accidental breach of confidentiality, transmission of viruses, entering into contracts, negligent misstatement and employer’s liability. There is no disclaimer that can protect against actual libelous or defamatory content; however there is a lot of information available about how to craft a disclaimer that is appropriate for your synagogue and community.
FROM: Larry
TO: Bekki
SUBJECT: E-mail

A disclaimer on our e-mails? Bek, come on! Do you really think that if there is some good juicy gossip someone wants to send, a few lines of small font type at the end of your e-mail is really going to stop them? Additionally, let’s recognize the fact that while it may add some level of security, such disclaimers really don’t have any legal standing. If I want to forward something along, a few words of legal mumbo jumbo certainly won’t stop me. And if I want to print an e-mail out, a few words highlighted in green asking me to think about the environment probably won’t stop me either.

FROM: Bekki
TO: Larry
SUBJECT: E-mail

Okay, so I’m optimistic. But I’m also realistic, especially about issues that we deal with when publishing our monthly bulletin online, like whether to include pictures and short blurbs about our upcoming B’nai Mitzvah kids or an Early Childhood event. The sad fact is that there are a lot of predators out there and parents are understandably concerned. So we need to watch what we do and what we say.

FROM: Larry
TO: Bekki
SUBJECT: E-mail

This is a very sensitive topic and one every synagogue should address. At Temple Chai, we publish the bulletin online but take the B’nai Mitzvah pictures out first. Might there be a creepy predator out there scanning our ChaiLites publication? Perhaps, but my guess is that predators will seek and find their prey whether we print a few school portraits each month or not. At the end of the day, our job is to foster community and shared experience. Let’s not scare ourselves out of providing these wonderful opportunities, but let’s also act with care.
FROM: Bekki  
TO: Larry  
SUBJECT: E-mail

Speaking of acting with care, we also want to remember that since e-mail has in many ways replaced face-to-face or telephone conversations, we need to show the same thoughtfulness and attention via e-mail as we do in person. There’s nothing worse than accidentally clicking “send” before an e-mail is complete because we’re distracted or multi-tasking. Also, e-mail obviously doesn’t allow for the same expressiveness that person-to-person conversation does, so we can’t express ourselves with vocal color and intonation. You might think you’re communicating excitement by writing in all caps, for instance, but your reader may think you’re shouting. E-mails are easily misinterpreted, jokes misunderstood, and excitement and happiness awkwardly expressed. Given this, it may actually be harder to write an e-mail than to talk person to person.

FROM: Larry  
TO: Bekki  
SUBJECT: E-mail

And yet, here we are, e-mailing instead of talking this over on the phone!

FROM: Bekki  
TO: Larry  
SUBJECT: E-mail

More importantly, we’ve hardly touched the subject of proper “netiquette.” So many suggestions, such little time to type. Here are a few of my favorites:

- Be polite – you’ve got nothing to lose. And never write an e-mail when you’re mad or in a bad mood. You’re more apt to say things you’ll regret later on.
- Only include information in an e-mail you would tell your mother – remember, e-mail isn’t private and it can be subpoenaed.
- Never forward personal e-mails or even business e-mails that have personal notes without the original sender’s permission.

FROM: Larry  
TO: Bekki  
SUBJECT: E-mail

Fantastic! And a few of mine:

- Make it clear why you’re writing and the action you want readers to take
- Be specific: provide deadlines, instructions, and goals; let people know what’s at stake and what comes next
- Write like an adult – use upper and lower case letters, proper grammar, and black font

Finally, if you’ve been e-mailing back and forth, forth and back, and nothing’s being resolved, talk to the person on the phone or face to face. I find that after several e-mail volleys, people are talking at one another, not with one another.

Bekki, thanks for being such a great correspondent. And for helping me become a better one!
On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit Touro Synagogue in New Orleans, affecting not just its physical existence, but the lives of its over 600 families. It would take manual labor to repair the building; but to repair our sense of community – and the continuity necessary to run a synagogue – it was technology that helped us recover quickly. I say “helped” because, of course, the incredible efforts of our staff, lay leaders, congregants and community contributed to our recovery. Technology, however, made us more efficient. This is our story, with a bit of advice thrown in for good measure.

Within the first week after the storm I went shopping for laptop computers to ensure that we'd be prepared for the future. It doesn't matter if you don't use a laptop regularly; as executive director, you should have one set-up with the same password/login as your desktop. Regularly synchronize data files and e-mail between the two. Make sure your accounting program and database system is installed on your laptop, as well. If you must evacuate, and you have enough time, the laptop should be synchronized a last time before you leave. If I evacuated today, I could be back at work, but out of the office, within an hour of reaching my destination regardless of the status of our systems back at the synagogue.

We all know back ups are a pain in the tuchisim but it's that very tuchis that will be saved if you have a good back up when the storm, or whatever, hits. Don't forget to keep one back up offsite at all times and, more importantly, to take your back up with you when you leave!

You can also have a secondary back up (not a substitute to a real back up) that's easy and inexpensive: When you're out purchasing that laptop, slide over to the flash memory aisle and buy a USB flash drive. A flash drive can be a small “thumb” drive or a larger "hard" drive-like piece of equipment. The thumb drives are easier to transport and carry and are usually less expensive. An alternative to the thumb drive is to buy a large USB portable drive, 160GB or larger depending upon the quantity of data you have. We have one that we use for a secondary backup though, time permitting, in the case of an evacuation I would do a quick back up of all our data to this drive and take it with me.

Despite my having all this in place, the single most valuable piece of technology after the storm turned out to be my Treo 650 Smartphone – the “smart” part, not the “phone” part, that is. For a phone, we all had to purchase pay-as-you-go phones as the cell networks were all incapacitated and New Orleans numbers didn’t work. What did work on the Treo was the address book and calendar functions.

Regularly (ideally monthly but at least quarterly) we export our database of members and nonmembers to a Microsoft Exchange Public folder and I sync this folder with my Treo giving me the contact information for all of our members and even nonmembers connected to Touro. In the end, it was the only single source of contact information for all in our community. Most all of the current database solutions allow you to export the data to a format that is readable by Outlook or Exchange or other calendar programs. Of course if you have the laptop or thumb drive, you can live without the PDA.

Despite our reliance on technology, to be honest, the best tool for disaster preparation is the human brain. Be mentally prepared that disaster can happen, make a plan to address it, and be ready to jump into action when disaster strikes. You’ll be able to come through it and help your congregants and employees weather it as well. That’s what we did and that’s why we continue to remain a thriving community today.

Mark H. Rubenstein is Executive Director of Touro Synagogue in New Orleans, the oldest congregation outside the original thirteen colonies. Beside his Senior Member status with NATA, Mark was honored by NATA, along with his area colleagues, with the Myron E. Schoen Service to Judaism Award for his leadership skills helping Touro to recover quickly after Hurricane Katrina. In May of 2008, Mark will begin as Senior Executive Director with Congregation B’nai Israel in Boca Raton, Fla.
**NATA MISSION STATEMENT**

The National Association of Temple Administrators (NATA) is an active professional network of Reform Jewish Synagogue Executive Directors committed to Judaic principles of ethics and integrity.

NATA’s mission is to support its members by:

- providing educational and training activities and standards,
- providing its individual members and their URJ congregations with access to NATA resources,
- advocating for and promoting the profession of Temple Administration,
- serving as the professional partner with the Union for Reform Judaism.

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**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEMPLE ADMINISTRATORS**

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THE NATA NATIONAL OFFICE

The NATA National Office is headquartered in Ridgefield, Washington, adjacent to the Columbia River and about 15 minutes north of Portland, Oregon. The office is managed by Kathy Small of Small and Associates, which prides itself on providing top-quality customer service to the NATA membership. The national office provides the day-to-day administration of membership, convention, education and placement services, as well as support to the NATA Executive Team and Board of Directors. Kathy Small has been managing the NATA office for the past 10 years.

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