OPENING YOUR DIGITAL DOOR: A QUICK GUIDE TO INCLUSION EFFORTS IN YOUR WEBSITE

Not so long ago, a new visitor to your synagogue would begin their experience by coming to your front door or calling you on the telephone. In today’s world, first contact with your synagogue will almost always be through your website. Your website is an access point into your community and provides your first opportunity to welcome, and it is your only chance to make a good first impression. If we want the world to know that we are inclusive, this is the place to start. Here are four easy steps to making sure that your website is as welcoming as your community.

1. **Make your site accessible.**
   Many types of disabilities — especially visual and auditory disabilities — present barriers for people trying to access websites. The first step to communicating that your congregation is welcoming is to make your website is accessible to everyone. A handy checklist of web accessibility standards based on accessibility regulations provided by the federal government under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 can be found at [http://webaim.org/standards/508/checklist](http://webaim.org/standards/508/checklist). If you need guidance to make this a reality, you might consider visiting Accessibility Partners.

2. **Share your commitment to inclusion.**
   Consider including a simple inclusion statement in the header or footer of each page of your site. You may consider having this notice link directly to your synagogue’s inclusion policy.

3. **Make your accessibility features and inclusion policy readily accessible.**
   Does your synagogue have a ramp or elevator, or do you have assistive listening devices and wheelchairs available? Does your facility have a fragrance-free policy? Whatever you have to offer, the key is to share it. You’ll be providing practical information to the visitor while also letting them know that your congregation is considering diverse needs. Don’t forget to include relevant information about accessible public transportation and parking.

4. **Invite a dialogue.**
   It’s impossible to anticipate every access need, and even the best website can only go so far. It’s important to clearly offer contact information to discuss particular inclusion needs.

A huge part of inclusion is signaling to populations that are used to being excluded that they have a place at your synagogue. Your website may well be the best way to let people know that your synagogue has a place for them.