



Changes in Society
Jewish Society

The Market Driven Community

Jewish Winnipeg Demographics
Innovative Approaches to Judaism & Jewish Life
A Brief History of Jewish Winnipeg

The Market Driven Community

Society has changed. Tremendous leaps in industrialization and technology have changed the way people build communities and civil society since the first settlements in North America. The way individuals relate to each other and to organizations has a significant impact on how communities need to adapt over time in order for Jewish community to remain relevant now and in the future. The following is the third in a series of papers prepared for use as background for the various community planning efforts undertaken by the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg in 2016.

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Key Trends:

- The generations view institutions, membership and philanthropy differently.
- Boomers and their children are large groups that drive the market in various ways.
- Related to the way they accumulate social capital, younger families make decisions about programs, philanthropic dollars, and community involvements as social investments.
- Students and their parents choose educational electives and extra-curricular involvements based on their resumes, positioning them to compete in a market driven world.
- Jewish communities compete for time, attention, dollars, and identity with everything else in society. Jewish involvement does not take priority as it did in previous times when Jews were excluded from parts of society in general.

1. Demographics and the Market

David Foot traced the effects of Boomers on the market place. Just as product developers must account for the market sizes in planning their products, so communities must plan for the demographic bulges. In Jewish communities the rise of modern, liberal, accepting society means that Jewish offerings must compete with everything else for time and attention. Jewish service providers – JCCs, synagogues, etc need to be clear about why they offer a program and what will gather Jews together.

While offering a secular program of excellence may attract Jewish participants, what is the Jewish purpose of such an offering? Why should a community invest in offering ballet classes? The reason may be that the time slot allows parents to have a facilitated Jewish conversation at the same time. Jewish learning can be offered in convenient and extremely relevant ways.

2. Generational Differences Described

One approach to examining the target markets is to create caricatures that describe some of the most prominent traits of the group. These are exaggerations and generalizations that do not apply to the whole group!!!!

Let's consider the population distribution in Jewish Winnipeg. The dominant population groups are boomers, their children, and their grandchildren, supplemented by immigrants who are the same age groups as the children and grandchildren.

Then let's look a little more closely at the younger Jews and the differences in their context from Boomers. This is important to understanding the impact of decisions made by leadership groups (e.g. community boards) that tend to be populated with more Boomers than "millennials".

Boomers

Boomers, the largest age cohort in the community (and in Canada), were born between 1946 and 1964.

Financial and physical health: They are not retiring when they reach 65 even though they are generally able to do so financially. They are healthier than their grandparents and living longer. Boomers are interested in travel, social justice projects, and their families.

Feminism: If you are a Jewish woman, there's a good chance that you went to university. If you undertook a career then you probably encountered the glass ceiling and maybe some overt or covert anti-Semitism.

Memory and Pride in Israel: Some of us remember black and white TVs with rabbit ears and three channels, or the list of ice cream flavours that was vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry in its entirety. Neapolitan was an innovation. And we remember where we were when Kennedy was assassinated, watched a man land on the moon and were incredibly proud when Israel won the Six Day War. Younger generations do not have the same profound experience of watching the Six Day War unfold as a modern miracle to solidify their identity as Jews and Zionists.

The Echo – children of Boomers

The children of Boomers are significant in number and also generally “doing all right”. They have been raised to make choices on their own, unlike older generations who were more likely to obey parents' wishes even as adults. The adult children of boomers choose what's best for themselves and their family. They value vacations, fitness and sport, music and restaurants in the mix of philanthropy and volunteerism in ways to spend recreation time and disposable income.

Generation of choices: If you were born after 1969, Sesame Street, Baskin Robbins, and Starbucks Coffee have always existed in your world. You grew up with information provided in 60 second to 2 minute sound bites, you always had a choice of more than a dozen flavours of ice cream, and ordering coffee has always involved choosing from dozens of combinations and permutations of flavours, grind, creamers, styles, and foam or no foam.

If you're under 45, you have reason to believe everything is your choice, assuming you succeed in competition in career, business, sports. You grew up in an era of prosperity and choice. You raise children with Barbara Colorosso's instructions on how to give them structure and teach them to make good choices.

Membership is something that comes with a three month trial period at the local fitness centre and if you don't like that one after a while you can switch to a new centre. Your cell phone plan is 3 years long at the outside, and if you have to change phone numbers to get a better deal you will.

You choose schools, camps, synagogues, and after-school programs based on their perceived merit and benefit for yourself and your family. If you don't see the benefit you choose something else. Perhaps Classical Ballet will be better on your child's resume than Israeli Dance, and the school should be renowned for Classical Ballet. Your child's pedigree needs to show integration and accomplishment in the world. Jewish achievements are probably not a priority over all these other choices.

Image of Israel: If you are under 45 the war on terror and CNN images of Israelis oppressing Palestinian children have long been part of your daily news consumption, which you primarily get in images and two minute news stories, and the internet which you can browse and skim at electronic speed.

Younger Millennials

The technology generation: If you were born after 1989, you don't remember a time without cell phones. You only learned to read digital clocks and Velcro your shoes shut when you were little. Laces came later in life. You knew how to use a computer before you mastered penmanship, an old-fashioned word which is likely not in your vocabulary. Wikipedia is your first choice for information, and the library is your last resort.

"What's a library?" "The place where you get free public internet for research when yours is down."

And you watch TV on your computer. You may text people who are in the same room with you, and you communicate with friends all over the world. Friends are on Facebook. Love trumps religion or race, which are irrelevant in a modern, global society. The environment is an imminent concern. Will the world survive til you have grandchildren? Your first full time job needs to be a good one where you will have access to the quality of social life you like after hours. Your job is only part of your life. Work/life balance is important.

Connection to Jewish community and Israel: You know that it is your birthright to see Israel, you're accustomed to Jewish programs like Hillel Shabbat dinners or attending national conferences, that are free or charge a small fee. You probably don't know how much they are subsidized, and don't care since they are always subsidized. That's normal in your frame of reference, so you plan to spend money on beer, food, movies, entertainment but you don't reserve dollars for Jewish activities like a Shabbat dinner. If you have a program idea and a few people who are interested, there's some group at university who will fund it.

While you may be seeking spirituality and meaning, you are almost as likely to find it in social networking, online gaming, or an online world that you pay money to use, as you are in a live social group, synagogue, or peer group. Getting together with family and friends on Friday night is your Shabbat experience even though you just call it dinner, and Jewish humour is really just American humour.

Diversity and inclusion: If you are male, it likely takes you a few years past high school to "find yourself", a term you don't know because it's sooooooo sixties, a little longer than the women in your class.

If you are female you are more likely to show ambition and be prepared for the competition of university. You grew up knowing you could do and have everything – career, family, time with friends.

Inclusion and equality are important. Acceptance of diversity vies for the particularism of religion in your belief systems. Feminism is the battle of the last generation.

3. The Jewish Educator Challenge

In a nutshell, Jewish educators face the challenge of educating Jewish kids, teens, and young adults in a way that competes with everything else in their lives and still wins their attention!

Parents today were Sesame Street kids. They grew up with everything in two minute sound bites. They always got to choose and control every detail of their lives and therefore expect to have all manner of choices for their kids lives – from 34 flavours of ice cream to which activity their kids should compete in. They are highly competitive, experiencing competition to get in to university programs, and even for exclusive schools for their kids right from nursery school. The words “Tiger Mom” and “Helicopter Parent” are used to describe members of this generation of parents.

So school isn't just about education. It's about how the child will get into the right university and social circle and such from the time they are 2 years old. The Junior Kindergarten application asks “What are your educational goals for your child this year?” The educational goals that the parents of these parents had for their children at that age was “have a good time with other kids”. Reading readiness, math facts, and other educational items were not on the agenda for 2-4 year olds 50 years ago.

Add to that the incredible diversity of Jews, as denominations hold less power over each generation, and “Just Jews” become the norm. You can learn your bar mitzvah over the net without a teacher, you can be a do it yourself Jew. But you may still sign up for dayschool if the educational excellence and Jewish society appeal to you for your child.

Everyone is used to having choices. So two people want tefilah, three want the right way to do Jewish and are dogmatic, 4 want bible as literature, and everybody else doesn't care as long as their kids are getting a good primary school education, and they are all together in the same class with their friends.

It's hard to buck the trends, and that's what elite students studying formal and informal Jewish education in the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and other graduate studies programs are tasked with. The challenge:

Make Jewish learning and living so relevant to modern kids that they will fight their parents to take a Jewish studies elective or attend an extra-curricular Jewish program over one that the adults think is better on their resume!

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