

MEDIA JUDAICA

Audio-Visual Media in the Synagogue and Religious School Library

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Introduction

The expression "the people of the book" has long been applied to the Jewish people. In past centuries, through both periods of anguish and periods of splendor, scholarship and study have been vital to Jewish existence. This heritage of Jewish scholarship has been gathered in books and deposited in many libraries.

Today's modern congregational library serves as an oasis of Jewish knowledge and culture for contemporary American Jewry. It enables modern American Jews to hold fast to a cultural heritage, rich in tradition, that has endured through great trials and tribulations.

The library plays an integral role in the process of transferring information. In our fast-paced world, where technological advances have had a profound impact on information transfer and dissemination, it is incumbent upon the congregational librarian to examine carefully the service provided to its patrons. Contemporary trends and new perspectives must be considered. Traditional patron service models must be re-evaluated. A successful patron service model must reflect the latest media by which information is transmitted.

While we are the "people of the book," it is vital to recognize that printed books are no longer the sole means for recording and transmitting information to the library user. Experience has shown that a successful information center derives information from a multitude of sources. The effective congregational library must follow such a model.

It is not the intention of this writer to suggest that the "book" be removed from the modern congregational library. Both adult readers and young students still utilize books heavily. It is my firm belief, however, that the information explosion of the past decade compels us to acknowledge the new phenomena. Non-print information sources transmit our culture and heritage in a manner parallel to print sources.

Audio-Visual Services of the Sindell Library

The Sindell Library of Temple Emanu El has provided its patrons with non-print information sources for many years. We follow the practice of acquiring curriculum-related audio-visual materials to supplement the religious school curriculum. Our basic film-strip and record collection was augmented by several 16 mm films approximately ten years ago through a generous donation by a member of the congregation. This enabled our religious school instructors to borrow films directly from the library. In time, these items were used by affiliate groups as well.

To encourage use of this medium, certain steps must be taken by the librarian. Unlike books, which a patron can examine quickly prior to selection, a non-print item cannot be casually examined. This type of information source requires the use of audio-visual equipment to bring its information to the user. While most teachers will preview A.V. items briefly, few teachers are willing to spend lengthy hours viewing an extensive collection of films. Here the contribution of the library professional is vital. We have provided our teachers with a well indexed, annotated guide to the 16 mm films in our collection. This listing enables teachers to become generally familiar with the content of the collection. The most promising items can be given closer examination, prior to making a final selection. Descriptive material regarding non-print information sources is an essential factor in stimulating effective utilization of this area of our collection.

A similar pattern is followed in our library for all other non-print sources. Annually, a comprehensive list of filmstrips, sound filmstrips, transparencies, multi-media kits and read-along-books is provided to religious school faculty. While the primary purpose of this list is to increase the visibility of the library to the teachers, it is not uncommon for a member of an affiliate group or young students to utilize this material. The in-

dividualized highlighting of this part of our collection is crucial for wide-scale usage. Users of this type of information are looking specifically for a non-print source. A considerable amount of time is saved by eliminating the need to search for A.V. items that are interfiled with print materials in a card catalog. Nevertheless, in the interest of treating the print and non-print collection as a comprehensive information entity, non-print information sources are recorded in the catalog. This serves to provide the patron with a complete overview of *all* information sources on a topic. Since annotated descriptions in the non-print guide provide additional information concerning A.V. items beyond that in the card catalog, patrons are encouraged to use the guide in addition. In short, our objective is to provide users with the maximum amount of background possible so that they can make a decision as to which information sources have a potential for meeting their needs. Finally, A.V. hardware is readily available in our library for previewing the sources that appear to be most consistent with the informational needs of the patron.

Video-Cassettes in the Synagogue Library

As interest in home video entertainment has increased in the past several years, many libraries have begun to offer video-cassettes for patrons to borrow. It has been proven experimentally that in subject areas where print collection usage is high, a corresponding high level of audio-visual usage will be observed. As a pilot project, we therefore added three cassettes on the subject of Israel to our collection. We had found that not only do students in our religious school use this subject area of the collection, but many individuals planning travel to Israel also rely heavily upon the collection as a means of increasing personal familiarity with the history and culture of this country. Thus, it seemed only natural to provide video material on Israel which patrons could borrow.

The results were most encouraging. After

we informed the congregation through the Temple Bulletin that video-cassettes were being offered, circulation became heavy. Placing a short-term loan restriction on this material became essential. Shortly thereafter, other video items were added. The video-cassette collection is located in an area where it is readily available and visible to our patrons.

The collection now includes additional material on Israel as well as material on Hebrew language self-study, Israel song and dance, Jewish folklore, holidays, and the Holocaust. Again, the same acquisition theory was applied: we have chosen to acquire video-cassettes on subjects that have demonstrated high circulation in the print component of the collection.

Other synagogue libraries may apply the above techniques to build an audio-visual collection and encourage its use. The editor of this column welcomes contributions from librarians who have employed other innovative techniques in the acquisition and cataloging of Jewish non-print media.

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- aid them in revitalizing their libraries;
- aid them in networking with other libraries;
- encourage them to develop contacts with the Association of Jewish Libraries, the Council, and other helpful library organizations;
- consider new publications which would be helpful to those libraries in need of assistance; and
- provide telephone consultations, if necessary.

It is clear that the JWB Jewish Book Council can no longer work alone on the certification of Judaica libraries. Continued monitoring of libraries which have received citations and the setting of standards for quality library service must be done in conjunction with the Association of Jewish Libraries.

References

- Cedarbaum, Sophia N. *A Manual for Jewish Community Center, School, and Congregation Libraries*. New York: JWB Jewish Book Council, 1962. (Superseded by: Berman, Margot S. *How to Organize a Jewish Library: A Source Book and Guide for Synagogue, School, and Center Libraries*. New York: JWB Jewish Book Council, 1982.)
- Standards for a Jewish Library*, prepared by the Association of Jewish Libraries, SSC Division. New York: JWB Jewish Book Council, 1968; revised edition, 1970.

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