

JEWISH *on the* INTERNET

FORWARD

Web Tabloid Serving Up Brash Wit, Saucy Stories in Bid for Community

In Screaming Headlines, USAJewish Rags on 'Revlon Ron,' 'Wascally Wabbis'

By PAUL ZAKRZEWSKI

For the casual Jewish web surfer, stumbling across the web site USAJewish.com comes as something of a shock. With its screaming multicolored headlines and double entendres, the homepage looks more like a supermarket tabloid than a Jewish community forum. Recent stories have included the latest allegations in the continuing divorce-and-custody battle of billionaire Ronald Perelman ("Revlon Ron"), hot news about a rabbi who was accused of molesting his young charges ("wascally wabbis") and rumors of a federal investigation of Seth Warshavsky, a young web porn entrepreneur ("Seth, lies and videotape").

USAJewish.com is among the newest additions to the growing list of Jewish news "portal" sites, web sites offering news, opinion and links to other Jewish sites. The web site's format is to cull a paragraph or two of sensational stories from online newspapers and web sources around the country. Editors then slap on irreverent headlines and kitschy graphics.

Yet USAJewish.com is meant to be more than just a tabloid, according to its founder and chief editor, Yori Yanover. Mr. Yanover sees it as a way of building community, for one. "We're not just about prurient curiosity," he said. "The kind of story I want to go after is not just the one about the rabbi with the teenage girlfriend, but any story that gives you the sense you're one of us."

"I start out with utter and complete love of Jews, whoever they might be," Mr. Yanover said. "We insult on an equal-opportunity basis," he said. "When we insult, we insult everyone."

Well, then, how does he explain his splashy, in-your-face coverage of stories such as the Perelman divorce case? "It's okay to take a guy like Perelman and portray him as a schmekel," Mr. Yanover said. "That's not hate. They get smeared wherever they go." Indeed, Mr. Yanover suggests, his web site's approach might even carry some therapeutic benefit to his subjects. "Our subjects need to be confronted with some self-knowledge, even at the cost of nuance," he said.

It is a recipe that seems to be grabbing readers. Launched in April 1999, the site claims 6,000 users each day and 2.6 million page views a month. Mr. Yanover said he's proud of the large number of users, considering he doesn't spend money on advertising.

"There's an increasing demand for these sorts of sites among people who don't want to read everything,"



NANCY J. KRAMER

YORI YANOVER: Behind the chasidic garb, a taste for the lurid.

said a web entrepreneur, Larry Yudelson, about the format of USAJewish.com. During the mid-1990s, Mr. Yudelson served as a co-editor with Mr. Yanover on an earlier incarnation of USAJewish.com that was called JCN18.com. The backers of JCN18.com hoped to build a Jewish "intranet," a community of Jewish web sites much like America Online. These plans collapsed, but the editorial pages of JCN18.com soon took on a life of their own. The formula

tant since JCN18.com folded. "I was getting tired of seeing all these straight-laced descriptions of cemetery desecrations. We wanted to do something with a more irreverent style. Jews don't live in the *shtetl* anymore, and if the Aryan nations can have [an irreverent] web site, then Jews with attitude can have one, too."

In fact, Mr. Yanover did not want to bother much with original content on his old web site. "I learned at JCN18.com that people came in for the community, the sense of connection with other Jews," he said. Research showed no fluctuations in traffic whether Mr. Yanover ran an original story or merely a recycled one with his own brash headline and graphic. He soon concluded that most visitors came to web sites like his for the feeling of Jewish fellowship.

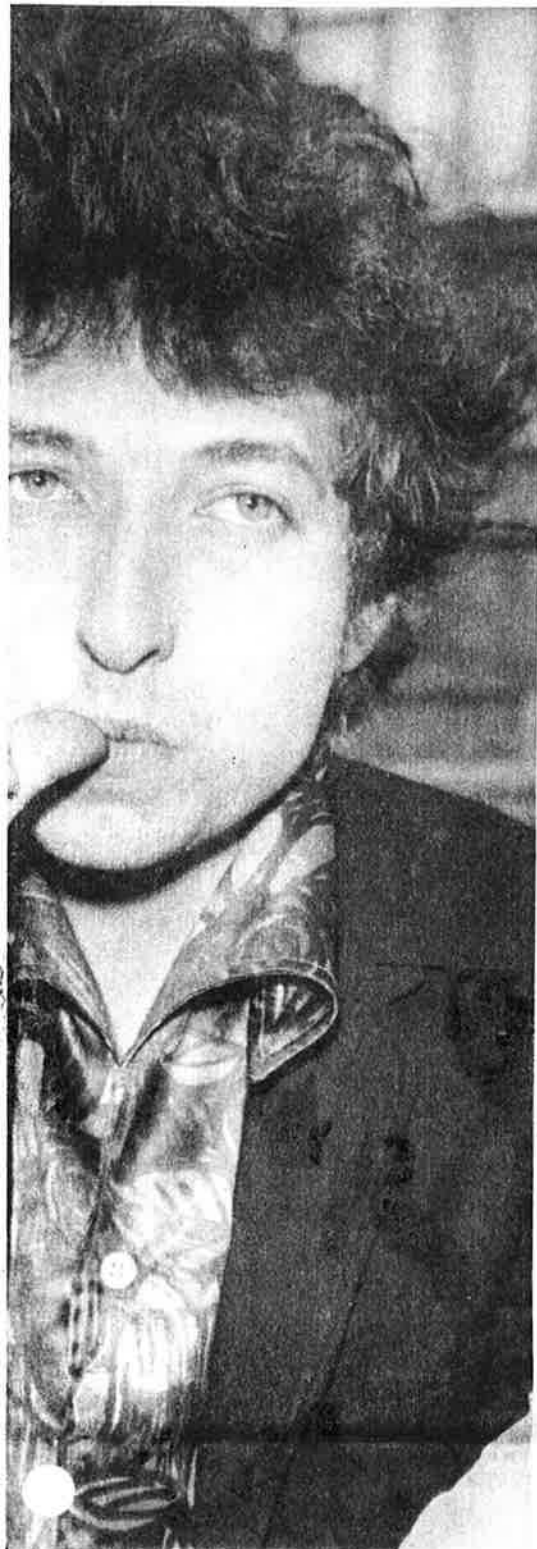
Mr. Yanover began USAJewish.com in the spring of 1999 with virtually no money. The site costs between \$1,500 and \$2,000 monthly to maintain, he said. He updates content mostly in the morning and has only recently added two editors who help him comb the Internet for stories. It is a method that works wonders in this new era of downsized content web sites and shaky initial public offerings, because sites such as USAJewish.com can offer something unique—a point of

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*Taking a leaf
from Avneri's muck-
raking magazine.*

was simple: Recycled stories and irreverent wit drew plenty of viewers, and by the time Mr. Yanover left JCN18.com in 1998, he was hooked on that combination.

"When JCN18.com began, there was the sense that the average Jewish web site was really staid," said Mr. Yudelson, who has been working as an independent web consul-



AP WJDEWORLD

nal name is Robert Zimmerman, but how many know that his *el Riva*? Such trivia, including information about his unusual, can be found at the web site 'Bob Dylan: Tangled Up in ably the largest collection of everything Jewish about the 1 by a longtime Jewish activist and writer, Larry Yudelson.

