# JEWISH on the INTERNET

# **FORWARD**

AP WIDEWORLD

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

# 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

or 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 video-

tape").

USA Jewish.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 USA Jewish.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 behefit 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

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,"



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 coeditor 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

Taking a leaf from Avneri's muckraking 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-

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 shted anymore, and if the Aryan nations can have [an irreverent] web site, then Jews with attitude can have one too."

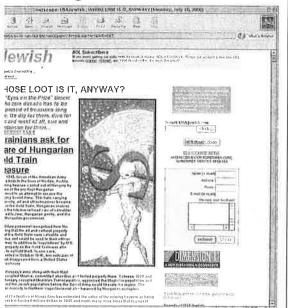
In fact, Mr. Yanover did not want to bother much with original content on his old web site. "I learned at JCN18.com that people came in for the community, the sense of connection with other Jews," he said. Research showed no fluctuations in traffic whether Mr. Yanover ran an original story or merely 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.

the feeling of Jewish fellowship.

Mr. Yanover began USA Jewish.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 USA Jewish.com can, offer something unique—a point of

Please turn to Page 16

# Rags on 'Revlon Ron'



#### Y EFFECTS: USAJewish strives for an eye-popping look.

rom Page 13
r relatively little cost.
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dre din Israel, Mr. swed in the Israeli army Yom Kippur War. It was he first felt the urge to Before his Internet verworked in radio. In the he worked at WBAI in with Leonard Lopate, ael a few years later, he id Arutz 7, a pirate radio began as an attempt to

bridge Israel's social divides but rapidly became a voice of the most militant Orthodox West Bank settlers.

Although Mr. Yanover is religiously observant — he worships with a chasidic congregation, keeps kosher and observes the Sabbath — he does not call himself Orthodox. "I don't automatically have Orthodox reactions," Mr. Yanover said. He also is not aslamed of his secular and socialist roots, Of Marx's theory of history, Mr. Yanover said, "I don't think we have a better tool to analyze history. If only Marx had stopped there."



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If there is a precedent for the kind of publication that USA Jewish.com aims to be, Mr. Yanover said it is the muckraking journalism made famous in Israel in the 1950s by leftwing activist Uri Avneri and his Ha'olam Hazeh weekly. Mr. Yanover said that when he was growing up in Israel, "these guys were the only anti-establishment voices around. That's where I learned about good, feisty journalism." Magazines such as Ha'olam Hazeh "represented the unaffiliated, the despised and rejected," he said.

"Ha'olam Hazeh had a great combination with muckraking in the front and T&A in the back," Mr. Yanover said, adding that he's a great believer in "verbal T &A" for his own web site. "I think our audience forgives it," he said. The way he sees it, the site appeals to three types of users: thrill-seekers, news "junkies" and "unaffiliated" individuals who are searching the Internet for Jewish content.

Mr. Yanover said that USA Jewish.com is only the beginning of his vision. The site now produces little revenue from advertising or syndication. But Mr. Yanover is beginning to pursue advertising opportunities "aggressively" and said he hopes in the next year to add original content to the site daily. He expects USA Jewish to compete directly with

### Looking for thrill seekers and news 'junkies.'

such established news sources as Jewishworld review.com and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "We deserve 25,000 readers a day," he said.

Even without these changes, Mr. Yanover seems to have found his niche. "There's a sense of magic to our fresh, hip approach to news, the kind of edge that The Village Voice used to have," he said. "It gives you a sense of self that a hundred JCCs can't give you."

# France Faults Yahoo for Sale of Na

# Court Fines Internet Portal for Allowing Auct

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French court is holding Yahoo! accountable for its role in the burgeoning market of Nazi memorabilia available on the Internet and has ordered it to stop allowing the goods to be sold in France.

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The court recently told the
Internet portal that it has until
July 24 to "make it impossible"
for web surfers in France to purchase items put up for auction by
international merchandise dealers on one of the company's web
sites.

Judge Jean-Jacques Gomez told the firm the auctions were "an offense to the collective memory of the country" and ordered Yahoo! to pay fines of some \$1,400 each to the two French-based groups that issued the complaint — the Union of French Jewish Students and the International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism.

A lawyer for the league, Marc Levy, said that he welcomed the judgment with "great satisfaction" and that the Internet "risks becoming a zone of nonlaw." Mr. Levy added that he "was surprised that such legal action had not been taken earlier."

The ruling is the first of its kind in France to condemn an Internet company for selling Nazi artifacts, and it may set a precedent for further legal actions.

Executives from the Californiabased company said that they support the "emotional" cause of ridding the Internet of racism and said they would try to comply with the ruling.

But the director of Yahoo! France, Philippe Guillanton, questioned whether the company could comply with the ruling, saying "there is no filtration method that can be 100% effective" in

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blocking sales of Nazi items in France.

The ruling follows a string of recent protests against Internet sites for profiting from the sale of Nazi paraphernalia.

On Yahoo!'s auction site, more than 1,000 Nazi items are currently for sale, including Third Reich medals, uniforms and used Zyklon B canisters similar to

### CITY DESK

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Purchase, N.Y., individuals found guilty of committing a crime motivated by the victim's race, color, national origin, ancestry, gender, religion or religious practice, age, disability or sexual orientation will face stiffer sentences and longer prison terms.

"Hate crimes do more than threaten the safety and welfare of all citizens, they disrupt entire communities and cannot be tolerated by a civilized society," Mr. Pataki said.

"Finally, there is recognition in New York State law that when swastikas are painted on synagogues and religious properties are intentionally damaged, it is not just an act of violence directed toward one person or one property. It is an attack on the minds and security of an entire community," Mr. Silver said.

Silver and McCall: Some insiders have seen the hand of Mr. Silver in the choice of state Comptroller H. Carl McCall's new Jewish community liaison, Abraham Fried. Mr. Silver and Mr. Fried's father, a Goldman Sachs executive, pray together at the Lower East Side's Bialystoker Synagogue on Shabbat, sources said. Mr. Fried is also the nephew of Judy Rapfogel, Mr. Silver's chief of staff.

"Carl McCall is a senior elected official in the state of New York. He always turns to me if he needs assistance in helping the Jewish

# American Guild of Judaic Art

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The Guild is a non-profit organization that serves as a forum and referral service for over 200 artists, craftspeople, galleries and retailers in the United States and Israel to help promote Judaic Art. Site includes Member/Artist Directory, Speakers Bureau, Reviews, etc.



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