



PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

How We Increased Enrollment Inquiries During Remote Learning:

Lessons from The Leffell School Admissions Office

Join [Diana Kaufman Schutt](#) and [Rabbi Yael Buechler](#) of The Leffell School in Westchester, NY for a moderated discussion to hear about specific strategies they implemented that have resulted in a 167% increase in points of contact since moving to remote learning and online-only events. Our conversation will explore how to increase admission inquiries through branded online programming, utilizing social media to engage with the millennial parents, tips to increase WOM marketing and more.

Let's start at the beginning, tell us about how this started, pre-COVID?

Diana: started with need to expand school, catchment area; shuls not giving as many candidates as previously; she lacked bandwidth to spend lot of time on outreach

A year ago, HOS asked the leadership team for a suggestion/wish--something added to school that would be impactful; her wish: outreach coordinator--she won!

Yael suggested reaching out to other demographics, communities, pre-COVID--more successful than anticipated--built pool of names, contacts

She was hesitant--her experience limited her ability to do this new work; lack of success previously with nursery schools; she learned, opened her mindset--turned "no" to "yes"

COVID: how showcase on screen? But still making personal connections

Key: reaching millennials

You don't work in the admission office directly yet your work does involve community building.

This is a very unique role and many schools don't have a person like you in their schools. Tell us a little about your role at Leffell.

Yael:we were already thinking about improving programs and connections w families

Millennials: interesting to experiment -- they like to collaborate on programming, not pre-made
Marketing to them: social media, mass marketing--60-90 families join for online programs

What was different about the programming and outreach efforts than what you were doing before?

Before, he led tefillah every day; now online continued
pre-Covid had started groups for parents of very young children
To continue engaging them, used music teacher viz zoom--2/week--had a camp join in
Add 1/week reading buddy program
Asked what they would like in fall--many responses

- *Dinosaur puppet*
- *Science program targeting MS students*

Yael: touched base w other millennial parents--15-20 minutes "sweet spot"--parents need a break

What would they put into baking?

Parents give children a blessing

Provide engaging opportunity

Diana: Instead of telling them "you're going to learn about the Leffell school" they just learn from participating, feel the warmth

How did you utilize social media to engage with the millennial parents?

Yael: being virtual is opportunity--world at fingertips--people from all over joined programs

Strategies: how to brand event--sometimes rebrand event to target specific population

Post on parents' sites

Biggest draw: FB & word of mouth--email forwarded from friend

Engage families already in school--knew it's successful when they asked to invite friends

Parent volunteers would post--Yael worked with them

NOT included logo--NOT hard sell

Millennials averse to anything institutional

Pre-Covid what did your programs look like?

Diana: hourlong, central location, swag, crafts

Room setup, activity area for young children--students helped out

Had tech, art, music, refreshments, good coffee

Parents came, even from the city (to Westchester)

Parents talking to parents, kids talking to students
Rooms filled

Can you tell us a bit about your branding? What do you do differently with these efforts? how did it feel not pushing the brand?

Still branded in materials; didn't want to scare off but also not false advertising
Things to take home--branded
Write thank you, done

How did you reach families outside the catchment area?

Yael: social media; groups Parenting under Quarantine etc
Emphasis on quality experience > where people come from

Can you share some tips with us for increasing a school's WOM?

Yael: were used to marketing a few days in advance w/ mass emails
Found that personalized emails MUCH more effective
Engaging, making feel ppl feel part of community--reach out if a regular doesn't show
Empower parents--happy to be asked to help and to take responsibility

What have you done to target older students?

Yael: strategies for millennials worked for everyone else
Virtual STEAM program this summer for middle schoolers--huge response

Any conversion from participants to applicants?

Diana: expected ROI in a couple years, but have gotten some applicants already, even older sibling of participant

Tell us about the data tracking. How are you tracking it, how do you share that information with the admission team? How are you using the data to make decisions about what to do next?

Tell us about the costs for running this program.

Yael: Before Covid much more expensive--in person materials (coffee!)
Now: minimal

Diana: this year expanded admissions budget

Is it possible to see programs in playback?

Yes--and welcome to share with any program

With this programming in place, what are you doing differently in your admission season for the coming year? Are there traditional admission activities that you are no longer doing?

Diana: let go of fear--missing out by not having physical, on campus programs

This is an opportunity to reach further than ever did

Not gathering en masse--digital, can be viewed when people are ready

Doesn't have to be the day they're available

Tell us about the working relationship between the both of you? How does it work?

Diana: previously, she was in charge, felt she was "expert" worried about loss of control but knew she had much to gain from Yael's help

Establish comfortable ways to work, communicate--edit each others work

Yael: huge institutional change--work across the whole school--partner w communications dept, faculty, parents

What other organizations have you partnered with and considering partnering with?

Yael: camp reached out to Leffell; otherwise have not reached out to partner w others bc programs are successful

But can imagine other schools wanting to partner, eg PJ Library

How will virtual tours in work?

Diana: we haven't settled--may have a couple different options

Not scared any more--would have been a year ago--very freeing

Is there anything that you would have done differently?

Yael: took long time to put feet in water and consider change

This is our time in virtual world

Strategy: we used to get stuck thinking about "feeder schools"

Kids aren't necessarily in traditional pre-schools

Enable millennials to hack into the school

What are you most proud of in this work?

Diana: able to pivot quickly--maintain momentum and buzz from before

Able to id new needs of families

Unsolicited gratitude from families she doesn't know

Yael: surprised at sheer numbers coming to the programs--we are providing meaningful and creative experiences for children

How to have bond with families of young children virtually?

Diana: now less about bonding w each other and now with us, the music teacher--interactive, engaging, observing, remarking what they're doing--they're noticed, cared about

What advice would you give to fellow admission professionals today that are trying to grow their outreach and access millennial parents?

Yael: go 10% out of comfort zone to try something new
Don't expect rsvps to all show up---60% is great

Diana: tap ppl from w/in your community to help with outreach
Find people from within your community to present/lead/showcase