

What I've Figured Out About Facebook

by Maggie Anton

Six months ago, when the words *social networking* were not yet part of my vocabulary, I was vaguely aware of Web sites like Facebook, but I considered them the province of teenagers and college students. That my daughter played Scrabble and cared for fluffy virtual pets on Facebook only confirmed my opinion. But then I started getting invitations to join Facebook from adults—other authors and people I worked with in the book biz.

Still I resisted. I was fully occupied with editing *Rachel*—Book III of my *Rashi's Daughters* trilogy—and had no time to spare for a frivolous project. Especially on the Internet, where hours could disappear into its black hole if I wasn't diligent.

But as I started gearing up to publicize my new book, I realized that a great deal had changed since *Book II: Miriam* came out in 2007. Online publicity now involved more than having my own Web site, sending copies to Internet book review sites, and Amazon.com. Much more.

My daughter went one step beyond the growing chorus of voices saying I couldn't ignore Facebook; she offered to set up my sites and show me how to manage them.

"My sites?" I asked, concerned that she'd used the plural.

She informed me that I should have a "profile," a "group," and a "page," since each serves a specific purpose and interacts with Facebook members in different ways: a profile as Maggie Anton the person, where I would collect "friends"; a "group" as *Rashi's Daughters*, where "fans" could gather to discuss my work; and a "page" as Maggie Anton, the author, which would allow me invite friends and fans to my speaking events.

Having a profile, page, and group would mean I could interact with my friends and fans—often but not necessarily the same people—in similar but not always identical ways. An important difference was that I could contact my fans as a group and send them invitations to my speaking events through my page, but I was restricted to contacting my friends individually. I am still discovering other, more subtle differences.

Since it is relatively easy to acquire "friends," I started with my profile, my goal being to grow my number of friends as quickly as possible and make them fans later. I immediately made the first of many mistakes by entering my name as *maggie anton* (all lower case). My daughter informed me that I could edit everything about me in Facebook—except my name.

So we started again with a new profile. Facebook made getting friends easy for a new member like me by sending friend invitations to all my email contacts. Now I understood why I had been receiving those invitations myself. Contacts who were already Facebook members quickly became my friends, some within minutes. One of the first was Larry Kirshbaum, former CEO of Time-Warner Books, who heads the literary agency that handles my novels. Facebook wasn't just for kids!

Making Friends Fast

The next day, having almost 100 friends, I was treated to my first demonstration of Facebook's power. In a quirk of fate, I had joined Facebook the day before my birthday, entering all sorts of personal data, including hometown, employer, school attended, religion, political party, and date of birth (none of this is required, and I deliberately left some sections blank). When I logged on to Facebook, I found dozens of birthday greetings from my friends waiting for me, because Facebook alerts members when their friends' birthdays are coming up.

Since Facebook wants its members to have lots of friends, it constantly suggests people for me to invite to be my friends, based on things we have in common and mutual friends. This is why it was important to list my religion, my interest in Talmud and medieval history, and my affiliation with various Jewish women's organizations. I wasn't interested in acquiring just any friends—I wanted likely readers of my books.

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Facebook was surprisingly accurate about potential friends it suggested, so after checking profiles, I invited nearly all of them. Every day there were more people to check out and more people who were asking me to be their friend. But this was merely the tip of the iceberg. Facebook has all sorts of groups—book clubs, historical fiction authors and readers, and Jewish women, to mention a few. I joined the ones that were appropriate for me and invited their members to be my friends, a continual process since new groups are constantly forming. Unfortunately, there is no index to Facebook groups; one discovers them by hit or miss.

Then I hit a goldmine. Facebook has an application called “visual bookshelf,” where members enter information about the books they own, have read, and want to read, along with reviews and ratings. To my astonishment, the first two books in my trilogy were both there, *Book I: Johved*, with more than 450 people who had listed it, and *Book II: Miriam*, with almost 400. One month later, after I had invited each of these people individually to be my friend, I had 600 friends.

Provide some photo or graphic for your profile; many potential friends won't accept anybody without one.

Searching various networks for my target audience by employer (Jewish organizations) and school (Jewish colleges) netted another crop of friends.

Three months in, I had nearly 800 friends, with new ones coming in daily. So what to do with them? And what not to do?

The To-Do List

– Think hard about what name to use. Have a friend who's already on Facebook check how many others share your name. Then decide if you need to add a middle name or initial to differentiate yourself from the crowd.

– Immediately, as friends are confirmed, tag them into different lists: family, friends, fans, book professionals, whatever tag seems useful. I also tagged by geographical location, which was invaluable when it came to letting people know when I'd be speaking in their areas.

– Provide some photo or graphic for your profile; many potential friends won't accept anybody without one. I chose an informal photo for my profile, my official author photo for my page, and my latest book cover for my group. These are the faces I present to the Facebook world, and it's important to pick good ones.

– Be careful to update status (a short description of what's happening in one's life) with interesting news. Everything I post will go on my profile, plus my 800 friends' profiles, which are seen by all their friends. This is how viral marketing works.

– Send birthday greetings to all friends/fans (located below Events on the lower right of profile page). It's easy to do and makes a nice impression.

– Make each speaking gig an Event, and send the invitations intermittently—starting with those for the earliest gig. Keep invitations spread out for maximum exposure.


– Comment on other people's posts. Remember that your post will go to all their friends too.

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


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The Don't-Do List

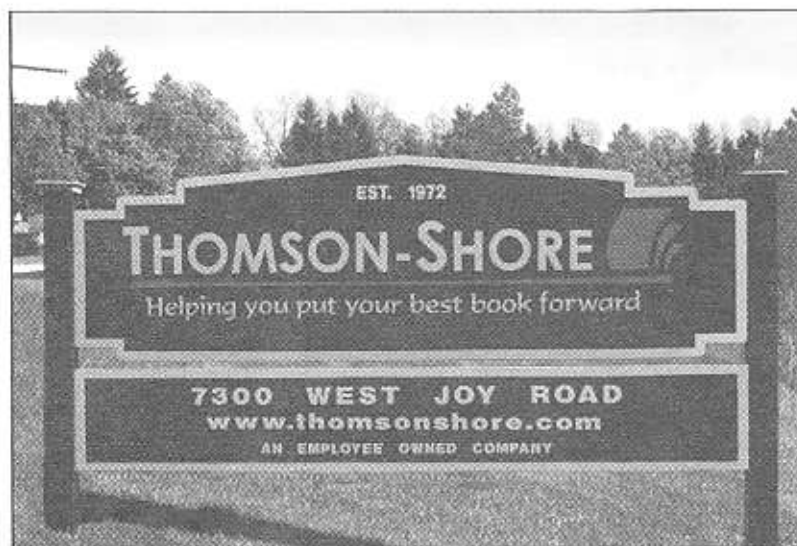
- Avoid overwhelming friends with lots of simultaneous posts; be judicious about when and how often you update your status.
- Refrain from posting material that is too personal, and never post anything offensive. You want to promote your books; nobody wants to know you're changing the cat litter.
- Instead of spending an hour all at once updating your status and commenting on others', do updates several times a day in small increments (a kitchen timer helps). Each update immediately lands on all friends' profiles, and anyone who's not on Facebook at that moment may miss it—especially if lots of other friends are also posting to them.
- Resist any temptation to post photos, including book covers, to several places simultaneously. When I post pho-

tos on different group sites, they're also posted on my profile and those of my friends. Nobody needs to see a dozen copies of your book cover one after another. Posting copies intermittently will make a more lasting impression.

- Control distractions created by all your friends' trivial posts and quizzes. Hide both sender and quiz so you never see them again. View only people you actually know, or want to know.

I admit I haven't checked Amazon over the last few months to see if Facebook has affected sales of my existing books, but I regularly get posts and messages saying how much someone liked my novels and how they can't wait for *Book III: Rachel*, due out in early August. The most tangible results of my new Facebook presence are the many inquiries I get about speaking engagements—with at least six scheduled so far directly from these contacts. *

Maggie Anton is the Ben Franklin Award-winning author of Rashi's Daughters, a series of historical novels set in the household of the great medieval Jewish scholar, whose daughters studied Talmud in a time when these sacred texts were forbidden to women. You can reach her through rashisdaughters.com or by sending her a message on Facebook.



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