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How PJ Library adapted its digital media strategy during the pandemic

to

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**P**J Library digital projects move fast and pivot quickly, which has never been more important. Before we all started sheltering in place back in March, I had the plan for PJ Library digital content mapped out for the next six months.

Overnight, it became clear that none of that was going to feel relevant. I remember picking up my son from school on Thursday, getting a call about canceled classes on Friday, and hopping on the phone with my boss, Meredith Lewis, the director of content, education, and family experience, on Sunday night to quickly come up with a new plan. And on Monday, PJ Library's virtual daily schedule started to take shape.

As lockdowns and shelter-in-place orders hit across North America, we followed conversations that were happening online, took notes on what other organizations were doing to help families and keep them involved, and then looked for gaps in support that we could help fill. That was in early March, and we had no idea how long some version of quarantine, social distancing, and shutdowns would continue.

Spring transitioned into summer, and many families were still sheltering in place. Camps were canceled, school openings were up in the air, and juggling work, home, and childcare became an increasingly difficult balancing act. PJ Library didn't stray from its mission and continued to provide Jewish content for children — in this case, high-quality, interactive, *fun* experiences that kids could take on with little to no supervision, such as videos of authors reading their PJ Library books. Since March, we have been developing daily digital schedules that detail when

and what new content will be released to give kids (and parents/caregivers) something to look forward to each weekday. Many of us on the digital team are parents ourselves; we understand all too well just how much other grown-ups need a break!

As the digital lead for PJ Library, I know how important it is to have a strong online presence.

**Nothing will ever take the place of books, and that's especially true for PJ Library. But digital platforms allow us to be more agile than print; it can take up to four years to bring a book manuscript to life, but we can make a video, compile online guides, round up resources, and curate event lineups for PJ Library subscribers in a day.**

In our work to bring more stories to families and build more storytelling moments between grown-ups and

children, we've extended our work beyond just the PJ Library books. Families receive in-the-envelope gifts from PJ Library, access to music, and, as social media continues to gain ground, new digital resources. In our engagement work, we've always said that we need to be where parents and caregivers are — and given that families are staying connected to PJ Library through social media, we need to be there too. Our staff has even participated in our programming, recording themselves as they read PJ Library books to their own families or as they make crafts or holiday treats.

Here's another benefit of digital platforms: We don't have to wonder whether our efforts have an impact. We can see families' responses in real time and analyze engagement on each platform. We had so many families sign up for our virtual tour of Jerusalem, for example, that we had to stream the experience on Facebook in order to accommodate everyone.

On the other hand, we can tell from simply listening to our subscribers' grown-ups that people are increasingly overwhelmed by the volume of online content. Our strategy now is not only to provide original content of our own, such as the *Have I Got a Story for You!* podcast and the High Holidays digital guide, but also to serve parents and caregivers by curating the massive amounts of content out there.

**Parents and caregivers don't always have time to watch everything before showing it to their kids. When we share something on our pages, grown-ups know that it's trustworthy and good.**

We continue to learn from other digital media as well. One thing I learned in my former life as a game developer is rapid iteration. You try something quickly, see what goes well (and what doesn't), and then put those lessons into action by immediately attempting a better version. We consistently focus on what families need in the moment, but we also look ahead to the support we can offer in the future.

The pandemic has tested everyone in countless ways. The silver lining is that we have a better understanding of our strengths and how we can become even stronger advocates and allies for PJ Library families and communities. As stressful as it has sometimes been to stay on top of a moment that has been evolving so quickly, it has also been deeply satisfying to see how families respond. No matter what the future brings (and if 2020 has shown us anything, it's that the future can be very unpredictable), we will always strive to meet parents and caregivers where they are — on the page and online — and do so in a way that is authentic and real.

Throughout the pandemic, PJ Library has strived to keep families involved and informed by sharing digital resources and meeting families where they are — at home and online. Here are some examples of how we've stayed connected with parents and kids.

### Storytimes and Craft-Alongs

Every weekday at 11 a.m., 1 p.m., and 4 p.m. (EST)

### Virtual Field Trips

Every day at noon (EST)

Find more family resources on  
[pjlibrary.org/familyactivities](http://pjlibrary.org/familyactivities)

Each day, PJ Library shares a **schedule** of when new content will be available for parents and kids.



Complete with activities and helpful information, our digital **High Holidays at Home** guide provided a new way for families to participate in Jewish New Year traditions.



Bestselling author and filmmaker **Tiffany Shlain** led a webinar, detailing ways families can unplug and spend quality time together away from screens.