

not cry? Life is so fragile, the virus so scary, the emotions so raw, the pain I could hear so real, and the love for her husband so palpable. It's in moments like these that I also feel close to Hashem, because everything about life and death is so G-dly. He's in total control. I prefer the black bears, the whitewater expeditions, and horseback riding in the mountains, but sometimes we get closer in tragedy.

Then came Friday, and I visited my friends whose home burned down about two months ago, and we placed a beautiful kosher *mezuzah* on their new rental home. It was a moment of Divinity as this determined couple chose to see light, positivity, and the value of a *mitzvah* in their life. It may sound simple to have a *mezuzah*, but nothing is simple, and the joy of that *mitzvah* gave me a glimpse into another G-dly moment, one filled with hope, holiness, and brightness.

Like young Sholom Dovber yearning for a moment with G-d, we often cry as we seek a revelation of Hashem, except crying isn't needed—He's right outside your window. Don't wait for Him to force you to come close; force yourself to see Him every day, in every moment. ■

*Rabbi Chaim Bruk is co-CEO of Chabad Lubavitch of Montana and spiritual leader of The Shul of Bozeman. For comments or to partner in our holy work, e-mail [rabbi@jewishmontana.com](mailto:rabbi@jewishmontana.com) or visit [JewishMontana.com/Donate](http://JewishMontana.com/Donate).*

## ROCHELLE'S REVIEWS

By Rochelle Miller



# VITALIZING ISRAEL'S ECONOMIC BRAND: UP CLOSE WITH JOANNA LANDAU, FOUNDER AND CEO OF VIBE ISRAEL

**F**or the past decade, the perception among Americans is that Israel's economic identity is tied to technological innovation. However, newly released research commissioned by nonprofit Vibe Israel shows that focusing on technology alone is no longer effective for promoting Israeli businesses. Other countries are successfully vying for the Start-Up nation position.

The research predicted that within four years Israel will become an average player in the global economy, emphasizing the urgency to revitalize Israel's economic brand now.

Using the research as a guide, Vibe Israel is working with Israel's business leadership and Ministry of Economy to ensure that that the nation's econom-

ic brand emerges from the pandemic stronger than ever.

We reached out to Joanna Landau, founder and CEO of Vibe Israel, for her input on Israel's new reality, the challenges it faces, and how Vibe Israel is helping revitalize the country's economic brand.

**Rochelle Maruch Miller: How has Vibe Israel strengthened Israel's brand thus far?**

**Joanna Landau:** Israel has been strengthening Israel's economic brand since 2010, with a specific focus on highlighting its cultural aspects and the spirit of the Israeli people.

In 2018 we developed an elaborate strategic plan (with the same consultants we are working with on the eco-

nomic brand), which we presented to the president of Israel in 2019, and which we began supplementing that year. That work plan did not focus on Israel's economic brand. When COVID-19 hit earlier this year, we were approached by the chairman for the Export Institute asking us to train Israeli businesspeople to be better Israel brand ambassadors, which is why we embarked in July on the process we are currently doing to develop an extensive work plan and strategy for the brand. We are now working with the Ministry of Economy and leading businessmen and women in Israel to develop the plan, which we intend to begin implementing in the first quarter of 2021.

**RMM: Please share some of the details of your recent workshops.**

**JL:** The workshops took place Monday and Tuesday. On Monday we did a workshop with the Ministry of Economy department heads who work with Israel's global brand, primarily the Foreign Trade Administration that operates all of the economic attaches around the world. On Tuesday, the workshop was with a select group of business leaders in Israel—from CEOs of Israel's largest companies that export products and services, through heads of VCs, and leaders of business associations (umbrella associations).

**RMM: What were some of the highlights of the presentations?**


**JL:** In the workshops our consultants presented the proposed central idea of Israel's economic brand, with

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a view to achieving common ground and agreement on the basic narratives at the heart of Israel's marketing messages as an appealing place to invest in and buy products and services from. The consultants then presented several projects they would like included in their strategic work plan to get feedback from the participants in the workshops, invite new ideas, and also suggestions for how participants can be involved in such projects. By hearing from the public and private sectors of Israel's economy, the participants gained a better understanding of what projects they can include in the work plan, which is the final phase of the rebranding process, to be completed and launched by an invitation-only online event in mid-December.

**RMM: How can Israel recapture the excitement it elicited ten years ago?**

**JL:** In 2009, when the book *Start-Up Nation* came out, Jewish people, especially in North America, took part and

were instrumental in sharing this new and inspiring story in an impactful way. Ten years on, Israel still has that inspirational factor that those who are familiar with and love Israel feel, but our research has shown that Israel is no longer perceived to be "owning this

updated, and equally inspiring messaging and stories, can emulate what many of us felt ten years ago, and bring back that moment of pride again where Israel shines. We further believe that the Jewish Diaspora can once again play an important part in this effort.

so that they can compete better on the world stage. In objective terms, Israel still has everything the world is looking for as a place to invest in and buy products or services from, but as our research shows, most people no longer know it.

## We believe that a rebranding of Israel's economy in the world through new, updated, and equally inspiring messaging and stories, can emulate what many of us felt ten years ago.

space." There are other countries who are claiming to be Start-Up Nations, and they are marketing that message much more effectively than Israel in 2020.

We believe that a rebranding of Israel's economy in the world through new,

There is another equally, if not more, important reason this project is crucial for Israel's future. The pandemic represents much more than a health crisis; it is also an economic crisis, which is causing every country to improve their marketing and messaging

Especially worrying is the data that shows that if Israel does not improve its marketing and positioning quickly within four years, it will have lost its competitive advantage to countries such as Estonia, Finland, South Korea, and Singapore (it has already lost its advantage to the UK and US). Israel, as a country whose economy is 50% reliant on tech exports, cannot afford to rest on its laurels of a fantastic message (Start-Up Nation) that is ten years old. If we do not maintain our competitive advantage, we will lose much needed taxable income that can serve to support the needy in Israel, expand the periphery, offer jobs, and boost our health and welfare services. Due to the pandemic, the competitive landscape has become much denser, with many other countries claiming (rightly) to be excellent at technological offerings. Without a strong brand, Israel, the Israeli people, and by extension, Jews in the Diaspora, all stand to lose out. If not for Zionist reasons, then simply because an investment in Israeli real estate, businesses, or infrastructure should continue to yield an excellent return, but it cannot continue to do so without a strong economic brand.

**RMM: Joanna, What message would you like to convey to our readers, many of whom own property in Israel? We are a community that loves and ardently supports Israel.**

**JL:** As we enter an era of hyper-competition due to COVID-19, now is the time for a complete overhaul of Israel's messaging, for the benefit not only of the Israeli people, but also of Jews around the world who are intrinsically linked to this country.

We invite anyone who feels they can support this project, whether through their network, advice, or funding, to contact us to begin a conversation. We are specifically aiming to build an Israel-Diaspora alliance of businessmen and women and philanthropists who can together, strategically rather than organically, help leverage this project. ■

*Rochelle Maruch Miller is a contributing editor for the Five Towns Jewish Times. She is a journalist, creative media consultant, lecturer, and educator, and writes for magazines, newspapers, websites, and private clients. She welcomes your comments at Rochellemiller04@aol.com. Read more of Rochelle Miller's articles at 5TJT.com.*



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