

JEWISHLINK

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Boca Shuk: An Online Marketplace for Jewish Community Listings and Ads

By Chaya Glaser

We've all been there: Your lulav suddenly breaks; a mezuzah is needed right away; you lose your tefillin or you need a round raisin challah on Erev Rosh Hashanah. It's unlikely that Amazon will deliver one to your exact location in under two hours, let alone two days. Luckily, Boca Shuk has you covered.

Through refinement and research, Boca Shuk has become a simple and efficient way for Jewish community businesses to list services at no charge, while also allowing customers to search for specific local items or services.

As the COVID pandemic infiltrated life and pushed many into lockdown, people gravitated en masse towards screens and remote ways to find the best local pizza or nearest home-office chair. In April 2020, Reuven Furst of Boca Raton got a call from his father, and they discussed the prospect of designing a site for community businesses while also "giving back to the community," said Furst. They shared this idea with the rabbi of the Boca Raton synagogue, who was interested.

So with a degree in computer science and finance, and experience in computer programming and marketing, Furst bought the domain and has since expertly coded the website from scratch. The site includes business listings, as well as classifieds for selling



Boca Shuk Founder Reuven Furst

items. Starting in Boca, it has since expanded.

All listings are free, because "we are community conscious, and want to help businesses out," said Furst. There is also space for paid ads at the top and bottom of the search page.

Boca Shuk

A community page provides information about prospective neighborhoods to move to, and relevant ad space can be affordably purchased. "In December, 6,000 people clicked on ads and listings," noted Furst.

Each individual listing is carefully vetted through background and license checks, and a login is required in order to avoid spam. Furst routinely checks that all information for a listing is updated and still valid. Oftentimes, a restaurant search might be redirected to a gambling site or virus, so Furst makes it a priority to avoid this issue. He contacts Google and

other search engines to correct those listings. "We want to make sure that businesses are not harmed by incorrect information."

A stickler for detail, Furst goes the distance to correct typos on someone else's website. When putting your best foot forward, a site must appear seamless and professional in order to be deemed legitimate. And Furst should know, as he spent over 30 years in the printing business. "It can be embarrassing for someone," he said, "and it would have been nice had someone told me, so I'm looking out for them. Sometimes it works out nicely, other times not, or you might even make a friend, like I did!"

Boca Shuk stores information about closed businesses on its database. If a business reopens, the information will be ready to go. "Our favorite update is finding out that a business has reopened," said Furst. "It means they were able to pull it off, and that's a wonderful thing."

Searches are optimized for customers to conveniently find what they need locally in a timely fashion— 0.3 seconds, to be exact. Over time, graphics and layout have improved based on feedback. Furst considers each complaint and recommendation. His brother gave

him a game-changing suggestion to create a keyword search option. "Now, if you have a craving for onion rings," Furst said, "you can search and find restaurants that serve onion rings!"

Furst recalled moving to Boca and driving 40 minutes to Fort Lauderdale just to get kosher meat. Over time, Boca has accumulated multitudes of kosher options. "We now have this convenience that I don't want to lose. People are used to it, and should understand that if you don't buy from these businesses, they won't last." Preserving Jewish community businesses is critical. "You go to shul with these people, they go to school with your kids, and I want the community to be supported."

There is a common tale of returning to one's childhood neighborhood only to discover that businesses one once frequented have closed. Furst recently visited Crown Heights, where he grew up. He gratefully found that, after 40 years, a particular business was still thriving. "It was wonderful to go back to my old neighborhood and notice that the business was still there." A rare occurrence, Furst experienced the importance of maintaining community businesses firsthand.

Furst believes that "it's better to buy from our community. I'm just trying to do the right thing, and by doing the right thing, I'm hoping to help someone else build a relationship within the community."

For more information, go to www.bocashuk.com.