



On the cover this week ...

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Building for the future

Innovators visit Israel to brainstorm ideas. **MARTIN JOSEPH**

Noam Dolgin, Justin Korda and Yaniv Rivlin traveled from Canada to the outskirts of Tel Aviv recently to join with a growing network of young Jewish entrepreneurs, educators, artists and activists who are brainstorming and building the Jewish future.

Outside the Kfar Maccabiah complex, they've come together in a big tent (literally and figuratively) with more than 100 others for the ROI Summit for Young Jewish Innovators. ROI provides critical funding, training and support for a host of Jewish entrepreneurial ventures, such as Challah for Hunger, Moishe House, Presentense and Jewcology, a web portal for Jewish environmentalists.

"The strongest part of ROI is the community built during the summit," said Dolgin, a Vancouver-based freelance environmental educator, organizer and advocate, and one of Jewcology's 17 founding members. "I came to an ROI meeting three years ago, and we've come a long way since then.... What we're doing is no longer theoretical, but very practical."

While the prospect of a green activist flying thousands of miles to make the case for greening the Jewish world might seem counterintuitive, Dolgin said, "You need in-person connections to work online effectively. You're more inspired to connect with people online after you've met them face to face."

"That's one reason we think it's so important to come together in one place at one time," confirmed Korda, ROI director and a native of Montreal. "Facebook isn't an adequate substitute for 'face time.'"

In the five years since its launch, ROI now has more than 500 members around the world, growth that Korda credits to his upbringing and experiences in the Canadian Jewish community.

"I was a student activist in Canada and, although we didn't always agree with the establishment, the community was always welcoming. In Canada, we've figured out how to be inclusive and diverse, and that inspires so much of what we do at ROI," said Korda.

"After five years of expanding this global network, we're embarking on a new direction ... [a] global brainstorm ... face-to-face for the members at the summit, and tweet-to-tweet for the hundreds scattered in 40 countries, to determine our future course," he continued.

"ROI provides a vehicle where the most creative young Jewish minds can cross-pollinate," explained Rabbi Yonatan Gordis, executive director of the Centre for Leadership Initiatives, based out of Vancouver and Jerusalem. "We're here to help them turn vision into reality as they take the car keys to the Jewish future."

Lynn Schusterman, whose Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation underwrites ROI, believes that this sort of inclusiveness and diversity are integral to strengthening Jewish bonds and building a better Jewish future.

"We are living in challenging times, and questions abound regarding how best to nurture our individual and collective connections to each other as Jews," she said. "We have seen how the network, skill-building and other resources we provide have led to collaborations that are helping to enhance and enrich Jewish communities all over the world."

The post-summit challenge is for ROI participants to head home and build their own networks and energize their individual communities – and to find ways to support themselves without regular grants

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This is where Rivlin might come in. He's the co-founder contribute.com, a brand-new start-up that can help nonprofit organizations raise money and strengthen their connections with supporters and members. One of Contribute's most ambitious goals is to help nonprofits capture a tiny slice of a huge pie – the \$80 billion in Internet advertising now flowing to corporate heavyweights like Google, Yahoo and Microsoft.

Although Contribute launched a little more than a month ago, it already has captured the attention of major nonprofits such as the Make-a-Wish Foundation.

Born and raised in Israel, Rivlin now spends much of his time in North America, where he is Contribute's regional director. His frequent business trips to Canada are also a homecoming of sorts: his mother was born in Montreal, where much of Rivlin's extended family still lives.

Creating bonds that transcend place and extend over time – that's one goal of ROI, and one that Rivlin believes is getting much closer to being achieved. "We'll see the results of this summit in five to 10 years," he said. And while ROI stands for "return on investment" – and ROI is producing real returns – "the ROI summit served to have all those in the tent 'renewing their investment' in the Jewish global community.... I'm optimistic about the future of the Jewish people," he said.

For information, visit roicommunity.org.

Martin Joseph is with the Dershowitz Group in Washington, D.C.