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Change Of Directory

Publisher of Jewish-themed listings challenging Bell Atlantic by printing his version of Yellow Pages.

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After 10 years of publishing the Jewish-Israeli Yellow Pages in Jewish communities throughout the city, Assaf Ran will take on Bell Atlantic by printing what he is calling the New Yellow.

"We will print 900,000 copies and deliver them door-to-door in Manhattan — covering every resident and business — in March 2000," said Ran. "This will break the monopoly of Bell Atlantic."

Ran, 33, an Israeli who came to the United States 10 years ago and holds dual citizenship, said the book is expected to carry some 3,000 ads and contain about 1,500 pages, the same as Bell Atlantic. The big difference: the cost to advertisers.

"We are selling ads for 70 percent less than Bell Atlantic's rates," he said, "and we give customers added value by putting a consumer discount card in the books for discounts of up to 10 percent with certain advertisers."

Bell Atlantic features discount coupons in its Yellow Pages.

Ran said he operates a toll-free referral service that directs callers looking for a particular product or service to his advertisers. The number has been in operation for 10 years and Ran said it receives "tens of thousands of calls" each year. He added that those who will be advertising in the New Yellow already are getting referrals from the number. And, he said, they are listed on his company's Internet Web site.

Ran said he has launched a \$1 million advertising campaign to attract advertisers in the coming month.

He noted that he is able to charge advertisers much less than Bell Atlantic — a listing in New Yellow costs \$300 a month, Ran said — because he is having the book printed in Israel.

"The printing is about 50 percent less in Is-

rael," he said from his main office in Kew Gardens, Queens. "Even with shipping, which is only 2 or 3 percent of the price — it is still much less."

The printing is going to be done at a plant in Yavneh, about 20 miles south of Tel Aviv.

"A lot of smaller businesses could not afford Bell Atlantic's Yellow Pages and they can finally advertise now," said Ran. "A lot of Bell Atlantic's advertisers have switched to us to save money."

He said he did not have figures on the exact number.

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Mary Jo Howe, Bell Atlantic's vice president of marketing strategy and customer care, said she knew of Ran's plans and said that a third company was preparing to publish its Yellow Book in Manhattan sometime during the first half of next year.

She said Bell Atlantic distributes 1.5 million of its Yellow Pages each year in Manhattan through door-to-door distribution and to those who request it throughout the year. Distribution begins in May of the 1,600-page book that contains more than 20,300 ads.

"We know that businesses and consumers use our book and refer to it," said Howe. "The [others] are publishing books that are unproven and may or may not remain in the business or home."

Howe noted that Bell Atlantic's on-line directory, Big Yellow, is the largest and most widely distributed. She pointed out that the Yellow Pages contains information about how sites, as well as subway maps, discount coupons and seating charts for area ballparks and arenas.

She said the cost of Yellow Pages ads vary depending on size, placement and whether color is used.

To raise the money for his new venture, Ran said he went public in April and that the initial public offering raised the necessary \$7.5 mil-



Assaf Ran, publisher of the Jewish-Israeli Yellow Pages, plans to print and distribute 900,000 copies of New Yellow in March 2000. *MEHAR DASKAN*

lion. He said his company, which trades on the NASDAQ under the symbol DAGM, had opened at \$6.50 and was trading last week at \$3.75. The book value, he said, is about \$3.50.

Ran said he plans to eventually publish the New Yellow in each of the city's other boroughs.

His experience with the Jewish-Israeli Yellow Pages taught him how to sell and market the New Yellow, he noted. The Jewish-Israeli Yellow Pages sells ads for \$1,400 to \$8,000 a year. Ran said he has a sales force of 100 in eight locations throughout the city and on Long Island.

About 300,000 copies of the Jewish-Israeli Yellow Pages are distributed annually, said Ran, through the mail and "in synagogues, kosher restaurants, Israeli restaurants and other

places with high traffic of Jewish and Israeli residents and tourists."

The Jewish Yellow Pages has 1,700 pages and 3,500 advertisers, he said. It is called the Jewish-Israeli Yellow Pages because every listing is in both English and Hebrew. It accepts ads from all businesses, "regardless of religion or nationality," Ran stressed.

One advertiser, Dr. Merdic Blau, a plastic surgeon, said he has found the book useful in "reminding people that I exist" and that he is now specializing in cosmetic surgery.

"I don't think it is good for people who do not know me, but for those who have heard of me and then see my number," he said. "The [book] is huge, almost like Bell Atlantic's. I'm Israeli and a lot of Israelis come. It works for me."