

*Fact Sheet:*



# *The Internet And MOMS Club® Chapters*

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*(Note: this Fact Sheet contains important information about internet security and your members' safety. Any chapter considering putting their newsletter online or using any on-line services should read the entire Fact Sheet to best understand what steps you can take to protect your members. If you have any questions about the information here, please contact your Regional Coordinator.)*



*International MOMS Club®  
Fact Sheet*

# The Internet and MOMS Club Chapters

## **The Internet and the MOMS Club**

Question: Which came first – the Internet or the MOMS Club?

Answer: The MOMS Club. Hard to believe, because in the overall scheme of things we're pretty young, but *it's a good thing that the MOMS Club came first!*

Because the MOMS Club came first, we developed a personal, face-to-face support system for at-home moms. Today, other on-line "support" groups don't really offer support at all – they're just a way for people to make money off of at-home mothers.

We started as a true nonprofit charity, dedicated to providing REAL support to at-home moms. We don't make a profit off our work with the MOMS Club, nor make money off your personal information or needs. Our whole goal is to help you, the at-home mother.

Over the years, the MOMS Club and the Internet have evolved together. We were one of the first mothers' support groups to provide universal information about our organization and chapters via the internet, and we quickly made full use of email for rapid communication between our volunteers and the chapters they help.

Now, virtually every mom is connected in some way through the internet, and most chapters have their own websites, which are linked to the International MOMS Club's site for increased visibility. We have special on-line communities for mothers with special needs, and our on-line newsletter and president discussion group provide the most up-to-the minute ideas and assistance.

As useful as the internet has been, though, we've witnessed some serious dangers lurking on-line. Cyber stalking has become a real problem, with pedophiles actively seeking victims on mothers-support sites. Identity theft is so common, just about everyone has signed up for some form of credit protection – something unheard of just a few years ago.

Because of that, it's important that anything we do on the internet keeps safety first. We can't prevent all bad guys from accessing our information, but we can minimize the danger and keep a watchful eye out for potential problems.

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## **How to have a safe internet experience**

First things first: don't post anything on the internet that you wouldn't tell a total stranger. Why? Because you never know when a total stranger may be reading your post.



Even high-tech passwords created to protect the largest companies can be hacked, usually far more easily than anyone anticipated. And, while you may not think anyone would be interested in what's posted on your website, newsletter or chat group, there are plenty of pedophiles who would love you to hold that thought.

This is not just an idle threat. We know pedophiles search mothers' groups' websites for information on meetings or park days where children will be – not our sites specifically, but any website that focuses on moms and children. They look for children's pictures they can download; they seek out mothers' and children's personal information, email addresses and home addresses. We know this, because pedophiles have actually posted that advice for other pedophiles on their own websites!

At present, there are no laws protecting you from pedophiles seeking the information you have willingly posted, and even if there were laws, a law only works if people are willing to follow it. Pedophiles obviously are willing to follow their obsession first and foremost, so no law is going to stop them.

Because of that, the less specific information you put on your chapter website, the better:

- \* At this time, don't post rosters that include mothers' and children's personal information (names, addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses);
- \* Don't post your calendar if it includes the location of the event;
- \* If you post pictures, don't post the person's whole name with it – first names only or no names at all is the safest way to go. (Really, names on pictures aren't necessary anyway – everyone in the picture already knows who they are!);
- \* And, whatever you post, only put that information or picture on the internet if you have permission from the people involved before you post that information or picture.

## **Understand who's making money off your members**

In recent years, many online "services" have popped up offering to make our lives easier. Those sites offer networking, websites, inter-locking calendars, babysitting coop points tracking, coupons and even rsvp'ing for parties!

Wow, who wouldn't love sites that do all that?

Before you sign up for any site, read the fine print. If the service is free, how are they paying for it?



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Nobody can afford to host websites or offer truly free online services (no matter what they claim).

All sites are making money off your use of them, so the question is: how?



**1) The most obvious method is to charge you.** Maybe they offer a free trial, but you have to pay to continue? If the site or service will eventually charge your chapter for using it, then you must include those charges in your chapter's budget.



**2) Hidden charges** – most on-line services aren't up-front about how they make money off your members. Some will "offer" advertising to your members. They call it an offer, but it's really not an "offer," because the website viewer is forced to watch pop up ads or scrolling ads that can't be removed.

If you see ads when you view your website or a service, that's one way the provider is making money off your use of their site. The advertisers pay the site for access to your members. That "access" you can see, but sometimes those pop-up or scrolling ads – or even the site itself – will plant cookies in your computer to track your activities. That access is invisible; it not only affects your computer, but can siphon off all sorts of information you won't even know you're revealing to total strangers.



**3) When the payment is you** – the sneakiest (and rapidly becoming the most common) way to make money off your members is to collect your personal information and actually sell it to advertisers.

If this is what they're going to do, they won't normally come out and say it that plainly in their "terms of use" on their website. Sometimes you have to read between the lines. If they say anything like, "We offer targeted advertising for our subscribers..." or "From time to time, our associates will contact you with special offers..." what they mean is that they are selling your information to outside companies who will contact your members whether they want to be contacted or not.

They'll make such ads and offers sound innocent and maybe even fun or interesting, but the point is, you will not know who they are selling your information to, nor what information they've chosen to sell.

If you use a website that offers a babysitting coop, for example, they may not only be selling your information (mother's name, age, address, email, number and age of children, preferences), but they may also be selling your children's personal information (allergies, preferences, etc.), depending on how much information you put on the site.

Recently, news articles have disclosed that even some software parents use to keep their children safe may be secretly sharing the children's personal information with outsiders.

For example, some leading brands of software that let you monitor your children's on-line activities, also allow the company to read the children's or your chat messages, and then they sell the information gathered from those emails or posts to outside companies.

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**Whether or not your members consider scrolling ads, cookies, targeting or information-selling programs a violation of their privacy is going to depend on the member. Some members won't care. Others will care very much.**



Therefore, the first step before using any website provider or on-line service is to understand exactly what your members will be giving in exchange for using it.

Make sure all the members understand that the site may not (or will not) keep their information private. Vote on whether the chapter wants to use the site at all, and with the members, develop guidelines for what your chapter will and won't post on the site...

...And, if anyone does not want to use the site, make sure they have an alternate way to get the information or to participate in all your chapter's activities:

- \* If you use your website for your chapter newsletter, make sure that the newsletter can be physically mailed to any member who is either not on-line or who wishes to have it mailed to her;
- \* If you use an on-line site to tally babysitting hours or for rsvp'ing, make sure that mothers can call a Babysitting Coop Coordinator or member-in-charge of the activity if they don't want their information on-line.

# Password?



## Password protected sites...

Some sites offer password protected areas for your newsletter or personal information. Does that make the site safer?

Not really. Most hackers can very easily bypass password protections, so, while a password protected site may be marginally safer than an open site, you still have to figure that any information you post there is going to be accessible by strangers.

If you do choose to use a password protected area, say for part of your website or for an on-line newsletter, the MOMS Club volunteer Coordinator who has been assigned to help your chapter must also be given access so she can visit your password protected areas. Be sure to include instructions or passwords in your communications to her so she can help your chapter throughout the year.

## Who Owns Your Site?

If your chapter has a website, make sure the chapter is the owner, not the individual who helped you set up the site originally nor the service provider. This solves many problems later if you want to change web mistresses or change services. Also, make sure that there is always

someone trustworthy who knows how to dismantle or discontinue the site if your chapter disbands or changes providers.

### **Plan now for changes later...**

It's a good idea for your website mistress AND the chapter president to have a master list of all passwords – for the website as a whole and for the individual users.

Then, if someone leaves suddenly, or if there is a problem, the chapter can still manage their website. Definitely, when the board changes over, make sure the new board has all the information it needs to continue the chapter's website.

### **Spam, spam, spam – How DID they get my email address???**

We often get questions from chapters claiming that “someone” sold their email address and how do they stop it?

As we've discussed, sometimes the website providers sell mothers' email addresses.

We can guarantee that the International MOMS Club never, ever sells, loans or gives away the contact information for our chapters.

If a potential member in your area asks us for your chapter's information, the most we ever give out is the contact person's first name and telephone number. We never give them your last name, and we only give out your email address if you've given us permission to do so. We never, EVER, give out your home address!



However, most chapters post at least one email address on their website, and we've found that creative spammers know that. Sometimes chapters also post whole names and other personal information. So when you wonder how someone got your email address or name, look on your website first and see if the information is there.

Also look at your other on-line contacts or social sites. As we mentioned earlier, many “social” websites sell your personal information.

The one thing you know is that the International MOMS Club did NOT give out the information.

We are required to provide our chapter's contact information to the IRS. While the information we are required to send the IRS each March includes only the current president's name, address and telephone number, chapters themselves give the IRS their new president's information and email address when they file the e-postcard 990-N on the IRS website each summer.

International keeps very strict control over our use of your chapter's addresses and email contacts, but we can make no promises for the IRS. The IRS considers the information about who runs any public charity – like your chapter – to be public information.

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Therefore, the IRS may release your chapter's official contact information. Often that information is old and out-dated. Please note that we have NO control over this.

So, what do you do if you get emails from someone wanting to sell something to your members? You can tell them that you're not interested, or you can do what you do when you get any other spam... hit delete and ignore it.

And, what do you do if you get an email from someone – not one of our volunteers assigned to help your chapter, but someone who says “she's” a MOMS Club member and needs your help? Maybe she says her husband is unemployed or they're divorced and she's trying to start a home-based business, so won't you buy her soap (or whatever) since she's a MOMS Club member just like you?

Or, maybe she says her child is sick and they desperately need to raise money for an operation or medicine?

In all those cases, it's spam.

The people sending those emails *may* be MOMS Club members, but they could just as easily be a guy sitting behind a computer in another country. You have no clue who is sending you the emails, and no matter who it is, you should just hit delete.



If they're asking you for financial help via email, you can bet that they're most likely not MOMS Club members. We have the Mother-To-Mother Fund® to help members facing devastating financial emergencies.

If anyone asks you for help accessing the Fund via email, it's spam. If you have a member of your own chapter who you know needs help, ask your volunteer Coordinator for information on the Mother-To-Mother Fund. All requests for help must come directly from the mom-in-need's home chapter to International, through your Coordinator.

Remember that on-line thieves are very creative and they send out new ploys all the time. They may even troll your website to find the name of a chapter member, and then send you an email asking for emergency help, claiming to be your member. NEVER send any money based on an email alone – never, never, never! If you get an email from someone you think may be a member of your chapter who is in sudden need, personally CALL her or otherwise verify her emergency, but never send money to anyone based on an email.

## ***Facebook, Yahoo Groups, and All Those Fun Apps...***

We're not even going to try to list all the other possible services or groups on the internet. New services and ways to use the internet are popping up all the time. No matter how complete a list would be today, tomorrow it would be out-of-date.

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If you use any chat or group sites, remember, safety must be your first concern. We suggest that your chapter not use any site that stores your members' personal information on-line, but if you do vote to do so, be sure that all your members understand the safety concerns and that there are alternate ways for your members to participate without the site.



**Make sure that your members understand that on these sites, their personal information WILL be sold or made available to outsiders.**

For example, on Facebook, it's been revealed recently that they often change their privacy rules without notice so members' information can be exposed to other companies that pay Facebook to tap into that info.

Why is that important? Because even if you've set your security settings to be as private as possible, Facebook could change the rules without warning you that your personal information will now be revealed.

That's been in the news, but did you realize that Facebook uses its "fun" games like Farmville to dig out your personal information?

As Consumer Reports' ShopSmart publication pointed out, "Your personal info is the currency you use to play. When you or your friends sign up, their developers collect your info, along with that of your friends."

They don't ask... they just do it.

While Facebook claims it does not allow apps that violate its privacy "rules," the rules can change without warning. And, Facebook actively entices other people to click onto games "to help their friends." Consumer Reports estimates that 1.8 MILLION computers were infected by social-network information-seeking apps through Facebook last year alone.

It's similar with any other group or social network. Your members' information will not be kept private.

## **When did we go back to Junior High and Where is Everyone?**

Relying on social networks can change the dynamics of your chapter in several ways:



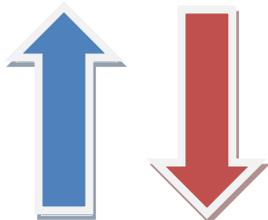
1) **"She said what???"** The internet has a perverse way of letting people say things that would be better left unsaid. Somehow, people who would never tell you to your face that your dress DOES make you look fat, will say the same thing on the internet and never think twice.

Minor differences of opinion that would have quickly faded away can become major blow-ups if members start trading insults or looking for supporters for

“their side” on-line. Having a Facebook page, Yahoo group or other on-line quick-communication can encourage members to “speak” before they think, and once they hit send or post, the message is out there for everyone to see.

We’ve seen chapters explode because of postings on Facebook or Yahoo, so if your chapter chooses to use them or any other posting service, before you do, decide what kind of postings you will allow and what you won’t.

Once you have the rules in place, they have to apply to everyone – for example, officers can’t criticize a member and then not expect to be criticized back. Keep the postings civil and emphasize that if you wouldn’t say it to someone’s face, don’t post it online.



2) **UP’S and downs of participation** – doing more on-line is generally fun in the beginning, but it quickly becomes very impersonal. We’ve found through the years that as a chapter starts to do more on-line, there is an initial spike in participation in those on-line activities, but then participation drops off on both the on-line activities AND the actual in-person activities.

Why? Well, the internet doesn’t really bring people together. Instead, it makes it easier to keep people at arm’s length. People (and their chapters) start to lose that personal “I know you” connection that makes us so special and fulfilling.

As they lose that personal connection, members feel less of a valued part of the chapter. They think nobody will notice if they come or not (and they’re often right). So, they don’t come as often. Without their participation, the chapter starts to slow down and do less, and the decline can lead to the chapter just fading away.

A real telephone call telling a member that you’ve missed them at meetings is worth 100 emails telling them the same thing. ***There’s nothing like a real voice saying, “Hi!” – with a smile – to build membership.***



### **International MOMS Club’s Plans for the Future!**

The International MOMS Club realizes that our chapters want and need to integrate their communications and data-keeping with a balance of both personal and internet services for their members.

To that end, International has been working to develop programs specifically for our chapters that both will allow you to have an integrated website, and protect your members’ privacy.

This has been extremely difficult, because while many on-line services have been eager to become associated with us, so far, none of them have been willing to keep our sites “pure.”

In other words, they’ve been “willing” to harvest your personal information, but not to provide us

with the programs we need at a reasonable price that will not subject your members to privacy-violating intrusions.

So, we've been frustrated, but we have not given up. Instead, we are working to develop our own programs that will allow your chapter a security-conscious website that will have a public face so you can advertise your chapter to potential members, and a private side that will allow you to have an on-line newsletter, rsvp system and roster, with as much safety as possible and with the knowledge that no one will be mining your members' information for an outsider's gain.

## **What can your chapter do in the meantime?**

While we are developing those programs, your chapter may use any on-line service it wishes – *as long as you meet these five conditions:*



### **1) Your members understand how they will be paying for the service and how their personal information may be sold to outsiders.**

Do not trust sites that promise you something for nothing. NO site gives you something for nothing; it's just hiding how it is selling your members' information. Be sure you read between the lines and understand not only what they are promising you, but what they are not saying about selling your information. Make sure your members understand the privacy issues.

### **2) Your members understand how relying on the internet could negatively impact your chapter.**

Actively plan how you will keep things personal and supportive, even if you do much of your communicating on-line. Re-evaluate your on-line activity often and adjust if participation starts to drop. Don't be afraid to go low-tech if members stop responding to emails and on-line tactics.

Mix your message – use email, but also use telephone calls or mailed reminders. If you have to choose only one, make it the most personal choice. Make sure EACH of your members knows that SHE matters to the chapter.



### **3) Your members VOTE to use any on-line service.**

ALWAYS VOTE on how your chapter will be using the internet. Voting protects your Board from complaints and liability later. Don't presume you know what your members want to do. Educate, discuss and VOTE so everyone can have a voice and can be heard!

### **4) Your chapter respects members who do not wish to have their personal information on-line and offers an alternate means of participating.**

If you offer on-line rsvp or a babysitting coop, you also need to have an RSVP or babysitting coop number members can call to sign up for an activity without posting their information to the internet. If your chapter has an online newsletter, it must also have a hard copy available to mail or pick up at meetings.





**5) Your chapter makes sure the MOMS Club volunteer Coordinators who help your chapter have access to all parts of your on-line site and that they can receive the equivalent information by mail if they prefer hard copies.**

Our volunteers help many chapters and not all of our volunteers are able to be on-line long enough to review all newsletters over the Internet. Some volunteers need to have your newsletters sent to them by regular mail.

Our volunteers also need to be able to see your member-only areas of your website so they can help you more quickly if there is a problem. They must have a current password at all times for all password-protected sites so they can see your on-line services and newsletters at any time.

*The strength of the MOMS Club is that our volunteers truly care about you and your chapter.*

*Whether your chapter uses on-line services or not, get to know the volunteers who work with your chapter – they have a lot of experience with the MOMS Club and as mothers!*

***Your Coordinator is there to help you and your chapter!***

