



COMMUNITY CONNECT INC.

Statement to the Technical Advisory Board from Community Connect, Inc.

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Member Safety Initiatives 2008

Community Connect, Inc. is the parent company of five social networking sites including BlackPlanet.com, MiGente.com, AsianAve.com, FaithBase.com and GLEE.com. BlackPlanet.com is our largest site and it is also the largest online community for African Americans.

Members use our sites to reconnect with old friends, meet new ones and visit the site daily to create relationships and exchange information while creating trusted networks between themselves. Our sites are embraced by celebrities and key personalities who are relevant to the audience and want to connect with them. We have high loyalty among our members because of our culturally relevant material focused on our member's backgrounds and interests.

We are committed to providing a safe environment for all our members across all our sites. Therefore, we have developed a comprehensive member safety campaign to help educate our members about how to have a fun and safe user experience. Our Member Safety initiatives focus on two key areas, unwanted content and unwanted contact. Our belief is that all members will have a safer online experience if they can control who can contact them and if the content they are exposed to does not violate any of our Terms of Service.

Our member safety campaign falls into four categories:

1. General Member Safety
2. Controlling Contact From Other members
3. Under 18 Member Safety
4. Education and Partnership With External Organizations



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## 1. General Member Safety Targeting Members of All Ages

- We have updated the Terms of Service to reflect the current state of the internet and to include online safety tips for teens, parents, daters and law enforcement agencies.
- We created and posted an email address for concerned parents and law enforcement agents to easily contact us with any issues or concerns.
- We prominently display “Report Abuse” links everywhere there is member to member communication.
- We have added a photo approval process for all social main photos to prevent inappropriate photos from appearing as the main photo on personal pages. This photo approval process is outsourced to a third party.
- Members can control Member Find results so that only people in their age range are displayed in search results.
- All main photos in Groups require approval. This was implemented in March 2008. This approval process is outsourced to a third party.
- We have created a tool that prevents members from creating and searching for forums or groups using words that have been banned by the Member Safety Team. Examples of banned words include child porn and pornography.
- Safety Tips contain resources for Internet Safety including FTC tips.
- Phishing warnings are contained in Safety Tips.
- Users must affirm they have read the Safety Tips prior to registration.
- We have a team of moderators trained to investigate and respond to all member reports of member safety violations.



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## 2. Controlling Contact From Other Members

We know that our members have different comfort levels about how much personal information they want to share with other members. We want every member to be able to decide how much or how little information they want to reveal about themselves.

Members have options and can select how much information they want to share with others.

- Members can opt to make their profile viewable to “Friends Only.”
- Members have the ability to block all or some members from sending notes and friend invites based on age, gender, relationship status and sexual orientation.
- Members can opt not to allow other members to IM them.
- Members can opt not to allow themselves to be searched by their real name, email address and location.
- Members can block individuals from contacting them using notes and IM.
- Members can choose not to display their age, name, sexual preference, their last log in date, how long they have been a member, race, education and income.
- Members can hide their online status so other members can not tell if they are online.



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### 3. Under 18 Member Safety and Education

We are committed to providing a safe environment to all our members especially members between the ages of 14-18. These members may not have a lot of experience navigating cyberspace so we have extra measures in place to help them safely navigate through our site.

- We created a special welcome email for members between the ages of 14 and 18 to provide a site overview and a reminder about internet safety with a link to online safety tips.
- We added age restrictions to chat rooms to prevent members under 18 from entering certain rooms and members over 18 from entering the teen chat rooms.
- After registration, we automatically add a friend to all members who are between the ages of 14-18. The friend, from Member Services, will regularly post notices on their bulletin board reminding members how to stay safe online.
- Members can not change their date of birth after registering.
- We changed the registration process to make it more difficult for a person under the age of 14 to lie about their age to become a site member.
- Safety Tips for Parents includes a suggestion to consider using computer based blocking software.
- The default setting for members under 18 is set to “Do not send notes to me from anyone over 18.”
- We added age restrictions to Groups. If a member under 18 creates a group, members over 18 can not join and vice versa.
- Members under 18 can not hide their age.
- We recognize that members who are between 14-18 are minors and we do not show them ads for alcohol or other ads designed for more mature audiences.



#### 4. Partnerships With External Organizations

Our members are extremely important to us and as a commitment to them we have joined with government agencies, organizations, and other social networking sites to comprehensively address member safety.

##### Partnership with New Jersey Attorney General's Office

- In October, 2007, we entered into a partnership with the New Jersey Attorney General's Office and other social networking sites to develop an icon that will empower users by allowing them to quickly and easily report inappropriate content or suspicious activity. Because the icon is uniform, all users have a clear idea what it means and will thus be able to quickly report abuse.
- In addition to developing a standard icon, the sites and the Attorney General have also worked together to develop consistency with respect to what occurs after the icon is clicked.

##### Partnership with Online Safety Organizations

- We have supported and worked with several non profit organizations that are tasked with increasing online safety and education including [www.wiredsafety.org](http://www.wiredsafety.org), the largest and oldest online safety organization and [www.safefamilies.org](http://www.safefamilies.org), an online organization who's mission is to teach parents how to help keep their children online.
- We have links to both organizations in our Safety Tips section.
- In January, 2008, Bernadette Sweeney, the Director of Member Services at Community Connect, was given the honor of becoming an honorary Teen angel. Teenangels is a group of 13-18 year-old volunteers that have been specially trained by the local law enforcement, and many other leading safety experts in all aspects of online safety, privacy, and security. After completion of the required training, the Teenangels run unique programs in schools to spread the word about responsible and safe surfing to other teens and younger kids, parents, and teachers.
- Honorary Teen Angels are selected because of their commitment to teenage online safety.



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The steps we have taken to help increase member safety and awareness have all been developed in house and most of the initiatives are managed by an internal team of Member Services Moderators. The photo approval tool was developed in house and is managed by an outsourced team of moderators.

Our tools were designed to measure how many members have opted to use the safety features we have in place. We can track how many emails we receive to the member safety address; we can track how many members click on our safety tips and our safety messages; we can track how many members use the Report Abuse link to report Terms of Services violations and we can track how many members opt in to use the privacy settings available to them and which ones are being used the most.

We are confident that the overall impact these initiatives have had on member safety is positive. However, we do not think it is fair to attach a number to member safety. For example, no one should assume that if 80% of members of any social networking site are using one or more privacy settings then 80% of members will be safe online. This assumption can not and should not be made. We will not stop researching and building new tools for increasing online safety just because a majority of our members are using all or some of our existing safety tools.

We are confident the initiatives in place thus far have had a positive impact on member safety. However, there is one activity that concerns us. Our initiatives to date have not been able to fully eradicate member behavior that is acceptable on the peer to peer level but still violates our terms of service. For example, a member may willingly post his or her address, phone number and school onto his or her personal page. Other members may willingly upload photos containing nudity and set the status to "Friends Only" meaning all members who are approved friends can see the photo. Both the sender and the receiver are willing participants in uploading and viewing "bad" content.

Peer to peer "bad" behavior is an area where we would like to have further discussion with the task force and other social networking sites. We strongly believe there is a need to educate our younger members about what should and should not be uploaded onto any website. We welcome any feedback and suggestions from the TAB and the other Social Networking Sites that are part of the task force team to help address this issue.



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BlackPlanet has the power to communicate with millions of members. We understand that with power comes great responsibility. While we will continue to research and implement technical solutions that work for us and our members we also want to use our reach to continue to educate our members. We are committed to partnering with organizations and groups that are dedicated to educating teenagers and adults about online safety.

In 2009, we will focus on creating a cyberbullying awareness campaign for our members. This campaign will target our members in the 14-18 year age range. We plan to create in house Public Safety Announcements that will be posted throughout the site. Our goal is to create awareness about the issue and to make our members understand that certain behaviors are should never be tolerated even if it a "Friend" who is initiating an unwanted action or behavior.

We also plan to add another option to the privacy settings. Our product roadmap for 2009 includes adding the option to allow members to block other members from visiting their page based on age range. As an example, members will be able to tell us not to let members between 18 and 25 view their page.

When this is implemented, the default setting for members under 18 will be to not let anyone over 18 view their page.

We have an ongoing commitment to member safety and we will keep seeking solutions that help educate our members and help them prevent unwanted content and contact. We want to clearly state that we are not against implementing technical solutions if they can add value to our community by providing a safer online environment.

The technical presentations shown at the Task Force meeting in September offered various methods and tools that were deemed by their presenters to help create a safer online environment. However, based on the questions and concerns that followed each presenter, none of the presentations offered a magic bullet solution that guarantees online safety.

When making recommendations we strongly encourage the TAB team to consider the effect that some of these technologies would have on the site members and the business itself.



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Implementation and cost alone may be prohibiting factors for smaller social networking sites. MySpace and FaceBook may be able to easily absorb the additional costs associates with implementation. However, smaller, niche sites, like ours, may find it impossible to meet the challenge of implementing new software and the increased costs involved. We are very concerned about any associated cost that may be incurred if any of the technologies presented were mandated.

Again, we are not against exploring technology that can help improve online safety. However, none of the solutions addressed bigger issues such as cyberbullying and other “peer to peer” bad behavior. None of the “solutions” presented at the Task Force meeting had answers that addressed these very important issues.

We strongly believe that technology alone can not and will not provide an absolute safe online environment. Education of the parent and child needs to be part of any online safety equation.

We are impressed by the dedication to online safety that everyone on this task force has shown. We would like to continue to move forward to address this issue and hope that we can work with the other members of the task force to come up with shared solutions and best practices to educate and help keep all members safe online.