

# Online Communities In Our Lives

## Have A Group? Going Online Can Save You Time

(NAPSA)—Can't keep track of your soccer team's phone numbers? Need to raise money for a class trip? Want to organize a bake sale for your child's school? It may be time to take your group online.

Whether it's for a group of friends, a gathering of community activists or even parents involved in the PTA, a Web-based group can be a time-saving way to virtually meet, make plans and more. Plus, you don't need to be a tech whiz to form an online group of your own. Try these tips:

### Keep It Simple

Use the Internet to your advantage. For instance, a Web site such as [www.BigTent.com](http://www.BigTent.com) lets you create an online group for free. By following a few simple setup steps, people can build a group site that is easy to administer and allows them to hold online discussions and get people involved. There are even tools to let groups run polls, schedule events, raise funds and collect dues.

Users include mothers groups, neighborhood associations, hobbyists and alumni organizations as well as home and self-improvement coach Marla Cilley, aka "The FlyLady," who uses BigTent to connect with and manage her 500,000-member online community.

"I want to help people create an environment for peace in their lives, and I needed a more com-



**Manic Mommies (pictured above) builds an active support community for moms nationwide.**

prehensive place to do it," she explains.

### Keep It Clear

It's important to clearly define both the mission and rules of a Web-based group. Establish guidelines and moderators for discussion chains as well as ground rules for participation in events. You might also use online polls within the group to vote on proposed changes to policy or other major decisions.

### Keep It Real

More than a third of adults visit a social networking site daily, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, making the sites excellent places to recruit new group members or to solicit donations. But be sure to use opportunities that are not Web based as well. Talk with friends and family about your group and encourage them to spread the word.

For more information, visit [www.BigTent.com](http://www.BigTent.com).