Looking for holiday gifts on a budget? Local Facebook garage sales are a veritable treasure trove of used and new items that are just around the corner. We caught up with Lois Reichert, the Admin of three popular local Facebook swap sites to get the skinny on the great deals that lie just a click away.

Q: Which Facebook swap sites do you currently Admin?
A: Right now, I do “Montclair Area Swap,” “Clothes Rack-Montclair Area,” and “Kid’s Swap-Montclair Area.” It includes towns bordering Montclair, like Verona, Bloomfield, West Orange, and Glen Ridge, and has grown to include Nutley, Cedar Grove and Livingston.

Q: How did you get started with these pages?
A: I started by helping a woman do the Montclair swap site, then when she became ill I took over.

There was already a swap site for South Orange/Maplewood. It’s where I did my first swap. They had 20,000 people, but I wanted to keep it more local and safe. I started my own page, so I could vet every member. I wanted it to be your real neighbors, so you can feel good about who is ringing your doorbell. I investigate by looking at profiles, asking questions, checking out their timelines, etcetera. I probably decline more than I add!

The main page than branched off into the Kid’s page and the Clothes Rack, to separate the types of things people are looking for.

Q: How do the sites work?
A: I call it an online garage sale. If you have something you want to sell, you take pictures of it (no stock photos, the buyer needs to see what they are really buying!), you put a price on it and tell buyers where to pick up. A buyer can then express interest and “PM” or private message the seller to arrange a pick up. On my site, I leave all the sales up to the people involved. Other sites have different rules, like “first come, first serve,” but I want the page to be about safety and helping the community.

Q: What goes into making sure the sites run smoothly?
A: A lot of Xanax! Just kidding! I have about 100 requests for posts a day. I pre-approve every item that is posted. Before I did that, things were a mess: multiple posts, posts on the wrong page. Now I preapprove all the posts to keep things neat and organized.

I let people “bump” their post (bring it back up to the top) every 72 hours. I want to keep things fair to my members.

Q: What is the most challenging part about running the swap sites?
A: People don’t read the pinned post! We have rules, but many people ignore them. I care about the members and want them to have a good experience. The hard part is that I have to preapprove the posts. It takes about 30 hours a week. But it’s a labor of love, and I feel like I’m helping others pay it forward.

Q: What’s the most fun or rewarding part about running the swap?
A: I like to help people! Especially for the kids site. Kids barely use or wear these things, so it’s nice to see others get use out of these items. And buying things can be fun! It’s definitely addicting.

Q: What is the strangest item for sale you ever saw someone post?
A: It wasn’t on my group (I would never allow it), but I saw it in another. Someone was selling an X-box, which isn’t that strange, but they didn’t realize that there was a naked person in the background of the photo!

Q: How do you think pages like these improve the community?
A: I’m all about community. These Facebook swap sites are all about recycling. People can buy things that they wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford. And people can sell things that still have lots of life in them! It’s perfect for neighbors helping each other.

Safe Exchange
Did you know? More and more towns are adding “Safe Exchange Spaces,” monitored public areas where goods and money can be exchanged. There are currently three Safe Exchange Spaces in West Orange. The parking lots of Police Headquarters, the Washington Street Sub-Station, and the Valley Sub-Station are open and available to the public as a “Safe Exchange Zone” for conducting in-person sales. The lobby of these three buildings are open from 8:30am to 4:30pm, Monday through Friday.