

SPARK NETWORKS INC
Form 10-K
March 25, 2011
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UNITED STATES
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20549
FORM 10-K

ANNUAL REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934
FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2010

OR

TRANSITION REPORT PURSUANT TO SECTION 13 OR 15(d) OF THE SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934
FOR THE TRANSITION PERIOD FROM TO

COMMISSION FILE NO. 001-32750

SPARK NETWORKS, INC.

(EXACT NAME OF REGISTRANT AS SPECIFIED IN ITS CHARTER)

DELAWARE
(State or other jurisdiction of incorporation or organization)
8383 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 800, Beverly Hills, California
(Address of principal executive offices)

20-8901733
(I.R.S. Employer Identification No.)
90211
(Zip Code)

REGISTRANT'S TELEPHONE NUMBER, INCLUDING AREA CODE: (323) 658-3000

SECURITIES REGISTERED PURSUANT TO SECTION 12(b) OF THE ACT:

Title of Each Class	Name of Each Exchange on which Registered
Common Stock, par value \$0.001 per share	NYSE Amex

SECURITIES REGISTERED PURSUANT TO SECTION 12(g) OF THE ACT: None.

Indicate by check mark if the registrant is a well-known seasoned issuer, as defined in Rule 405 of the Securities Act. Yes No

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Indicate by check mark if the registrant is not required to file reports pursuant to Section 13 or Section 15(d) of the Act. Yes No

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant (1) has filed all reports required to be filed by Section 13 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the registrant was required to file such reports), and (2) has been subject to such filing requirements for the past 90 days. Yes No

Indicate by check mark whether the Registrant has submitted electronically and posted on its corporate Web site, if any, every Interactive Data File required to be submitted and posted pursuant to Rule 405 of Regulation S-T during the preceding 12 months (or for such shorter period that the Registrant was required to submit and post such files). Yes No

Indicate by check mark if disclosure of delinquent filers pursuant to Item 405 of Regulation S-K (§ 229.405 of this chapter) is not contained herein, and will not be contained, to the best of registrant's knowledge, in definitive proxy or information statements incorporated by reference in Part III of this Form 10-K or any amendment to this Form 10-K.

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a large accelerated filer, an accelerated filer, a non-accelerated filer or a smaller reporting company. See definitions of accelerated filer, large accelerated filer and smaller reporting company in Rule 12b-2 of the Exchange Act. (Check one):

Large accelerated filer Accelerated filer Non-accelerated filer Smaller reporting company

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is a shell company (as defined in Rule 12b-2 of the Act). Yes No

The aggregate market value of the voting and non-voting common equity (which consists solely of shares of common stock) held by non-affiliates of the registrant as of June 30, 2010 was approximately \$39,704,837 based on \$3.48, the closing price of the registrant's common stock on the NYSE Amex on that date.

The registrant had 20,587,336 outstanding common stock, par value \$0.001 per share, as of March 25, 2011.

Information required by Items 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 of Part III are incorporated by reference from the Proxy Statement for the registrant's 2011 Annual Meeting of Stockholders. Except with respect to information specifically incorporated by reference in the Form 10-K, the Proxy Statement is not deemed to be filed as part hereof.

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Spark Networks and Spark Networks logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Spark Networks USA, LLC, one of the Company's indirect wholly owned subsidiaries.

CAUTIONARY STATEMENT REGARDING FORWARD-LOOKING STATEMENTS

This annual report on Form 10-K, including the sections entitled "Risk Factors," "Management's Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations" and "Business," contains forward-looking statements that involve substantial risks and uncertainties. All statements other than statements of historical facts contained in this annual report on Form 10-K, including statements regarding our future financial position, business strategy and plans and objectives of management for future operations, are forward-looking statements. In some cases, you can identify forward-looking statements by terminology such as "believes," "expects," "anticipates," "intends," "estimates," "may," "will," "continue," "plan," "predict," "potential" or the negative of these terms or other similar expressions. We have based these forward-looking statements on our current expectations and projections about future events and financial trends that we believe may affect our financial condition, results of operations, business strategy and financial needs. Our actual results could differ materially

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from those anticipated in these forward-looking statements, which are subject to a number of risks, uncertainties and assumptions described in the Risk Factors section and elsewhere in this annual report on Form 10-K, regarding, among other matters:

our ability to attract members to our Web sites, convert members into paying subscribers and retain our paying subscribers;

the highly competitive nature of our business;

our ability to keep pace with rapid technological change;

the strength of our existing brands and our ability to maintain and enhance those brands;

our ability to effectively manage our expenses;

our dependence upon the telecommunications infrastructure and our networking hardware and software infrastructure;

uncertainties relating to potential acquisitions of companies;

the volatility of the price of our equity securities;

the strain on our resources and management team of being a public company;

the ability of our principal stockholders to exercise significant influence over our company; and

other factors referenced in this annual report on Form 10-K and other reports.

You should not rely upon forward-looking statements as predictions of future events. We cannot assure you that the events and circumstances reflected in the forward-looking statements will be achieved or occur. Although we believe that the expectations reflected in the forward-looking statements are reasonable, we cannot guarantee future results, levels of activity, performance or achievements. Moreover, neither we nor any other person assume responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of the forward-looking statements. Except as required by law, we undertake no obligation to update publicly any forward-looking statements for any reason after the date of this annual report on Form 10-K to conform these statements to actual results or to changes in our expectations.

You should read this annual report on Form 10-K, and the documents that we reference in this annual report on Form 10-K and have filed as exhibits with the Securities and Exchange Commission, completely and with the understanding that our actual future results, levels of activity, performance and achievements may materially differ from what we expect. We qualify all of our forward-looking statements by these cautionary statements.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

We are required to file annual, quarterly and current reports, proxy statements and other information with the SEC. You can read our SEC filings over the Internet at the SEC's Web site at <http://www.sec.gov>. You may also read and copy any document we file with the SEC at its public reference facilities at 100 F Street, N.E. Washington, DC 20549. You may also obtain copies of the documents at prescribed rates by writing to

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the Public Reference Section of the SEC at 100 F Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20549. Please call the SEC at 1-800-SEC-0330 for further information on the operation of the public reference facilities.

We maintain a corporate Web site at www.spark.net. You may access our annual report on Form 10-K, quarterly reports on Form 10-Q, current reports on Form 8-K and amendments to those reports filed with, or furnished to, the SEC pursuant to Section 13(a) or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, as amended, with the SEC free of charge at our Web site as soon as reasonably practicable after such material is electronically filed with, or furnished to, the SEC. The reference to our Web address is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute incorporation by reference of the information contained on this Web site.

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PART I

ITEM 1. BUSINESS

Unless the context otherwise requires, the terms Company, we, us, and our refer to Spark Networks, Inc., a Delaware corporation and its subsidiaries. The Company was incorporated on April 20, 2007.

Our Business

We are a leading provider of online personals services in the United States and internationally. Our Web sites enable adults to meet online, participate in a community and form relationships. We provide this opportunity through many features on our Web sites, such as profiles, onsite email centers, real-time chat rooms, instant messaging services and offline singles events.

Currently, our key Web sites include JDate.com, Spark.com, BlackSingles.com, and ChristianMingle.com. We operate several international Web sites and maintain operations in the United States and Israel. Information regarding the geographical source of our revenue and data on our four reportable segments can be found in Note 11 to our Consolidated Financial Statements included in this annual report. Membership on our sites is free and allows a registered user to post a personal profile and access our searchable database of member profiles and customer service. On most of our websites, the ability to initiate most communication with other members requires the payment of a monthly subscription fee, which represents our primary source of revenue. We offer discounted subscription rates for members who subscribe for periods longer than one month. Subscriptions primarily renew automatically for subsequent one-month periods until paying subscribers terminate them.

The common stock of Spark Networks, Inc. is traded on the NYSE Amex (formerly the American Stock Exchange).

On December 31, 2010, Spark Networks Limited (SNUK) distributed its shareholdings in each of HurryDate, LLC; MingleMatch, Inc.; Kizmeet, Inc.; SN Holdco, LLC; SN Events, Inc.; Reseaux Spark Canada Ltd. and Spark SocialNet, Inc. by transferring its shares in those companies to Spark Networks, Inc. Spark Networks, Inc. subsequently transferred all of its shares in the same companies to LOV USA, LLC, a newly formed and wholly owned subsidiary of Spark Networks, Inc. SNUK continues to hold all of the shares of Spark Networks (Israel) Limited, VAP AG and JDate Limited. In addition, SNUK now holds all of the shares of Spark Networks USA, LLC, a newly formed subsidiary into which SNUK has transferred all of its United States based assets.

Our Industry

We believe online personals fulfill significant needs for single adults looking to meet a companion or date. Traditional methods such as printed personals advertisements, offline dating services and public gathering places often do not meet the needs of single people. Printed personals advertisements offer individuals limited personal information and interaction before meeting. Offline dating services are time-consuming, expensive and offer a smaller number of potential partners. Public gathering places such as restaurants, bars and social venues provide a limited opportunity to learn about others prior to an in-person meeting. In contrast, online personals services facilitate interaction between singles by allowing them to screen and communicate with a large number of potential companions. With features such as detailed personal profiles, email and instant messaging, this medium allows users to communicate with other singles at their convenience and affords them the ability to meet multiple people in an anonymous, convenient and secure online setting.

Our Competitive Strengths

Strength of the JDate Brand. We believe JDate, with its strong brand recognition, is a valuable asset. We believe the strength of the JDate brand will continue to allow us to market to and serve the Jewish

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community profitably. Because of the strength of the JDate brand, we are not required to spend as much on marketing JDate as we are on our other Web sites, or as much as others in the industry may spend on their personals Web sites.

Affinity-Focused Communities. We believe singles are more likely to interact, find friends and form lasting relationships with like-minded individuals who share common values, beliefs, traditions and cultural upbringings. For this reason, the majority of our Web sites are targeted to specific religious, ethnic, geographic and special interest groups. We believe our targeted communities enjoy greater word-of-mouth recognition and consumer loyalty relative to general market communities.

Web Site Functionality. We continually evaluate the functionality of our Web sites to improve our members' experience. Many of the features we offer, such as onsite emails, real-time chat rooms, instant messaging, E-cards and message boards increase the probability of communication between our members, which we believe increases the number and percentage of members who become or remain paying subscribers. We believe this functionality drives return visits to our Web sites and helps retain paying subscribers.

Customer Service Focus. Our multi-lingual call centers and email support team monitor our sites for fraudulent activity, assist members with billing questions, help members complete personal profiles and answer technical questions. We believe the quality of our customer service increases member satisfaction, which improves the number and percentage of members that become and remain paying subscribers.

Our Online Personals Services

Our online personals services offer single adults a convenient and secure setting for meeting other singles. Visitors to our Web sites are encouraged to become registered members and post profiles. Posting a profile is a process in which visitors are asked various questions about themselves, including information such as their tastes in food, hobbies and desired attributes of potential partners. Members may also post photos of themselves. Members can perform detailed searches of other profiles and save their preferences, and their profiles can be viewed by other members. In most cases, for a member to initiate email and instant message communication with others, that member must purchase a subscription. A subscription affords access to the paying subscribers' on-site email, instant messaging systems, message boards and chat rooms, enabling such subscribers to communicate with other members and paying subscribers. Our subscription fees are charged on a monthly basis, with discounts for longer-term subscriptions.

Our Web Sites. We believe we are a relatively unique company in the online personals industry because, in addition to servicing the mass market, we operate Web sites targeted at specific religious, ethnic, geographic and special interest groups. We currently offer Web sites in English, Hebrew and French. Some of our Web sites, organized by segment, are as follows:

Web Site	Target Audience
Jewish Networks	
JDate.com	Jewish singles
JDate.co.uk	Jewish singles
Cupid.co.il	Jewish singles (Hebrew speakers)
JDate.co.il	Jewish singles (Hebrew speakers)
JDate.fr	Jewish singles (French speakers)
General Market Networks	
Spark.com	Non-targeted
Kizmeet.com	Dating and matchmaking
Date.co.uk	UK singles

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Web Site	Target Audience
Other Affinity Networks	
AdventistSinglesConnection.com	Adventist singles
AsianSinglesConnection.com	Asian singles
BBWPersonalsPlus.com	Big beautiful women and admirers
BlackSingles.com	African-American singles
CanadianPersonals.net	Canadian singles
CatholicMingle.com	Catholic singles
ChristianMingle.com	Christian singles
DeafSinglesConnection.com	Deaf singles
GreekSinglesConnection.com	Greek singles
IndianMatrimonialNetwork.com	Indian singles
InterracialSingles.net	Interracial singles
ItalianSinglesConnection.com	Italian singles
LatinSinglesConnection.com	Latin singles
LDSSingle.com	Mormon singles
LDSSingles.com	Mormon singles
MilitarySinglesConnection.com	Military singles
SingleSeniorsMeet.com	Mature singles
SingleParentsMingle.com	Single parents
UKSinglesConnection.com	UK singles
Offline and Other Businesses	
HurryDate.com	Rapid dating and offline events
Matchnet.com	Free dating search engine

Web Site Features. We offer different ways for our members to communicate including:

On-Site Email. We provide all paying subscribers with private message centers. These personal on-site email boxes offer features such as customizable folders for storing correspondence, the ability to know when sent messages were read, as well as block and ignore functions, which allow a paying subscriber to control future messages from specific paying subscribers.

Hot Lists and Favorites. Hot Lists enable members to see who is interested in them and to save those favorite members in whom they are interested. Lists include (1) who has viewed your profile, (2) your favorites and (3) who has emailed you. Members can group their favorites into customized folders and add their own notes, including details included in a member's profile.

Message Boards. Message Boards enable paying subscribers to communicate in a group environment with suggested topics for discussion.

Real-Time Chat Rooms. Paying subscribers can use our exclusive chat rooms to mix and mingle in real-time, building a sense of community through group discussions. Additional features enable users to add customized graphics such as emoticons to their conversations.

Ice Breakers. Members can send pre-packaged opening remarks, referred to on the Web sites as flirts and teases, to other members or paying subscribers.

Click! Our patented *Click!* feature connects members who think they would be compatible with each other. A member clicks "yes," "no" or "maybe" in another member's profile. When two members click "yes" in each other's profiles, our patented feature sends an email to both of them alerting them of a possible match.

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Travel and Events. As a complement to our online services, we offer travel and other promotional events which allow individuals to meet in a more personal environment. Our travel and events are typically cruises, dinners, speed dating events or other mixers designed to facilitate social interaction.

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Business Strategy

We intend to grow revenue by driving additional traffic to our Web sites, increasing the number and percentage of our members who convert to paying subscribers, launching new or acquiring existing businesses, and implementing advertising sales on select Web sites.

Drive traffic. We believe there are opportunities to drive additional traffic to our Web sites through integrated and targeted marketing and cross-promotion into vertical affinity markets.

Integrated and targeted marketing. We believe targeting potential members with consistent and compelling marketing messages, delivered through a broad mix of marketing channels, will be effective in driving more traffic and a higher percentage of relationship-oriented singles to our Web sites. We intend to use a variety of channels to build our brands and increase our base of subscribers including online and offline advertising, customer relationship management tools, public relations, promotional alliances and special events.

Cross-promote. Our large base of members provides us with a significant amount of consumer data to evaluate cross-promotion opportunities for growth. We are able to analyze different groups of members by key metrics such as total potential subscribers and average revenue per paying subscriber and identify those targeted groups that may prefer a service dedicated to their particular affinity groups.

Increase Conversion Rates. We believe a growth opportunity lies in our ability to convert more of our members into paying subscribers. We plan to achieve this increase in conversion by focusing on:

Improved member communications. We believe enhanced member communications is a key component to growing our business. We continue to focus on improving and enhancing our Web site functionality and features to encourage communications between members. Most of these communications require members to become paying subscribers. We will also continue to inform members of new features and functions to increase the number of visitors to our Web sites who become paying subscribers.

Improved search. We believe the more successful members are in finding matches in our database, the more likely they are to want to communicate with those members. To initiate email and instant message communication or participate in the chat rooms or message boards, members must become paying subscribers. We intend to continue to enhance the quality and relevance of our search results to provide fast, relevant suggestions.

Leveraging strong customer service. Each time a member or a potential member contacts our customer service center by email or phone, he or she represents a potential new paying subscriber. By training our customer service representatives on upselling opportunities, we believe they will continue to be successful in selling our services.

Extend into new affinity-focused markets. We constantly evaluate new opportunities to identify potential new affinity-focused markets into which we may expand either organically or through acquisition. Our large member base provides us with significant consumer data to evaluate opportunities for growth into such new markets and identify those target groups that may prefer a service dedicated to their particular affinity group.

Implement ad sales. We believe there is an opportunity for additional revenue from the sale of advertising on our Web sites. We expect advertisers will continue to seek highly targeted environments such as ours to complement their brands and reach niche consumers. We intend to remain selective about our choices for advertising partners so as not to adversely affect the quality of our user experience. In addition, advertisers have expressed an interest in our ability to provide them with an offline presence at our various parties and events around the country.

Sales and Marketing

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We engage in a variety of marketing activities intended to drive consumer traffic to our Web sites and to allow us the opportunity to introduce our products and services to prospective members. Our marketing efforts are

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principally focused online, where we employ a combination of banner and other display advertising. We also rely on commercial search listings and direct email campaigns to attract potential members and paying subscribers, and use a network of online affiliates, through which we acquire traffic. None of these affiliates individually represents a material portion of our revenue. These affiliate arrangements are easily cancelable, often with only one day notice. Typically, we do not have exclusivity arrangements with our affiliates, and some of our affiliates may also be affiliates for our competitors.

We supplement our online marketing by employing a variety of offline marketing and business development activities. These include print, television, public relations, event sponsorship and promotional alliances. We believe a more targeted marketing message, delivered through an array of available marketing channels, will improve consumer awareness of our brands, drive more traffic to our Web sites and, therefore, increase the number of members and paying subscribers.

Customer Service

Our multi-lingual call centers and email support team monitor our sites for fraudulent activity, assist members with billing questions, help members complete personal profiles and answer technical questions. Customer service representatives receive ongoing training in an effort to better personalize the experience for members and paying subscribers who call or email us and to capitalize on upselling opportunities.

Technology

Throughout the year, projects, such as certain premium services, were successfully deployed using a mix of our proprietary technologies. In addition to our new products, our technology employees maintain our software and hardware infrastructure.

Our network infrastructure and operations are designed to deliver high levels of availability, performance, security and scalability in a cost-effective manner. We operate Web and database servers co-located at third party data center facilities in Los Angeles, California and Lindon, Utah.

Intellectual Property

We rely on a combination of patent, trademark, copyright and trade secret laws in the United States and other jurisdictions as well as confidentiality procedures and contractual provisions to protect our proprietary technology and our brands. We also enter into confidentiality and invention assignment agreements with our employees and consultants and confidentiality agreements with other third parties.

Spark Networks, Spark, JDate and BlackSingles.com are some of our trademarks, whether registered or not, in the United States and several other countries. Spark Networks, Spark, BlackSingles.com and JDate are registered trademarks in the United States. JDate is also a registered trademark in the EU, Australia, Israel and Canada. Spark Networks is a registered trademark in the United States and EU. Our rights to these registered trademarks are perpetual as long as we use them and renew them periodically. We also have a number of other registered and unregistered trademarks. We hold two United States patents for our *Click!* application, the first of which expires January 24, 2017, that pertain to an automated process for confidentially determining whether people feel mutual attraction or have mutual interests. *Click!* is important to our business in that it is a method and apparatus for detection of reciprocal interests or feelings and subsequent notification of such results. The patents describe the method and apparatus for the identification of a person's level of attraction and the subsequent notification when the feeling or attraction is mutual.

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Competition

We operate in a highly competitive environment with minimal barriers to entry. We believe the primary competitive factors in creating a community on the Internet are functionality, brand recognition, critical mass of members, member affinity and loyalty, ease-of-use, quality of service and reliability. We compete with a number of large and small companies, including vertically integrated Internet portals and specialty-focused media companies that provide online and offline products and services to the markets we serve. Our principal subscription-based online personals service competitors include Match.com (a wholly-owned subsidiary of InterActiveCorp) and eHarmony, both of which operate primarily in North America but have international operations as well. There are numerous other companies offering subscription-based online personals services, but the majority are smaller than us in terms of paying subscribers and annual revenue generation. In addition, we face competition from free online personals services and social networking Web sites such as OkCupid (also a wholly-owned subsidiary of InterActiveCorp), PlentyOfFish and Facebook.

Employees

As of December 31, 2010, we had 144 full-time equivalent employees. We are not subject to any collective bargaining agreements and we believe our relationship with our employees is good.

ITEM 1A. RISK FACTORS

You should carefully consider the risks described below together with all of the other information included in this report before making an investment decision. The risks described below are the material risks that we are currently aware of that are facing our company. In addition, other sections of this report may include additional factors that could adversely impact our business and operating results. If any of the following risks actually occurs, our business, financial condition or results of operations could be materially adversely affected. In that case, the trading price of our common stock would decline and you may lose all or part of your investment.

Risks Related to Our Business

Our growth rates may decline and our operating margins could deteriorate; our business may be adversely affected as a result of the economic downturn.

Our revenue has declined over the last few years. It is possible our operating margins will deteriorate if revenue growth does not exceed planned increases in expenditures for all aspects of our business in an increasingly competitive environment, including sales and marketing, general and administrative and technical operations expenses.

Our member and paying subscriber base is composed of individual consumers and in the event of a prolonged economic downturn in the United States or in our international markets in which spending by individual consumers drops significantly, our current and potential subscribers may be unable or unwilling to subscribe to our services and our business may be negatively affected. To the extent the overall economy continues to deteriorate, we may lose existing members and paying subscribers and fail to attract new members and paying subscribers. Average paying subscribers decreased 2.4% in 2010 compared to 2009. If our members and paying subscribers continue to decrease, then our revenue would decrease and our operations could be adversely affected.

We have significant operating losses and we may incur additional losses in the future.

Although we were profitable 2010, we have historically generated significant operating losses in some years. As of December 31, 2010, we had an accumulated deficit of approximately \$27.4 million. We had net income (loss) of approximately \$3.7, (\$6.4) and \$4.8 million for the years ended December 31, 2010, 2009 and 2008, respectively. If our revenue does not grow at a substantially faster rate than our operating expenses, or if our operating expenses are higher than we anticipate, or if our revenue continues to decline but our operating expenses increase, we may not be profitable and we may incur additional losses, which could be significant.

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Adverse capital and credit market conditions could limit our access to capital and increase our cost of capital, which may significantly affect our ability to meet liquidity needs.

The capital and credit markets have been experiencing extreme volatility and disruption for two to three years. In 2010, the volatility and disruption have reached unprecedented levels. In some cases, the markets have exerted downward pressure on availability of liquidity and credit capacity for certain issuers. Without sufficient liquidity, we may be forced to curtail certain operations and may be unable to operate our business as we deem appropriate. Disruptions, uncertainty or volatility in the capital and credit markets may also limit our access to capital required to operate our business. Such market conditions may limit our ability to replace, in a timely manner, maturing liabilities and access the capital necessary to operate and grow our business. As such, we may be forced to delay raising capital or bear an unattractive cost of capital which could decrease our profitability and significantly reduce our financial flexibility. Our results of operations, financial condition, cash flows and capital position could be materially adversely affected by disruptions in the financial markets.

If our efforts to attract a large number of members, convert members into paying subscribers and retain our paying subscribers are not successful, our revenue and operating results will suffer.

Our future growth depends on our ability to attract a large number of members, convert members into paying subscribers and retain our paying subscribers. This in turn depends on our ability to deliver a high-quality online personals experience to these members and paying subscribers. As a result, we must continue to invest significant resources in order to enhance our existing products and services and introduce new high-quality products and services that people will use. If we are unable to predict user preferences or industry changes, or if we are unable to modify our products and services on a timely basis, we may lose existing members and paying subscribers and may fail to attract new members and paying subscribers. Our revenue and expenses will also be adversely affected if our innovations are not responsive to the needs of our members and paying subscribers or are not brought to market in an effective or timely manner.

Our subscriber acquisition costs vary depending upon prevailing market conditions and may increase significantly in the future.

Costs for us to acquire paying subscribers are dependent, in part, upon our ability to purchase advertising at a reasonable cost. Our advertising costs vary over time, depending upon a number of factors, many of which are beyond our control. Historically, we have used online advertising as the primary means of marketing our services.

Despite an economic downturn, costs of online advertising may continue to increase. If we are not able to reduce our other operating costs, increase our paying subscriber base or increase revenue per paying subscriber to offset these increases, our profitability will be adversely affected.

In addition, our costs to acquire subscribers may increase if we raise prices on our Web sites as potential customers may be slower or more reluctant to purchase higher price services and Web site access.

We secured a \$25.0 million revolving credit facility, which could restrict our ability to use our operating cash flow for the growth of our business.

In February 2008, we entered into a credit agreement with Bank of America under which we had no outstanding borrowings as of December 31, 2010. If we are unable to pay our debts as they become due, we will be required to pursue one or more alternative strategies, such as refinancing or restructuring our indebtedness, selling additional debt or equity securities or selling assets. We may not be able to refinance our debt or issue additional debt or equity securities on favorable terms, if at all, and if we must sell our assets, it may negatively affect our ability to generate future revenue. If we are unable to meet our obligations as they become due or to comply with various financial covenants contained in the revolving credit facility, this could constitute an event of default.

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Our obligations under the credit facility are secured by a lien on substantially all of the assets of Spark Networks USA, LLC, which is the borrower under the credit facility, and by guarantees by Spark Networks, Inc. and a number of our subsidiaries. Any default under the credit facility, could result in an acceleration of payment of all outstanding debt owed at the time, which could materially and adversely affect our financial condition.

Our revolving credit facility has certain covenants that could restrict how we operate our business.

The terms of our revolving credit facility contain various provisions that limit our ability to, among other things:

incur or guarantee additional debt;

receive dividends or distributions from our subsidiaries;

make investments and other restricted payments;

make dividend payments or redeem equity securities;

grant liens;

transfer or sell assets;

engage in different lines of business; and

consolidate, merge or transfer all or substantially all of our assets.

These covenants may affect our ability to operate and finance our business as we deem appropriate. If we are unable to meet our obligations as they become due or to comply with various financial covenants contained in the revolving credit facility, this could constitute an event of default.

Competition presents an ongoing threat to the performance of our business.

We expect competition in the online personals business to continue to increase because there are no substantial barriers to entry. We believe our ability to compete depends upon many factors both within and beyond our control, including the following:

the size and diversity of our member and paying subscriber bases;

the timing and market acceptance of our products and services, including the developments and enhancements to those products and services relative to those offered by our competitors;

customer service and support efforts;

selling and marketing efforts; and

our brand strength in the marketplace relative to our competitors.

We compete with traditional personals services, as well as newspapers, magazines and other traditional media companies that provide personals services. We compete with a number of large and small companies, including Internet portals and specialty-focused media companies that provide online and offline products and services to the markets we serve. Our principal subscription-based online personals service competitors include Match.com (a wholly-owned subsidiary of InterActiveCorp) and eHarmony, both of which operate primarily in North America but have international operations as well. There are numerous other companies offering subscription-

based online personals services, but the majority are smaller than us in terms of paying subscribers and annual revenue generation. In addition, we face competition from free online personals services and social networking Web sites such as OkCupid (also a wholly-owned subsidiary of InterActiveCorp), PlentyOfFish and Facebook.

Many of our current and potential competitors have longer operating histories, significantly greater financial, technical, marketing and other resources and larger customer bases than we do. These factors may allow our competitors to respond more quickly than we can to new or emerging technologies and changes in customer requirements. These competitors may engage in more extensive research and development efforts, undertake more far-reaching marketing campaigns and adopt more aggressive pricing policies that may allow them to build larger member and paying subscriber bases than ours. Our competitors may develop products or services that are equal or superior to our products and services or that achieve greater market acceptance than our products and services. These activities could attract members and paying subscribers away from our Web sites and reduce our market share.

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In addition, current and potential competitors are making, and are expected to continue to make, strategic acquisitions or establishing cooperative and, in some cases, exclusive relationships with significant companies or competitors to expand their businesses or to offer more comprehensive products and services. To the extent these competitors or potential competitors establish exclusive relationships with major portals, search engines and Internet Service Providers, or ISPs, our ability to reach potential members through online advertising may be restricted. Any of these competitors could cause us difficulty in attracting and retaining members and converting members into paying subscribers and could jeopardize our existing affiliate program and relationships with portals, search engines, ISPs and other Web properties.

Our efforts to capitalize upon opportunities to expand into new vertical affinity markets may fail and could result in a loss of capital and other valuable resources.

We may decide to expand into new vertical affinity markets to increase our revenue base. If we expand into such vertical affinity markets, management's time and attention will be less focused on our existing businesses and will require us to invest significant capital resources. The results of any expansion efforts into new vertical affinity markets are unpredictable, and there is no guarantee that our efforts will have a positive effect on our revenue base. We face many risks associated with our planned expansion into new vertical affinity markets, including but not limited to the following:

competition from pre-existing competitors with significantly stronger brand recognition in the markets we enter;

our improper evaluation of the potential of such markets;

diversion of capital and other valuable resources away from our core business;

foregoing opportunities that are potentially more profitable; and

weakening our current brands by over expansion into too many new markets.

If we fail to keep pace with rapid technological change, our competitive position will suffer.

We operate in a market characterized by rapidly changing technologies, evolving industry standards, frequent new product and service announcements, enhancements and changing customer demands. Accordingly, our performance will depend on our ability to adapt to rapidly changing technologies and industry standards, and our ability to continually improve the speed, performance, features, ease of use and reliability of our services in response to both evolving demands of the marketplace and competitive service and product offerings. There have been occasions when we have not been as responsive as many of our competitors in adapting our services to changing industry standards and the needs of our members and paying subscribers. Our industry has been subject to constant innovation and competition. New features may be introduced by one competitor, and if they are perceived as attractive to users, they are often copied later by others. Over the last few years, such new feature introductions in the industry have included instant messaging, message boards, E-cards, personality profiles and mobile content delivery. Introducing new technologies into our systems involves numerous technical challenges, substantial amounts of capital and personnel resources and often takes many months to complete. We intend to continue to devote efforts and funds toward the development of additional technologies and services. For example, in 2010 and 2009 we introduced a number of new features, and we anticipate the introduction of additional features in 2011 and 2012. We may not be able to effectively integrate new technologies into our Web sites on a timely basis or at all, which may degrade the responsiveness and speed of our Web sites. Such technologies, even if integrated, may not function as expected.

Our business depends on establishing and maintaining strong brands and if we are not able to maintain and enhance our brands, we may be unable to expand or maintain our member and paying subscriber bases.

We believe that establishing and maintaining our brands is critical to our efforts to attract and expand our member and paying subscriber bases. We believe that the importance of brand recognition will continue to increase, given the growing number of Internet sites and the low barriers to entry for companies offering online

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personals services. To attract and retain members and paying subscribers, and to promote and maintain our brands in response to competitive pressures, we may have to substantially increase our financial commitment to creating and maintaining distinct brand loyalty among these groups. If visitors, members and paying subscribers to our Web sites and our affiliate and distribution associates do not perceive our existing services to be of high quality, or if we introduce new services or enter into new business ventures that are not favorably received by such parties, the value of our brands could be diluted, thereby decreasing the attractiveness of our Web sites to such parties. As a result, our results of operations may be adversely affected by decreased brand recognition.

If we are unable to attract, retain and motivate key personnel or hire qualified personnel, or such personnel do not work well together, our growth prospects and profitability will be harmed.

Our performance is largely dependent on the talents and efforts of highly skilled individuals. The loss of any of our management or key personnel could seriously harm our business.

We may also encounter difficulties in recruiting personnel as we become a more mature company in a competitive industry. Competition in our industry for personnel is intense, and we are aware that our competitors have directly targeted our employees. We do not have non-competition agreements with most employees and, even in cases where we do, these agreements are of limited enforceability in California. We also do not maintain any key-person life insurance policies on our executives. The incentives to attract, retain and motivate employees provided by our option grants or by future arrangements, such as cash bonuses, may not be as effective as they have been in the past. If we do not succeed in attracting necessary personnel or retaining and motivating existing personnel, we may be unable to grow effectively.

Our business depends on our server and network hardware and software and our ability to obtain network capacity; our current safeguard systems may be inadequate to prevent an interruption in the availability of our services.

The performance of our server and networking hardware and software infrastructure is critical to our business and reputation, to our ability to attract visitors and members to our Web sites, to convert them into paying subscribers and to retain paying subscribers. An unexpected and/or substantial increase in the use of our Web sites could strain the capacity of our systems, which could lead to a slower response time or system failures. Although we have not recently experienced many significant delays, any future slowdowns or system failures could adversely affect the speed and responsiveness of our Web sites and would diminish the experience for our visitors, members and paying subscribers. We face risks related to our ability to scale up to our expected customer levels while maintaining superior performance. If the usage of our Web sites substantially increases, we may need to purchase additional servers and networking equipment and services to maintain adequate data transmission speeds, the availability of which may be limited or the cost of which may be significant. Any system failure that causes an interruption in service or a decrease in the responsiveness of our Web sites could reduce traffic on our Web sites and, if sustained or repeated, could impair our reputation and the attractiveness of our brands as well as reduce revenue and negatively impact our operating results.

Furthermore, we rely on many different hardware systems and software applications, some of which have been developed internally. If these hardware systems or software applications fail, it would adversely affect our ability to provide our services. If we are unable to protect our data from loss or electronic or magnetic corruption, or if we receive a significant unexpected increase in usage and are not able to rapidly expand our transaction-processing systems and network infrastructure without any systems interruptions, it could seriously harm our business and reputation. We have experienced occasional systems interruptions in the past as a result of unexpected increases in usage, and we cannot assure you that we will not incur similar or more serious interruptions in the future. From time to time, our company and our Web sites have been subject to delays and interruptions due to software viruses, or variants thereof, such as internet worms.

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In addition, we do not have a high availability disaster recovery system, which means in the event of any catastrophic failure involving our Web sites, we may be unable to serve our Web traffic for a significant period of time. Our Web sites primarily operate from only a single site located in either Southern California or Utah. Any system failure, including network, software or hardware failure, that causes an interruption in the delivery of our Web sites and services or a decrease in responsiveness of our services would result in reduced visitor traffic, reduced revenue and would adversely affect our reputation and brands.

The failure to establish and maintain affiliate agreements and relationships could limit the growth of our business.

We have entered into, and expect to continue to enter into, arrangements with affiliates to increase our member and paying subscriber bases, bring traffic to our Web sites and enhance our brands. Pursuant to our arrangements, an affiliate generally advertises or promotes our Web site on its Web site, and earns a fee whenever visitors to its Web site click through the advertisement to one of our Web sites and register or subscribe on our Web site. These affiliate arrangements are easily cancelable, often with one day notice. We do not typically have any exclusivity arrangements with our affiliates, and some of our affiliates may also be affiliates for our competitors. None of these affiliates, individually, represents a material portion of our revenue. If any of our current affiliate agreements are terminated, we may not be able to replace the terminated agreement with an equally beneficial arrangement. We cannot assure you that we will be able to renew any of our current agreements when they terminate or, if we are able to do so, that such renewals will be available on acceptable terms. We also do not know whether we will be able to enter into additional agreements or that any relationships, if entered into, will be on terms favorable to us.

We rely on a number of third-party providers and their failure or unwillingness to continue to perform could harm us.

We rely on third parties to provide important services and technologies to us, including third parties that manage and monitor our offsite data centers located in Southern California and Utah, ISPs, search engine marketing providers and credit card processors. In addition, we license technologies from third parties to facilitate our ability to provide our services. Any failure on our part to comply with the terms of these licenses could result in the loss of our rights to continue using the licensed technology, and we could experience difficulties obtaining licenses for alternative technologies. Furthermore, any failure of these third parties to provide these and other services, or errors, failures, interruptions or delays associated with licensed technologies, could significantly harm our business. Any financial or other difficulties our providers face may have negative effects on our business, the nature and extent of which we cannot predict. Except to the extent of the terms of our contracts with such third party providers, we exercise little or no control over them, which increases our vulnerability to problems with the services and technologies they provide and license to us. In addition, if any fees charged by third-party providers were to substantially increase, such as if ISPs began charging us for emails sent by our paying subscribers to other members or paying subscribers, we could incur significant additional losses.

If we fail to develop or maintain an effective system of internal control over financial reporting, we may not be able to accurately report our financial results or prevent fraud. As a result, current and potential stockholders could lose confidence in our financial reporting, which would harm the value of our stock.