

Preface to the eBook

This eBook is a FREE edition of the original published book
The Art of Internet Dating by David L. Jones

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This eBook is exactly the same content as the original published edition.

The original published book is now out of print, so the author has decided to make this eBook available free of charge. This was done in order to help people by making the best Internet dating guide available to as wide an audience as possible.

The author did not make any financial profit by making this eBook available for free, so if you like this book and find it of value, a ***small donation*** would be very much appreciated.

Especially if you find the person of your dreams!

At the very least, email the author to tell him the book worked for you.

Donations can be made via the website:

www.artofinternetdating.com

and you can email and/or PayPal the author at:
david@alternatzone.com

Enjoy, and best of luck! - *David L. Jones*,
Jan 1st 2007



The
Art
of

Internet DATING

The Definitive Practical Guide

D. L. Jones

THE ART OF INTERNET DATING

**THE DEFINITIVE PRACTICAL GUIDE
TO INTERNET DATING**

BY DAVID L. JONES



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INTRODUCTION

Have you exhausted all the usual avenues for finding your soulmate?

Are you too busy to get out and meet people?

Tired of the club/pub meat-market scene?

Do you find it difficult to approach someone face to face?

Or do you simply find that you can't get a date?

Maybe you would just like to meet some new and interesting people or would like to make new friends locally and from around the world.

Or would you just like to try something new and exciting?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, or anything remotely like it, then Internet dating is definitely for you. In fact it's for everyone!

Internet dating is growing in popularity at an exponential rate, and rightly so. It's fast, efficient, completely safe, and is suitable for everyone and anyone no matter what your background, who, or what you are looking for.

Literally *millions* of people all over the world have been using the Internet to meet others for friendship and relationships since the mid 90s. Now it's more popular than ever as it becomes more widely publicised and accepted. It is no longer considered 'weird' to have met someone from the Internet, and is so common and socially acceptable that it barely raises an eyebrow in today's communication driven society.

Internet dating rewrites the rules for meeting people in today's society. It has become another method of meeting people, over and above the usual avenues of family, friends, work, school, and social

outlets among others.

In the past, Internet dating has usually been a hit and miss affair. Pioneers who simply made it up as they went along drove the first few years. But now, Internet dating has evolved into a whole new approach and a socially acceptable way to meeting people. Now with this book there is no longer any reason to stumble blindly through the world of Internet dating.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is the *definitive* practical guide to the Art of Internet Dating.

Just *why* there is a need for such a book I hear you ask?

Finding someone and getting a date via the Internet, let alone finding your soulmate, is nothing like you will have ever experienced before. Many aspects of communication and body language that you have grown up with and are used to are either no longer relevant in, or must be modified for an online world. You will quickly find that your regular pickup lines won't work, and there is no body language or eye contact to fall back on. On top of that, your charm, wit and humour are now viewed on an entirely new level.

If you jump into Internet dating blindly then you are putting yourself at the mercy of chance and 'the numbers game'. Most new Internet daters are either mauled by the more experienced competition, or become a victim of their own inexperience.

Whilst there are many similarities between Internet dating and meeting people through traditional social channels, the medium of the Internet puts everyone back onto an equal playing field. It is definitely an art in a whole new world with a different set of rules.

This book has been written by someone who's been Internet dating from the earliest days. Someone who has seen and played the Internet dating game from all perspectives, and made all the mistakes along the way so you don't have to.

You will learn all the ins and outs, the unwritten rules (until now), and the secret tips used by successful Internet daters. There is advice for males and females on how to place and respond to profiles, how

to get and organise dates, things to do, and more importantly the things *not* to do. Many important technicalities specific to online personals are also explained. Almost every conceivable aspect of Internet dating is discussed, dissected and analysed, to help you get the most out of it. There is something for everyone, from the Internet dating novice to the well-seasoned veteran.

Unlike other 'Internet dating' books, this one is purely a practical guide designed to increase your chances of meeting Mr or Ms Right. There are no stories or anecdotes about the author's Internet dating triumphs, you don't need to know any of that. Whilst these stories might make you feel all warm and fuzzy inside, they won't help you to find the love of your life or get a date, but good practical advice and insight most definitely will.

The focus will be on using the Internet to find a romantic interest, soulmate or date, be it casual or permanent. But it also has relevance for those looking for pen pals, friends, business contacts, activity partners, and those who just want to spend their life chatting to people around the world.

STEP BY STEP

There are an endless number of ways to approach Internet dating, but by and large there are some basic steps that are followed by most successful Internet daters. The chapters in this book follow this general pattern. The first eleven chapters give you an introduction and overview of the various means available and what you can expect. From then on it's step-by-step through the Internet dating process using the primary Internet dating tool – on-line personals.

THE BASICS

WHAT IS INTERNET DATING?

To put it simply, Internet dating is all about using the Internet as a means to find and make contact with someone. Be it a pen pal, friend, sporting partner, casual date, relationship or your soulmate. It's all possible, and there are a literally millions of people out there right now in every corner of the globe just willing and waiting.

You may have heard stories in the press about people meeting, falling in love and even getting married on the Internet in 'virtual weddings' without having met. That's the world of the uninformed misguided media; in reality things couldn't be more different.

So you aren't some computer geek, and you don't want to meet some computer geek right? "*Heck, I don't even own a computer*" I hear you saying. Well that's ok, you don't need to own a computer, and the vast majority of the people on the Internet today are 'normal' people, just like you. That wasn't how it was just a few very short years ago, but now the Internet has grown to be almost as ubiquitous as the telephone, and people from every facet of life are using the Internet.

The Internet is fast becoming one of the easiest, most popular, and surprisingly to most, one of the safest forms of meeting people. Read on and you'll find out why.

ASSUMPTIONS

This book is written assuming that you know at least what the Internet is and how to use it in a basic sense. For example, you should be conversant with using a web browser and email at a minimum. If you don't know anything about these things then there

are countless books and courses out there that will get you started. Once you have this basic understanding you are ready to tackle Internet dating.

Also, this book will not go into detail about how to use certain features of products mentioned, like ICQ, newsgroups, chat clients and so forth, as each one would need (and have) a book in their own right. But in most cases you will be directed to web pages to find out more about them. The focus will be on the techniques and the best way to make use of each product for the purposes of Internet dating.

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

To start meeting people on the Internet you need three basic things:

- 1) An Internet connection to the World Wide Web (www)
 - 2) Spare time
 - 3) This book for the best advice on how to go about it
- You already have #3, that's a great start.

#2 is up to you. The more time you have to spend on Internet dating, the greater the potential. This free time will not only include using the Internet itself, but making time available to actually meet your dates in real life, which of course is what it's all about.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON DO I NEED TO BE?

Anyone can succeed in the world of Internet dating, you don't have to be a certain kind of person, nor have any particular type of personality. You don't need to be a social recluse or have a degree in computer science. People using Internet dating are as diverse as can be imagined, so no one will be out of place.

TYPES OF INTERNET CONNECTION

There are 4 basic ways to get an Internet connection:

- At home with your own Internet connection
- An Internet connection at work
- A friend's Internet machine

- A public access Internet terminal such as in a library or Internet cafe.

By far the best thing to have is your own Internet connection at home. You will be able to take all the time you like in the privacy of your own home.

If you are going to use a machine at work to access the Internet then there are several things to watch out for. For starters, most companies have policies against using company computers for non-work related activities, and if you get caught it could mean losing your job. If, on the other hand, your company is happy for you to use it for such a purpose and they know about it, then you can expect to be hassled by everyone in the office wanting to know the outcome of every email and date that you have!

Using a friend's Internet machine is similar to using an office machine. If you can get away with using it without your friend looking over your shoulder, then great, otherwise they can tend to get very nosy. On the other hand, having a friend to encourage you and provide a bit of unbiased advice can be a great advantage. Why not both of you try Internet dating together and see who can get the most or best dates?

Public access terminals should be used as a last resort for three major reasons. You generally can't spend too much time on them, which limits what you can do. Secondly, you tend to get people looking over your shoulder, which can be a tad embarrassing. Third, they are relatively expensive. However, if this is all you have access to then that's ok, you can certainly make do.

IS INTERNET DATING SAFE?

YES!

It's that simple, Internet dating is as safe as you want it to be, you are in complete control. This cannot be stressed enough.

Most people out there are genuine and nice. In fact they are generally much nicer than someone you will meet in a pub or nightclub after they have had one too many to drink.

Most Internet dating 'horror stories' are along the lines of the

person they met was totally different to who they thought they would be, and they never contacted again. A waste of time, not a big deal. You get better horror stories about meeting people at the local bus stop.

The great thing about the Internet is that it allows you to pick and choose, and sort out most of the people who aren't suitable without ever coming face to face, giving your phone number, or even emailing. You get to decide who to contact, when, and how much information to give out, whether or not you meet, and where and when you meet. You can't possibly get any safer than that.

The Internet is for all intents and purposes anonymous until you decide that you want to take it further. So come on, don't be afraid, be cautious if you like, but get out there and give it try, you will be pleasantly surprised.

IS IT EASY TO MEET THE PERSON OF YOUR DREAMS?

Unfortunately not, just like in real life. In most cases it comes down to perseverance and luck. The Internet, however, does give you the benefit of a huge group of potential single people to choose from and few of the usual social barriers, so your chances of meeting the right person are greatly improved.

Sure there are many people who have fallen in love with and married the first person that they have met via the Internet, so it does happen for some people, but almost certainly will prove a bit harder for the majority of people. Just as in real life, you meet various people, have fun, and have the odd heartbreak along the way before (hopefully) meeting your soulmate. In fact, technically the Internet vastly improves your chances of meeting and falling in love with the first person you meet; such is the power of the information available to you via the Internet. There are no guarantees, except for one; if you don't give it a try you won't succeed.

For the more introverted people out there, the Internet is a godsend. It's not uncommon to date ten times as many people from

the Internet as you have met in normal social settings, and turn down even more than that.

WHAT TYPE OF PEOPLE WILL I MEET?

One of the great aspects of the Internet is the seemingly limitless variety of people you can meet. Anyone from the boy/girl next-door type, Elvis fanatics, astronauts, fellow stamps collectors or worm farmers, and it's not unheard of to find the occasional supermodel or celebrity. This is generally in stark contrast to the normal club/pub/social circle routine in which you will mostly meet the same kind of people from the same social set again and again.

Although the world of Internet users is almost infinite in scope, when it comes to Internet dating here are few 'personality types' you might encounter. By no means take this list seriously; it's just a light-hearted look at some generalisations.

THE AVERAGE INTERNET DATER

Just your average person, with an average job, a normal social circle and a well-adjusted lifestyle genuinely looking for Mr/Ms Right. The vast majority of people on the Internet personals scene fall under this category. Maybe they are just like you?

THE SERIAL DATERS

These people just need to have someone to go out with every night of the week. Most of them are just out for fun and like meeting people to the extreme.

THE SWINGERS

These people are after a good time plain and simple, and they usually won't be shy about it in their profile. Casual affair, fling, call it what you will; if this is what you are looking for then you'll find no shortage of takers on the Internet. You will be able to spot them a mile away, they won't be afraid to tell you what they want.

THE CHAT FREAKS

These people live their lives in a virtual world; they spend their entire day and night in chat rooms, and will generally only meet in real life at chat room social functions, often organised by them. The world of Internet chat rooms is their domain; enter at your own risk. They generally ignore newbies anyway.

THE CONTACT COLLECTORS

These types of people never want to meet; they just want to have as many people on their email list as possible. A lot of times they won't even return email, they will just add you to their list. Can usually be spotted by the phrase, "I like making new email buddies," in their profile.

THE CYBERERS

Are just after cyber sex. You will find them lurking in seedy chat rooms, and they'll usually send you a chat request saying, "*wanna cyber?*" or, "*what are you wearing?*" Each to their own. Entertain them or just plain ignore them, it's your choice.

THE FAKERS

Are not who they appear to be. They use a fake name, fake photo, lie on their profiles, and just enjoy being someone else. These people are a hindrance to serious Internet daters. Luckily they can be spotted, and very rarely agree to meet in real life.

THE WINDOW SHOPPERS

People who place a profile 'just for the fun of it'. They like seeing who will reply, but have no real intention of ever meeting or taking it further. These can include people who are 'just curious', and want to check out what it's all about before getting serious.

INHIBITIONS GO OUT THE WINDOW

You will quickly learn that on the Internet people are much more open and willing to reveal almost anything. The feeling of being behind a computer screen tricks your subconscious into revealing

much more than you would under normal circumstances. This is most often the case within chat rooms when people are thinking and typing in real time. They really let their hair down and give little thought to what they are actually revealing.

This can have its benefits and it's pitfalls. It's great for you in that you can potentially find out a lot of additional information about people, which can help decide if they are the one for you. On the other hand you can accidentally reveal personal information about yourself that you may never have intended to. It can happen to anyone, beware.

Use this to your advantage to find out as much as possible about the person you are talking to. You can never have too much information when you are looking for Mr/Ms Right.

CREDIT CARD SECURITY

Serious Internet dating will often require a credit card and a willingness to use it online. Many people will be naturally scared at such a prospect, but in reality this is completely unfounded. Quite simply, credit cards are safer than cash.

Virtually all websites that accept credit cards online are securely encrypted and run by large reputable businesses, and the chance of your credit card number being stolen is almost non-existent. However, even if your credit card number *is* stolen (a very remote possibility), you have little to worry about. You are usually *not* liable for any costs incurred if it is stolen. The merchant (the company supplying the goods or services) is usually responsible for all debts incurred with stolen credit cards. This is why you hear that 'Credit Card fraud is costing the industry millions per year'. The key word there is that the 'industry' loses, you the consumer do not lose a cent, except maybe for an increased cost in goods due to factors like credit card fraud.

All you have to do is check your statement each month and report any transactions that you know you did not make. Note, however, that your credit card will most likely be cancelled and you will be issued with a new number, so it is an inconvenience at worst.

If you have any doubts concerning credit card security, contact your credit card supplier. Many people (myself included) have a separate credit card that they use specifically for use online. It can be used to pay for your Internet service provider, Internet dating costs, and online shopping. This way if your credit card number is stolen then it is only your online activities that are inconvenienced and not your regular credit card bills and day-to-day lifestyle. A separate card also makes it easier to track what you have spent.

If you are willing to pay for Internet dating then you will have more success.

MISCONCEPTIONS

Misconceptions about Internet dating abound due to the media, early social stigma, and incorrect assumptions from people who know nothing about Internet dating.

By and large, most of these misconceptions are all but buried, and Internet dating is pretty much accepted in today's modern society. In fact, it is now at a point where it is relatively uncommon *not* to know someone who has had some experience with Internet dating, or has already met their partner via the Internet.

THE MALE/FEMALE RATIO

It was only a few years ago when the Male/Female ratio on some Internet dating sites was 90% or more in favour of males. Males had to fight tooth and nail for the few females brave enough to enter. It was not uncommon for a female to receive hundreds of emails on the very first day that she placed her profile, or to be swamped by chat requests as soon as entering a room.

I'm glad to report that things are now totally different, and the Male/Female ratio is closer to 50/50 on most large sites. In fact, on some sites the women complain that there aren't *enough* decent guys. But, as with real life, guys are generally always on the back foot and have to work much harder to get a date. Girls have it much easier than guys when it comes to just getting a date, but quality dates are an each-way bet.

TECHNIQUES OF SUCCESSFUL INTERNET DATERS

Successful Internet daters love competition online, and actually use the unsuccessful and inexperienced people to their advantage.

How do they do this?

For starters, they have their technique down pat, and it makes them look really attractive. In contrast, inexperienced people can appear unattractive, which in turn makes the successful people look and sound even better than they really are!

There are a few rules to being successful at Internet dating:

- Don't do, say or show anything that makes you look generally unattractive or stupid.
- Know who and what you are looking for, and don't be afraid to say it.
- Be persistent, and play the numbers game.
- Stand out from the competition

Sounds easy and obvious, but this whole book is about getting it right. The detail that can go into getting it right will amaze you.

GETTING TO KNOW SOMEONE THE VIRTUAL WAY

Is it actually possible to get to know someone well via the various means available on the Internet without actually meeting in real life?

Unfortunately the answer is that it's extremely difficult. The human mind has an amazing ability to be able to assume and imagine things. Your imagination, expectations, and subconscious tend to take over when you are presented with the scant amount of information often found via the Internet. It is so easy to make false assumptions about someone, and one of the biggest lessons you could learn about Internet dating is not to assume anything.

No doubt you will find a profile or meet someone in a chat room that you will think is just perfect, and the person you have been waiting your whole life for. Trust me, it happens to every Internet dater given enough time. Whatever you do you have to resist the temptation to think you have met the person of your dreams. Be enthusiastic and hopeful for sure, but try not to jump to such huge conclusions based on what is essentially very little information.

Through experience you will learn that people usually turn out quite differently in real life to the image you had built up of them via the Internet. This is one of the most common outcomes of meeting someone through the Internet, and really with hindsight it is quite obvious why this is so.

If you have ever had a regular 'blind date', you will most likely have already experienced this. The friend who set you up tells you something about the person, but when you finally meet they end up not being as they had been described. The differences with

Internet dating are that you often get to know more details about the person beforehand from their profile and other information. You can also chat and exchange emails for many months before deciding to meet them.

Stay clear of 'virtual relationships' (getting to know and fall in love with someone without meeting), they rarely, if ever work. Getting to know someone requires interaction in the real world face to face, there is no substitute for it. The Internet is a very poor and often misleading alternative.

This, of course, does not mean you *cannot* get to know and fall in love with someone via the Internet, it's just that it's extremely difficult and statistically not very successful. For the vast majority of people it will not work.

The best advice you can have is to use the Internet as a means of making initial contact, and getting to know someone a little bit, with the ultimate aim of meeting in real life as soon as possible.

CAN YOU FALL IN LOVE WITH SOMEONE YOU HAVE NOT MET YET?

If you believe some of the stories in the press – YES, but the real answer is sadly a big NO. If you have not met them in real life, then you have not fallen in love with them, but the *image* of them you have build up in your mind. It may feel like you have, but in reality you are deceiving yourself. Not that there is anything really wrong with this, but you may be setting yourself up for a great deal of disappointment when you do meet. Be careful not to get too attached to someone until you meet him or her in person.

EMAIL

Emailing is not surprisingly the most popular method of communicating. Everyone has it; you can respond in your free time, at home, from work, on a holiday, anywhere you have access to the Internet.

Constant emails back and forth can often be a convenient way to get to know someone, and it is also the most popular as it's usually

the first point of contact. There are, however, some points to keep in mind when using email to get to know someone:

- Some people are much better at expressing themselves in the written word, than in real life and real time.
- Also, not all people are good at communicating and expressing themselves via email. In fact, for many it is a new experience and not part of their day-to-day life.
- The other person may expect you to be good at communicating via email and you run the risk of appearing ‘dumb’ or disinterested through no real fault of your own.
- Many people get a lot of email, and it’s easy, and often convenient to ‘forget’ to reply. If you work in a modern office environment where email is the main form of communication, you will no doubt be very familiar with this.

CHAT ROOMS

The Internet provides many ways to ‘chat’ to someone in real time. Be it as text messages typed in, a voice chat that is exactly like a telephone call, or full video conferencing with video and sound.

Chatting is a great way to get to know someone in a short amount of time, it’s much more efficient than email.

But it can have its drawbacks in that you typically don’t think too much about what you are saying, and you can accidentally reveal things that you didn’t intend to. On the other hand this can also be an advantage to you.

Chatting complements email very well, and most Internet daters will use both.

SMS MESSAGING

In today’s society, the ever-present mobile phone provides instant communication with anyone, anywhere at any time. This communication is not limited to voice, but can include text data as well. Just like email, you can send and receive electronic SMS messages on your mobile phone. You can even send them from an Internet connection, which is why it’s mentioned in this book; it’s

another form of electronic communication using Internet technology.

This move towards a wireless world is a largely untapped resource that you can take advantage of to get to know someone. You can arrange dates, send directions, and a whole lot more.

If you have someone's mobile phone number and you are a bit nervous about calling them, then why not send them an SMS message. It's a great way to break the ice, and it lets the other person know that you are thinking about them.

Everyone loves getting an SMS message. It's convenient, efficient, and relatively cheap so definitely give it a go.

THE NUMBERS GAME

Internet dating is without a doubt a numbers game, statistics, call it what you will, but that's what it comes down to.

To put it simply, you have X number of people of the right gender, Y number of those people who match what you are looking for, and Z number of those people who are after someone like you. Depending upon who you are and what you are looking for, the number of Z people could vary from thousands down to just a few.

From my experiences I am convinced that there is a Z person – a soulmate out there for everyone on the Internet dating scene. The numbers are just so insanely large that it would take the most pessimistic person in existence to believe anything else.

The art of Internet dating is to find those Z people, get in contact with them, and *convince them* that you could be their Z person.

I highlighted *convince* them because one of the hardest and often the most frustrating parts of Internet dating is trying to convince someone else that you are worthy of being given a try. Obviously you can't know what the other person wants, but you can sometimes get a reasonably good idea. If that person just can't see it because you forgot to capitalize the 'I's' in your email or they didn't like the colour of your hair in your photo or something equally as picky, it can be rather disheartening.

But fear not, for the major goal of this book is to teach you all the tricks of the Internet dating game and vastly improve your chances of meeting your one in a million.

What you need to do is *not* make any mistakes, get things right the first time, and it will only be a matter of time before your number

comes up and you meet your Mr/Ms Z

On the other hand, it's so easy to make mistakes and miss all your opportunities. Seeing as that there are only so many Z people out there, the last thing you want to be doing is missing an opportunity.

What are you waiting for? Your Z person could be logged on right now...

WHAT TO EXPECT

It's easy to talk about all the wonderful things that Internet dating can do for you, and it all sounds very easy right?

It can be easy, but a lot of you are no doubt sceptical and may be wondering what it's *really* like in the world of Internet dating. What can you typically expect, the good things, the bad things, what are the worst-case scenarios?

Well they are good questions, and I most certainly wouldn't have to been able to write this book, nor had the intention to write it if I hadn't have experienced the sometimes brutal reality of what Internet dating is like for the inexperienced, and the experienced for that matter.

Lets take a look at what the average Internet dater can expect. Obviously some, all, or even none of these may happen to you. They are merely to give you an idea of what a typical Internet dater who meets a lot of people can expect given sufficient time. Just like meeting people in normal social situations, many of these problems will be familiar, but there are a few that are specific to Internet dating given the medium it works under.

Internet dating really is little different to meeting people in real life, you can meet some good people, and you can meet some bad people. Internet dating just lets you do all of this with the utmost of efficiency.

THE GOOD

So what *benefits* can you expect from Internet dating?

MEETING NEW AND INTERESTING PEOPLE

First and foremost you can expect to meet a *lot* of people. If you play the game right your email box can be inundated and you won't know who to meet first. If you love meeting new and interesting people then Internet dating is without a doubt the place you should be.

MORE FREE TIME

Because Internet dating is so efficient when it comes to finding people, you won't have to spend countless late nights at clubs and parties in pursuit of your ideal partner, or just a good time. You can search for and get to know people when it suits you.

IT'S SAFE

Contrary to popular misguided assumptions, Internet dating is safer than your usual club/pub environment. Many of you will no doubt have experienced people who just keep hassling you at those venues, and they can be difficult to get rid of at times. If the same things happen to you on the Internet you can just hit the Delete button and your problems are gone. You get to choose who, when, where and how you will meet.

MEETING YOUR PERFECT MATCH

If you stick with Internet dating, sooner or later you are going to meet the person you are looking for. The sheer number of people on-line and the odds almost guarantee it. That is if you play the game right.

IT'S FUN

Internet dating really is a lot of fun. It's a refreshingly new and exciting way of meeting people, and you will almost certainly get caught up in the fun and excitement of it all.

THE BAD

As with all things, you take the good with the bad...

WINDOW SHOPPERS

Many people on the Internet dating scene are simply 'window shopping'. They might place a profile, respond to your profile, or chat you up. But they are really just doing it to see what it's like and to have a bit of fun; they aren't interested in meeting you. They can waste a lot of your time leading you on. The same as your typical flirter at a party.

ENDLESS DATES

One of the biggest disappointments can come in the form of date after date after date after date without ever meeting anyone close to who you are looking for. You might start to wonder why it's so hard to meet someone compatible.

This comes about because most people form an opinion about you before you meet, which often turns out to be wrong, so they end the date somewhat disillusioned. Add in the fact that it's so easy to get another date via the Internet, and you get the unfortunate situation where either one or both parties don't hit it off for what are usually trivial reasons, and the rest is history.

There are some people who do hit it off with the very first person they meet, but they are the vast minority. On average the typical Internet Dater might go through dozens of dates before having met the right one, but it can be a fun ride, and can, in fact, be one of the most enjoyable aspects of Internet dating. So don't let it get you frustrated, get back out there and have some fun!

This is really no different to real life where you meet someone at a club, pub or party; it's just that the efficiency of the Internet means that you can have a different date every night of the week if you so desire. A definite benefit if your dating life was non-existent before.

GETTING STOOD UP

Yes it does happen, not very often mind you, but something to be aware of. Most Internet dates are effectively 'blind dates' and many

people, especially first timers get very nervous at the prospect.

Occasionally you might get stood up for whatever reason. Don't take it personally, get back online and get yourself another date.

THE VANISHING PERFECT DATE

Many an Internet dater will be able to tell you a story of how they met this fantastic person who sounded like a dream come true. They emailed every day, were getting along fantastically and were about to arrange a date when all of a sudden they vanish off the face of the earth and were never heard from again.

This is unfortunately very common, and you have to experience it yourself to realise that it is actually possible. But it does happen and it can be a real disappointment. This is even more common with people you meet and correspond with through chat rooms and ICQ.

Some possible explanations are that people can lose their email accounts, computers can crash and contact details get lost, they can meet someone else, or their circumstances change and they have moved on to greener pastures. Perhaps they were just window-shopping?

The Internet can be a fragile communications medium. Try and get as many contact details as possible (phone, address, multiple emails, etc.) to reduce your risk of becoming another victim of 'the vanishing perfect date' syndrome.

CAN I PENCIL YOU IN FOR NEXT MONTH?

You've met this great person, they like you and you like them, so you ask them out on a date – only to be confronted with, "Sorry, but I'm busy for the next few weeks, can we make it sometime next month?"

You probe a little more and ask if a quick coffee after work would be ok, but they will most likely have an excuse for every waking hour of the day. They just don't seem to want to make an effort to meet you. "How hard could it be to meet up for coffee," you think?

This scenario is surprisingly common, and it usually means that

the other person isn't really excited at the idea of meeting you, even if they sound excited. Sending emails is one thing, but when it comes to actually meeting someone they just aren't quite sure. Lets face it, if the other person is seriously looking for Mr/Ms Right then they are going to make an effort to meet you, regardless of how busy their life is. Very few people will have a genuine excuse for not being able to meet you for 30 min.

There is nothing you can do but hold them to any promises they make and keep the correspondence going.

IT'S DIFFERENT FOR GIRLS

Internet dating basically has one set of rules for girls and another set for guys. Or more precisely, it could be described as one set of odds for girls and another set for guys.

Girls can (but not always) have it pretty easy when it comes to getting a date on the Internet. You are almost guaranteed a date every night of the week if you want it, and you can expect almost a 100% reply rate to your emails. You can do the most extensive and nit picking profile search that you like and still end up with dozens of profiles *with* photos.

Want a guy over 6' with blue eyes, blonde hair, doesn't smoke, social drinker, and degree educated with an athletic body? – no problem, a search will reveal probably a dozen profiles and a date by this Friday night, and that's just on one singles site.

Guys on the other hand can have it tough. Want to find that same stringent criteria in a girl? Good luck, you are going to need it, and then even more luck to get a reply. You will usually have to settle for less strict criteria and no photo or body type description.

That's not to say it's guaranteed for girls and impossible for guys. On the contrary, some guys get more dates than some girls and vice versa; it's how you approach it, how you present yourself and how you play the whole game. That's the aim of this book, helping you to get the best possible odds.

THE UGLY

After the bad, comes the inevitable ugly. *Shhh* – most people don't like to talk about it...

THE BODY TYPE ILLUSION

Almost every Internet dater will quickly learn that the Internet is a great way to hide and/or exaggerate ones looks. For example, not too many people are going to admit to being overweight when they can simply tick a box on a profile that says 'Average'.

Body type would have to be one of the most popular things that people will lie or stretch the truth about. The same can be said about both guys and girls. For example, a guy might sound really great with an 'athletic' physique, only for you to be confronted with the reality of a 6-pack beer gut and slouching shoulders.

The rule is to never take anyone's word for it, keep an open mind, and don't try and build up a mental image of them. In reality nine out of ten times someone won't look like the person they described themselves as. It's not that people intentionally lie; most don't, it's just that they have an image of themselves, and you have a mental image of them that you have build up from the scant information available. Combine these two factors and you have the potential for big disappointment on both sides. Take every physical description with a proverbial grain of salt.

Don't read too much into photos either, they can be very deceptive.

HARASSMENT

While there is no doubt that harassment can happen, it is quite rare, even more so than in real life. So at the very worst you are no more likely to be harassed by someone you meet on the Internet than someone you meet through normal social channels. Even less so because of all the benefits of anonymity that the Internet can offer.

Someone harasses you via email or ICQ? No big deal, just add them to your 'ignore list' or at worst get new accounts and your problem is gone.

If you are concerned about this then choose to only give your phone number and address details to people that you trust.

THE COMPLETE LOSER

Yes you will meet complete losers; it's pure statistics, sooner or later you are bound to meet one. No different to real life where you are lucky if you haven't had some complete loser try and chat you up.

Sure you screened their profile and chatted to them for a while, yet they still turned out to be the biggest loser of all time, why?

Chin up, it's not your fault, it's just that the Internet can hide the real person; you have to meet someone face to face to find out what they are really like.

NO MORE FREE TIME

Internet dating, chatting online, and having email correspondence can be very time consuming

You'll be surprised at how much time it takes to respond to all your email, how tiring it can be having 5 dates in one week, and how long you will end up spending in the chat rooms. These can all be good or bad points of course, but you'll find that you will definitely have less free time than you did before if you get hooked.

IS IT LIKE THE MOVIES?

Internet dating has been popularised by the immensely successful Hollywood movie, 'You've Got Mail', starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan.

How close is this movie to the reality of Internet dating? Surprisingly close in some ways in fact. In the way that the characters are drawn into and become addicted to chatting to each other. Sneaking around, and not being able to wait to check their email. Internet dating is certainly exciting and terribly *addictive* – you have been warned!

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

The Internet is the ideal place to meet people with similar interests or views that can often be difficult to meet in normal social settings. If you have trouble meeting people with similar interests then the Internet can be a great way, if not *the* best way to meet like-minded people. Anonymously if you choose.

GAY AND LESBIAN

Most good personals sites will have the option to search for Gay and Lesbian people. When you fill out your profile you will be typically asked for your sex and the sex of the person you are looking for. These will then match up when people do a search. For instance, when you do a search you might select 'Guy looking for Guy'. Be very careful to ensure that you are searching for other Gay or Lesbian people, and not heterosexual as the majority of people will be. Most people will state their sexual orientation on their profile somewhere, so ensure that you check for this before emailing. Be sure to state it on your profile as well, you don't want the wrong people responding to your profile, it just wastes everyone's time and their money.

There are sites that do cater specifically for Gay and Lesbian people. These are probably a better option if this is what you are specifically looking for. But bear in mind that they are not as well known, and hence, you are limiting the number of people you can potentially meet by only using these dedicated services.

There are also many dedicated Gay and Lesbian chat rooms around the Internet. Random ICQ chat also has this feature.

BI-SEXUAL

Not many sites cater for bi-sexuals all that well, either in profile or search options. You might have to read the body of the profile to find out. If you are looking for a bi-sexual partner, then stating this in your profile header can help the right people find you.

SWINGERS

If swinging is your thing, then not too many sites cater for it as a category. Once again, you might have to dig deep into profiles to find them. Be up front in who and what you are looking for and you will get genuine responses. There are sites devoted to swingers, so it's best to try and seek these out.

RELIGION

While almost every personals site will have an option where you can put and search for a religion, you will most likely find that the majority of people are not overly religious. So don't assume that because someone selects 'Christian' that they are a devout Christian, or have even been to church for that matter. The religious setting in profiles is just like any other setting such as body type, don't read too much into it. Take it as a vague guide only.

If your religion is very strict and it's very important to you to find someone with the same beliefs, then there are a few personals sites and chat rooms dedicated to certain religions. These sites are more likely to give you genuine responses. You might have to search around a bit to find these sites, but it will be worthwhile.

HIV

Once again, the Internet is the place to meet almost anyone. Some sites even cater for people who are HIV positive, with specific profile options you can tick to specify that you are HIV and/or searching for someone with HIV. This can be an invaluable resource if it's what you are looking for.

DISABLED

Disabled people were not traditionally catered for on most sites. But the tide is turning, and there are now sites devoted to meeting disabled people, and some regular personals sites cater for this as well.

As you can see, there are no shortage of sites and services available for almost anyone, and this is by no means a comprehensive list. The Internet is *the* place to be to meet similar people.

STAYING ANONYMOUS

One of the greatest benefits of Internet dating, and a key reason to why it is so easy and successful, is that it can be completely and utterly anonymous. Right up until such time as you decide to meet someone face to face. Quite simply Internet dating is one of the safest forms of meeting people today.

So how do you stay anonymous on the Internet? Well it's quite easy as long as you follow a few basic rules, no one will ever know who you are or where to find you until *you* decide to tell them.

ANONYMOUS EMAIL ADDRESSES

The most basic requirement is to get yourself an anonymous email address from one of the thousands of web based email providers on the Internet. Hotmail (***www.hotmail.com***) and Yahoo! Mail (***mail.yahoo.com***) are by far the two biggest and most popular, and are the only ones recommended in this book. As you will see later, these two have extra benefits that will give you an added edge in communicating. Only use other free email services if you have some compelling reason to do so.

If you are using your own Internet connection then you will most likely have your own email address provided by the service provider. You should avoid using this address if you want to stay completely anonymous.

Even if you don't want to remain anonymous, there are a few good reasons to get a new email address specifically for Internet dating:

- You can choose to be completely anonymous at a later stage.

- It keeps all your personal emails and your Internet dating emails separate.
- If you get harassed, bombarded with endless spam mail, or just get sick of the whole thing you can simply shut down or ignore the account. You will never be bothered again.

SETTING UP AN EMAIL ACCOUNT

To get an anonymous address you will need to register with the email provider and choose a username. But with tens of millions of users, every imaginable common name will already be taken, so you will be forced to choose something very unique. Don't be at all surprised if your name spelled backwards is already taken.

Obviously if you want to stay anonymous then don't choose a username that gives away any part of your real name, like *johnsmith@hotmail.com*

To register for your free anonymous email address just go to either site mentioned above, choose the new user register option and follow the instructions. Couldn't be easier.

Be *very* careful to follow the online instructions, they will inform you how to fill out the various forms as to provide total anonymity. The golden rule being that you should *never* reveal your real name, even if the form mentions it is safe to do so. So be adventurous and make up a name, you can be anyone you ever wanted to be!

Once you have an anonymous email address then you are ready to enter the world of Internet dating, be it a chat room, personals site, messenger service, newsgroup or whatever. When registering for any of these services be sure to use your new anonymous email address. Make sure you document and remember your username and password.

The only way someone will find out your name and other details from now on is if you tell them.

DISADVANTAGES OF STAYING ANONYMOUS

Yes there are disadvantages to staying anonymous, so it's in your best interests to weigh up the pros and cons. Generally it's ok for

girls to remain anonymous, but for guys it's a big decision that could seriously decrease your chances.

The major disadvantage is that it looks like you have something to hide. Not everyone you meet will understand if you don't want to tell them your real first name or give them a phone number. You may of course have a genuine reason for hiding your identity, but trying to explain that to someone who has never met you is not going to be easy.

Even the simple act of having a Hotmail or Yahoo! address is enough to raise the suspicions of some people. Obviously they have no idea of the benefits, but that's how they think. Generally you won't be at any disadvantage by using an anonymous address as long as you appear genuine and don't try to hide anything.

PLAYING IT SAFE

For those that wish to play it completely safe and stay anonymous right up until the time that you meet, here are some tips:

- Always use an anonymous email service
- Never use any part of your real name when setting up your email account.
- Don't 'sign' messages with your real name. Your first name might be ok if you want to use it. Many people prefer to use their 'handle'.
- If you have public information about you on the Internet, like a web page for instance, then ensure that you don't give away any information that will allow others to search and find it. Some people are very good at searching for and digging up information like this.
- Don't give out your phone number, and only arrange your dates via email or an online chat.
- Be careful using messaging programs like ICQ, they can leave information trails about you if you don't set them up correctly.

DOCUMENTATION

WHY DOCUMENTATION IS IMPORTANT

If you follow the advice in this book and are taking every advantage of Internet dating possible, then you should be well and truly snowed under with email, profiles, accounts, dates, names, numbers and information. Unless you are an information sponge and have a photographic memory, you won't be able to keep up with this deluge of information. This means you risk losing opportunities and dates. This is most often learned the hard way, but it doesn't have to be.

“How hard can it be?” I hear you ask.

Picture this: How do you think you would go trying to keep up with five blind dates in a week. Remember all their details, the dozens of emails you have sent to each one with dozens of personal details, the chats, phone calls, etc, and then do this week in and week out. Odds are you won't even be able to remember all their names, let alone the other details. Very few people can keep up with all this information, don't underestimate how hard it is.

This sort of scenario is very common, such is the potential power of Internet dating. It can be like starting a new job every week where you have to get to know everyone's name and position, only harder. We all know what that's like.

DOCUMENTATION TIPS

Here are some practical documentation tips to keep the serious Internet dater ahead of the game.

- Make a printout of every profile that you respond to, otherwise

you will forget who they are when they email back a week later. By which time they could have removed or changed their profile.

- Make a note of the email address of every person you respond to. Writing it on the profile printout is a convenient way.
- When sending a 'message' to someone via an Internet dating site (instead of direct by email), makes sure that you put their username in there somewhere. That way you will be able to track who they are when they reply (from the original message text, if any), as the email address will be unfamiliar to you.
- Save a copy of their picture locally, it might come in handy later.
- Make a printout of, or at least store in a separate email folder, every email that you send and receive to each person. This way you can quickly read up on the email history of that person just before your meet.
- By all means make a complete 'Dossier' on each and every person. It might seem like a lot of effort, but it may come in extremely handy. People are impressed when you remember every little detail about them.
- Save all your chat text. People are more willing to give out information in a chat room, and it's to your benefit to keep it, you won't be able to remember it all. Most chat programs like ICQ will have an option to save your entire chat session as a text file. Keep these text files stored in a unique directory for easy retrieval, or print them out
- Keep a hard copy of every profile you create of yourself.
- Keep a written track of your profile name (handle), user name, and password for every site that you are member of. A serious Internet dater will be a member of several sites and/or have more than one profile. I *still* get email from sites I don't even remember joining many years ago.
- Once you get someone's phone number and address, write it on their profile printout. You never know when you might lose your 'little black email book'.
- Keep notes of how the date went as soon as you get home. Odds are you won't remember much about them after a few other blind dates.

Yes it does seem like a lot of work, but serious Internet dating is not easy work. It requires planning, perseverance, and luck. Good documentation will benefit you eventually and you'll be glad you did it.

Don't make the mistake of thinking, "I'll start documenting when it gets out of hand." It's the lack of documentation that makes it get out of hand in the first place. Get into the habit from the very start.

METHODS OF MEETING

There are five major methods of meeting people via the Internet, each one has its own advantages, disadvantages and relevance depending on who and what you are looking for. The smart and serious Internet dater will typically use most or all methods in order to cover as many bases as possible.

How they rate: *The five major methods of Internet meeting and their effectiveness.*

	Chat Rooms	Personals	ICQ	Social Events	Alternative
Finding a date	*	***	*	**	*
Number of potential single people	*	***	**	**	*
Ease of contact	**	***	**	**	*
Making cyber friends	***	***	**	*	*
Meeting people who aren't looking (the sneak method)	***		***	*	**

* = Poor, ** = Good, *** = Best

CHAT ROOMS

Chat rooms are the traditional means of meeting people on the Internet. So traditional that they were around way before the World Wide Web took hold.

Before the WWW and the Internet as we know it today (pre 1990s), there were Bulletin Board Systems, or more commonly referred to as BBSs. Mostly computer hobbyists ran these from their back room. They had anywhere from two phone lines to hundreds, and you could dial in and use crude chat software to enable you to talk to the other people on the same system. There were no such things as mice, graphical user interfaces, photos, scanners, email addresses, etc. This was the realm of text-based green screen monitors, 20MB hard drives, and 300bps modems you had to dial yourself. Women online back then were as rare as hens' teeth, and they were literally swamped by messages from every male online at the time. It was quite rare to meet anyone but fellow male computer nerds this way. Online dating back then was almost unheard of, the Male/Female ratio was just too small, so it wasn't really thought of nor attempted (except possibly by yours truly!). Overall, it was hardly a place for anyone but your stereotypical teenage male computer geek or electronics hobbyist.

Then came widespread public use of the Internet and chat programs like IRC, the newer web based chat sites, and finally instant messaging services like ICQ.

WHAT IS A CHAT ROOM?

A chat room typically takes the form of one or more 'windows' on the screen that contain line after line of text. One line is a response from a single person, their 'Nic' (Nickname) or 'Handle' is generally shown alongside. The people in the chat room enter a line of text and then press ENTER, where it is displayed for everyone to see. It then continues in a free-for-all chat session where one person may be having a dozen simultaneous ongoing 'conversations' with different people. It can get very confusing to follow as there are typically many people carrying on different conversations at any one time. Crowded chat rooms can appear completely random at first glance.

Once you first jump into a chat room it can be quite a shock, and will take you some time to get used to what is going on and what is

being said. It is best to just sit back for 5-10 minutes and watch the action to get a feel for the topics being discussed and the mood of the people. It is not unusual to see a lot of swearing, personal messages that you have no idea about, and lots of acronyms.

It's a good idea to make up a unique handle for yourself and stick with it, that way people get to know you. It's not unusual to try and enter a new chat room only to find someone is already using your handle. Some chat clients like Yahoo! Chat assign you a permanent handle, which means that no one else is able to use it.

Volunteers moderate some chat rooms, and people who swear constantly or provoke other people are kicked off. Moderated chat rooms are a much nicer environment to chat in, so it's a good idea to start off with those ones if you can.

YOU CAN'T WIN AGAINST TROLLS

It's not uncommon to end up in a verbal insult match in a chat room. Some people, called 'trolls', are just there to provoke, and they have nothing better to do than insult you till you leave.

The best way to handle trolls is to completely ignore them. It may seem tempting to come back with a smart reply that you are sure will shut them up once and for all, but it never works. They are chat room veterans, and are guaranteed to have a razor sharp comeback for everything before you have started to type your next line. Ignore them, and leave them to die in their virtual world.

MEETING SINGLES IN CHAT ROOMS

If you are in a public chat room that is not devoted to singles, then there are a few ways to find and approach people.

The first is to make use of any 'profiles' that are available. Some chat programs allow people to create profiles about themselves. It may be something as simple as listing their sex, age and location. But this is enough to shortlist the people in the room. You can then send them a private message if the chat program has this facility. Make sure that you introduce yourself politely, don't just say, "Hi, wanna chat?" Try something like, "Hi, my name is John, I'm a

30yo guy from Sydney. Would you like to chat?” you’ll get a much better response. A nice virtual rose never goes astray either “—<—{@”

Another approach is to put a general message in the chat room and see if anyone bites. Once again, be polite. Something like, “Hi, I’m John, would any nice single Sydney ladies care to chat?”

You might get flamed by people for doing that, but just ignore them. If you are nice then you shouldn’t have much trouble getting someone to chat.

Once you have found someone, suggest that you go into a private chat room, or even switch over to an instant messaging service like ICQ.

There are hundreds of public chat sites available, and many personals sites also have chat rooms.

IRC

When the Internet was in it’s infancy (before the World Wide Web), about the only way to chat online was with a program called IRC (Internet Relay Chat). It was mostly popular with university students as this was basically the extent of the Internet back then. Many a university student has failed subjects and even entire degrees because they spent their lives hooked on IRC!

IRC is a simple text-based system that allows you to chat with people in the same ‘room’. You connect to an IRC server (hundreds around the world) using an IRC client program, and select from one of many rooms available. Each room has a different theme like general chat, sex, movies, computers, etc.

With today’s multitude of user friendly web and client-based chat rooms to choose from, IRC is considered very ‘old hat’ and archaic, really only used by the old school of computer veterans.

IRC is relatively difficult to use and understand, even with the newer IRC client programs like MIRC. You need to learn IRC commands, and some of the servers are unreliable and can be difficult to find.

If you are new to the Internet and chatting then it’s advisable

to stay clear of IRC, there are much better and simpler ways to chat.

ICQ

A few years back it became very hip to give out your email address instead of your phone number. These days even the humble email address has almost given way to the swapping of ICQ numbers.

No Internet dating book would be complete without discussing ICQ, and with over 100,000,000 users word wide it's no wonder.

I'll say up front that if you don't have ICQ then do yourself and your chances a real favour and surf on over to ***www.icq.com*** and get it for yourself.

WHAT IS ICQ?

ICQ is a separate program that runs in the background on your computer, and allows you to keep in contact instantly with other people using ICQ. You can send files, messages, chat in real time, talk, and even send SMS messages to and from mobiles. ICQ will alert you when people come 'online', and you can send messages and files, etc., even when people are off-line, much like email.

In addition, to this it allows you to search for other ICQ users with similar interests, etc., which is a great untapped resource for the smart Internet dater. We will talk about this in a later chapter.

YOUR ICQ NUMBER

When you join ICQ you will be given a unique number (also called a Universal Internet Number – UIN) that will stay with you forever.

This number is generated sequentially starting from 1 upwards. At the time of writing, this number is over a staggering 100,000,000

This is the number that you swap with other people. With it they can find you and add you to their 'ICQ list'.

ICQ SNOBBERY

Believe it or not, there are people on ICQ that look down on people with bigger ICQ numbers than themselves. Some will even refuse

to speak to people with an ICQ number bigger than a certain number. It's not unusual either to find people trying to sell their low ICQ numbers to make money. As a guide, if you have a sub 1,000,000 number you are pretty hot stuff and obviously a seasoned Internet veteran. It's rare to meet people like that these days though.

There are whole books devoted to ICQ and its use, but the details on their web site are enough to get you up and running.

INTERNET ORGANISED SOCIAL EVENTS

A great way to meet people is through real life social events organised by personals sites. They can either be 'official' events organised by the company that runs the web site, a commercial 'events' company affiliated with the web site, or by regular members of the personals site (typically the chat room regulars)

These events can range from the usual party/nightclub type events, to bush walks, BBQ's, cruises, movie nights, organised sports, group holidays, the list goes on.

'Singles events' are getting very popular with formal Desperate & Dateless Balls (D&D), dinner parties, nightclub events, etc., that can attract thousands of single people.

Although these seem like a great and natural way to get to meet people, the major disadvantage of this is it really defeats the purpose and efficiency of the Internet when it comes to looking for a potential partner. You might as well forget the Internet altogether and go to your local nightclub.

The nightclub/party events really are basically the same as your typical nightclub 'meat market' scene, so you should know basically what to expect. In fact, these types of events are by far the most popular, one mention of the word nightclub or beer usually generates a few hundred eager participants. The other types of events such as bush walks and cruises typically attract a smaller and different type of crowd entirely.

Having said that though, there are several benefits. You can be assured that most people there will be single and looking for someone, and they will usually be in the same position as you and

won't know anyone there. So it can give those who are a little on the shy side a good chance to get out in the real world and mingle. Obviously going to these events in addition to using the other Internet methods can only help increase your chances of meeting who you are looking for.

These events can also be a great way to ask out someone you have been chatting to or emailing, as they may feel more comfortable meeting you for the first time at an organised event. This is discussed later on.

If you are the more social type then why not organise your own event? It's not hard and it's a great way to meet new people. Many personals sites will accept events from members, and will advertise them on your behalf. Let your imagination run wild and put on something creative, who knows it may even turn you into the most popular person on the personals site.

ALTERNATIVE METHODS

Alternative methods can include newsgroups, Yahoo! groups, special interest websites, list servers, personal home pages, the list is endless.

This is not something even a keen Internet dater would go in active search of, but if you do happen to be around these places then it pays to keep an eye out, you never know.

Try:

<http://groups.yahoo.com>

<http://groups.google.com>

PERSONAL ADS AND PROFILES

Personal ads and 'dating' sites are the granddaddy of Internet dating. If you are serious about meeting someone on the Internet for whatever reason, then this is the ultimate way to do it. Some are called 'personals' sites, 'dating' sites, 'matchmaking' sites, etc., but they are all basically the same. I will refer to them throughout this book as simply 'sites'.

They are generally commercial websites that are specifically designed for meeting people with similar interests, much like traditional dating agencies. In fact, a lot of them are traditional commercial dating agencies that have realised the Internet is the only way to stay in business. The market for dating agencies has taken a hammering since the Internet dating boom, and most have had to expand or move completely to the Internet in order to compete.

The idea behind these sites is that they have a personal 'profile' of information on each person in a database that you can search in a multitude of different ways. Many ways you can search are by:

Gender, age, location, height, weight, body type, eye colour, hair colour, occupation, religion, sexual orientation, education, star sign, music and book interests.

Many sites go a lot further and try and 'match' you up with all sorts of compatibility tests, but they are generally unreliable and really only useful for their amusement value.

The great thing about these sites is that you can do a search on any combination of criteria and you will be presented with a list of people that match. You can then check out each profile in detail, get their contact details, and make contact with them if you so desire.

The efficiency of this just has to be seen to be believed. For example, in Australia with a population of around 20 million people, one Australian site claims to have 100,000+ members, almost all of them from Australia and single. This is an incredible 0.5% of the population, searchable in an instant!

Compare that with a nightclub in which you might weed your way through only a handful of people in a night if you are lucky. In this situation the only criteria you have to judge people on is their looks and body language.

The rest of this book is mostly about meeting people via these personals sites, so it is covered in great detail. These sites are what Internet dating is all about, the other methods mentioned are a very distant second.

PREYING ON THE UNEXPECTED

There are a great number of people on the Internet who are single and looking, but either don't know what Internet dating is, don't know how to use it, or are just reluctant to use it. These people are *not* off-limits to your searching, there are ways to find them and persuade them into a date!

This can be a huge untapped resource for serious Internet daters. These people will be surprised to hear from you, and as such are often very keen to try something new. A nice side benefit is that there is no competition – the thorn in the side of every Internet dater.

How do you find these people and contact them I hear you ask? There are a few avenues available to you:

ICQ

ICQ is a great way to search for people. There are millions of people using it, and the 'ICQ Whitepages' search facility allows you to search for people based on similar criteria you will find on personals sites. You can search by geographical location, age, sex, occupation, and even interests. You can get a list of search results and it will even tell you who is online at that very instant. You can then send them an instant-message or chat request.

It's best to send an instant-message first, as it is considered bad ICQ etiquette to send uninvited chat requests.

The key to using this method for guys is to be polite and nice. Women on ICQ can often get bombarded with cyber sex requests, and guys just asking if they have a picture. If you are polite,

introduce yourself and ask nicely if they would like to chat, then you stand a much better chance of getting a reply. Don't come on strong via ICQ, people will often just ignore you.

Some tips:

- Once you have developed a rapport, don't forget to add them to your list, and get them to add you. You don't want to lose them. Ask nicely before adding them though.
- Don't sound too desperate, if they have to leave then thank them for the chat and let them go. They will be on again, hopefully.
- Find out when they are typically on, and let them know when you are on.
- Add personal information to their ICQ 'profile' or document it elsewhere.
- Ensure that you backup your ICQ list and history information. One hard drive crash can mean the loss of year's worth of contacts!
- Ensure that you save any chats to a text file so you have a record of everything.
- Messages are automatically saved in an archive, make sure you check it before you chat to them again to find out where you left off.
- ICQ has excellent documentation features, get to know them and make use of them.

WORK EMAIL

Never underestimate when and where you can meet people using the Internet. It doesn't always have to be via the Internet chat rooms and personal sites as such. It can just as easily be randomly via your email at work – emailing customers, clients, work colleagues, etc.

If someone sounds nice then why not try sending a nice 'thank you' email to someone who has helped you out. While you are at it, try flirting a bit to see if you get a reciprocal response. Obviously it will be difficult to find out much, if any information about them initially, but why not take a chance and ask them out for lunch?

If you have their mobile number then how about sending an

SMS message? You never know where it might lead.

NEWSGROUPS

Newsgroups are the place to find like-minded people. There are tens of thousands of newsgroups on almost every conceivable topic. If you want to meet people with similar interests, then subscribe to a newsgroup and scan through the messages. To do this you will need a newsreader program. Your ISP will be able to tell you about how to set this up and connect to a news server.

Another way to find people via newsgroups is to search through the newsgroup archives at **<http://groups.google.com>**

Google also allows you to read and post messages without a newsreader program. You can do an 'advanced search' for various topics, groups and messages. Newsreader programs have more flexibility however.

Look for messages from your target group, and by checking their email address you can get an idea of which country they are from. Send them an email and see what happens. Obviously keep your email contained to the topic of the newsgroup until you feel confident enough to ask them out.

This is a long shot, but you never know your luck on the vast world of the Internet.

OTHER TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS

One of the obvious benefits of the Internet is that it allows you to meet people from every corner of the globe.

COURTING LONG DISTANCE

The majority of people who start Internet dating just assume that there is no other option than to meet someone locally, and never give long distance relationships a second thought.

Only searching for people within your local area (for most people that would involve a 1-2 hour car ride at most) does limit the amount of people you can meet. However, if you include your entire city as your local area, which most people do, you should have no shortage of people in major cities.

Most people stick to their local area for several reasons:

- It's too inconvenient to meet people outside of your area. At least one of you must make the effort to get to the other person.
- It can be expensive if you are talking about air travel.
- The odds really are quite low that that person is the 'right one' for you. Internet dating is after all effectively a blind date. Travelling half way around the world for a blind date is not everyone's idea of a smart thing to do.

Many people will be naturally frightened by the prospect of meeting someone from outside of their local area, and it really does take a special kind of person to be able to do this.

Here are the pros and cons of trying to court long distance via the Internet:

DISADVANTAGES

- The likelihood is quite low that you will find the person of your dreams. That's just the statistics of Internet dating, so putting all your eggs in one basket is risky.
- You are away from the safety of your friends and family if you are the one travelling. It's also expensive.
- If the other person is coming to you and you don't like them but they like you, they are naturally going to be a bit more upset than someone who lives next door. It may be difficult to get rid of them, in which case you can expect the big guilt trip – *“but I paid all this money and came all this way to meet you.”* It can get nasty. Be prepared for the worst.

ADVANTAGES

- You can make some great friends with whom you can stay with and show you the local sites while travelling. This can make for a cheap holiday.
- You will have a much wider range of people to choose from, greatly increasing your chances of finding the right one.
- Because the two of you will have gotten to know each other pretty well before taking such a big step, the chances of it working out can be potentially higher.
- Because you have both gone to so much trouble to meet each other, you are not as likely to 'nit pick' and find faults with the other person. This is what typically happens when you just meet someone from around the corner where they are a dime a dozen.

In general though, stay well clear of long distance virtual relationships unless you are experienced at this sort of thing, and know exactly what you are doing. You are setting yourself up for a big fall should it not work out. There is also the possibility of the person simply vanishing of the face of the Internet, it happens, and it's common.

Remember that long distance relationships don't work at the best of times even for married couples and those in long-term

relationships. Imagine how difficult it will be with someone you hardly know, or have never actually met.

The best time to look for people overseas is if you plan on visiting there and you want people to meet, stay with, and to show you around. This is a great use of Internet dating; it allows you to form friendships with people from every corner of the globe. You can also stay in constant touch with them via any Internet machine anywhere in the world.

It's not uncommon to find profiles of people who are not in the country yet, but will be visiting very shortly and are looking for people to meet up with and show them around. This can be great if you are planning on travelling solo.

PEN PALS

As you may have guessed, the Internet is a great place to make pen pals, or virtual pen pals as the case may be. In fact the Internet and email has revolutionised the traditional pen pal system. Emails are quicker and more convenient to write, cost nothing, and get there instantly. You can exchange photos, chat, talk, and even videoconference over the Internet. It's an awesome way to keep in touch with people.

Some broader sites have a separate pen pals section, and these are a better alternative to general Internet dating sites.

Most people on Internet dating sites are looking for a relationship of some sort, not a pen pal. People who register with pen pal sites, however, are most likely to have the mentality it takes to keep up the constant emailing, and are less likely to get bored and move on. There are plenty of pen pal web sites and groups on the Internet, a simple search will turn up plenty of options.

In a general sense, Internet dating can be like having a pen pal who you meet and fall in love with. Some Internet daters email for years before meeting and realising they are meant for each other.

FINDING A BRIDE

There would be men out there who are looking for a 'bride'. If that's you then the Internet has no shortage of places to find what you are looking for. There are many 'Marriage introduction agencies' and the like online, most noticeably from Russia and Asia. Most of these sites target people in western countries with promises of the 'brides to be' coming to meet you. In some cases it can be as simple as paying your money and getting a bride.

This is obviously not what Internet dating is all about, but it's another alternative if that's what you are after. Most of these companies were around before the Internet took hold, and they have found that the Internet is a great way to advertise the clients they have available and to reach a worldwide audience.

You may find that once you start joining some personals sites, your email address might end up on the list of these foreign introduction agencies. If this happens you might receive regular spam emails offering their services.

I cannot offer any advice on these sorts of agencies, but as always, 'buyer beware'. Suffice it to say that I have heard success stories and I've also heard of scams and things simply not working out.

CYBER SEX

Many of you will have heard about cyber sex, and may be wondering exactly what it is. Cyber sex is simply using the Internet as means of having 'virtual sex' with another person.

This can take many forms, be it 'talking dirty' in a chat room or even email, a voice chat connection (the same as phone sex), or using real time video (I'll leave that to your imagination!).

If this is what you are after then you will usually have little trouble finding an eager participant.

If you are looking for basic cyber sex without voice or video, then all you need do is visit a few chat rooms, many of which will have an 'adult' channel. Cyber sex is also rife on random ICQ.

One mention of cyber sex will cause most regular Internet daters to hit their delete button, so don't mention it unless you know the

other person is willing. Cyber sex is generally viewed as being tacky, and only for degenerates and perverts who have no life. It's popular though; if you're into that sort of thing then go for your life.

CHOOSING A PERSONALS SITE

All Internet dating sites are *not* the same, and you must choose carefully about which ones you spend your time and money pursuing.

Even some of the biggest commercial sites may be totally useless for your particular requirements, so picking the right personals site is just as important as what you put into your profile. You can have the best profile in the world, and pay all the money you want to get your profile up in lights, but if you pick the wrong site you may not get a single email.

GEOGRAPHICALLY

The first thing to do is look for the large reputable sites that are specific to your geographical area. There will be no shortage of sites for any particular country, check the list further on in this chapter for some to get you started. Many of the dating link sites have sections for each country, this is a great resource.

AFFILIATES

The second thing to consider is if the site you are looking at provides an affiliate service. Affiliate sites are other sites that use the database and 'search engine' of the main provider to give the appearance that they are also running their own personals site. This is becoming very common, and the benefit to you is that your profile will be automatically visible on many other sites as well, ones that you would never find yourself. This greatly increases your exposure.

COST

There are many sites around that provide a completely free service. It's free to place a profile and free to respond to a profile. The only cost is when you want to make your profile 'stand-out', which is entirely optional.

Most large personals sites will cost you money as they are run by commercial companies specifically set up to run the site as a business. Unfortunately, the most popular sites are usually the ones that cost money, but they are the ones with the most people, and the best features. So if you limit yourself to free sites then you may be missing out on a large potential audience.

Most sites will allow you to 'join' the site, place your profile, and search profiles for free. But to respond to a profile you must either be a paid 'member' (monthly or yearly, etc.), or buy 'stamps' (they also go by other names such as 'tokens', etc.) that allow you to email people. It might cost one stamp to email one person for instance. Stamps are typically a few dollars each, and are usually cheaper the more you buy at once. Be wary of stamps that 'expire' after a certain date; you don't want to blow your money.

Big sites will accept secure online credit card transactions and will process your request in a few moments. Some will even accept a cheque posted to them by regular snail mail, or a credit card number over the phone.

Some sites charge a lot more than others, so shop around. But be sure to choose the right site to suit your needs, and not just the cheapest site available. Keep a look out for sites offering a free trial period.

As a general rule, sites that are free attract more 'window shoppers' and people who are not serious about meeting anyone. It stems from the simple fact that people will not pay to just muck around, but if it's free then why not?

All of this is of course assuming that you are going to email people. If you are content to place your profile, sit back and wait for the emails, then you need not spend a cent. As you will glean from the rest of this book, this is not the preferred option. Serious

Internet dating will almost certainly cost you some money.

If you compare the cost/efficiency/benefit ratio of Internet dating to other forms of meeting people, you will find that even the most expensive Internet dating site is an absolute bargain. For the cost of entry to a nightclub and a few drinks you can email dozens of people, or maybe get your profile put up in lights for months.

WHAT YOU GET

Every site will give you different features and benefits, and depending on what your needs are; one site might be the best choice for you because it has a certain feature.

Almost all sites will give you the basics:

- Allow you to create a profile that is included in the searchable database.
- Ability to search their entire database for free using various search options and restrictions. Don't ever pay for just searching.
- The ability to send a message to any member on the database, this will usually cost money.
- Allow people to contact you at their expense.

Some features that are highly desirable are:

- Sites that give you the direct email address of the person you are interested in, instead of having to send a 'message' via the site.
- Real life social events that you can join in and/or organise yourself.
- A chat room.
- Online secure credit card transactions.
- Ability to pay to have your profile listed more prominently, and/or allow others to contact you for free.
- A large (or no) character limit for your profile.
- The ability to upload multiple photos.
- A link to your own personal web site.

Some sites offer other fancy features such as a phone service that allow you to record your voice so other people can dial in and listen to your message. This is now redundant given the fact that voice files can be easily swapped by email, and you can talk in real-time with instant messaging programs and chat rooms. Very few people pay extra to make use of this service, and likewise I would suggest you save your money for sending emails.

REGULATORY BODIES

There are currently very few, if any laws that prevent anyone from operating a personals singles site any way they see fit. However, the ones that charge for their services fall under the business category and are subject to common business laws in the country in which they are based. Laws vary greatly from country to country, and there is often little recourse should you have queries or complaints about sites in other countries.

There is no regulatory body that controls how personals sites do things, and provide or promote their services. Reputable sites will have their own 'Code of Practice' which you can read before joining. If you don't like the way they do things then the best option is to go elsewhere.

Stick to the large well-known sites, preferably in your own country and you will be fine.

FINDING PERSONALS SITES

With literally thousands of personals sites on the Internet, finding one shouldn't be too hard. Finding one that is right for you on the other hand is a bit more difficult.

I'll make things a bit easier for you by listing a few of the major sites in various countries. This is not a recommendation for any particular site, but they are some of the biggest and more reputable ones. You should start by investigating each one and find out if it's worthwhile for you.

If you are really serious and have the time, then a profile on multiple sites will only improve your chances of meeting someone.

But following the principles in this book, and regularly being active on each site can be very time consuming.

If you are looking at meeting people locally then it's best to start with the sites that cater for your particular country. Note, however, that many sites work equally well for any country.

DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ

Many sites may seem impressive when they claim to have hundreds of thousands, or even millions of members, but take this with the proverbial grain of salt. The truth is that while they may have that many registered profiles, the number of active members is much less. Many profiles are abandoned, duplicates, not serious, and could in fact be many years old. There is no way to know how many active profiles a site has. Remember also that half or even more will be of the opposite sex.

If you really want to know how many profiles are applicable to you, then do a broad search for your criteria. The search will tell you how many profiles it found. Now search again, but this time only for profiles that have been active in the last month (if this search option exists). This will give you the best indication of how many possible candidates are on that site.

On many sites, you have to register just to do a simple search. Many people will register and create a profile in order to just take a peek, thus creating yet another inactive profile.

AUTOMATIC PROFILE GENERATION SITES

Avoid sites that generate your profile text for you. On these sites you are asked to fill in detailed questions about yourself and who you are looking for. From this information the site automatically generates a profile based on your information. For example:

“John is a 28yo Male from Sydney Australia. He is 5’11” and weighs 75 kg. He has blue eyes and pale skin. His religion is not important. His interests include Soccer and Wind Surfing.

“John is looking for a 20-30yo female located in Sydney. She should be between 5’1 and 5’9” tall with a slim to average build.”

The object of this is to give everyone the same chance, and in turn to generate a site full of supposed 'quality' profiles. As you can see, however, the result is not exactly a work of art. In fact, it's mind numbingly boring.

Not surprisingly this doesn't work in practice, and the only outcome is to bore those who are searching for profiles. Try this yourself and you'll quickly find that even searching a few profiles becomes incredibly tedious.

On top of that it's next to impossible to stand out in any respect against your competition. Avoid these sites if you can.

WRITING YOUR PROFILE

This would have to be arguably the most important part of this book. If you are serious about Internet dating then you are going to want to create yourself a profile. It's such an important part of the whole Internet dating game, yet it's the one thing people have the most problem with. Because of that, it's also the one thing they often put the least amount of effort into. This is *not* what you want. Apart from actual searching, your profile should be without a doubt the component that you spend the most amount of time and effort on. Your profile is important for several reasons:

- It is your chance to express yourself, and who and what you are looking for.
- It will dictate what kind of response you get, how many people respond, and what type of people respond.
- It is a source of information for other people to find out more about you when you email them.

There are no hard and fast rules to making the perfect profile; everyone is different, and so will be your perfect profile. However, there are a great many things that you can do wrong that can seriously jeopardise any chance you have of getting a reply. Just as importantly there are also some general things that you can do to greatly improve your chances.

THINGS NOT TO DO

Here are a list of *bad* things that you should never ever do or say in your profile; ignore them at your peril:

DON'T USE BAD GRAMMAR OR HAVE SPELLING/TYPING MISTAKES

It makes you look sub-literate. The wording of your profile is your first impression, just like the way you dress and your appearance is the first impression people get of you in a real life situation. You wouldn't turn up to a club in your daggiest clothes, messed up hair and bags under your eyes now would you?

This means that you *must* check and double-check your profile. The best advice is to write your profile using a word processor off-line and take all the time in the world. Write it, re-write it, spell check it, get it perfect, and then cut and paste it into your profile when you are next online. If you just fill out your profile online you are guaranteed to rush it and make mistakes.

Spell checkers are great, but be sure to thoroughly check your profile afterwards for any goofs caused by the spell checker, they aren't infallible.

Grammar checkers are generally a waste of time. They often do a very poor job and can make your profile sound even worse. If you think that you need to use a grammar checker then you really need someone else with good grammatical skills to check your profile for you.

DON'T TALK ABOUT YOUR EX-PARTNERS/RELATIONSHIPS

It makes you look spiteful and like you are on the rebound. No one likes emotional baggage, this is your new chance to start fresh so don't blow it.

DON'T USE SEXUAL INNUENDO

For girls it makes you look like a slut, and for guys it makes you look like a creep. So unless you *are* a slut or a creep and don't mind admitting it, keep it clean.

DON'T MENTION HOW GOOD YOU ARE IN BED

Don't think you are going to get a swag of the opposite sex beating down your door to take you for a test drive; it just isn't going to happen. Instead, you'll be branded a loser and won't get a single reply, except maybe for some flame emails calling you a loser. This is of course of most relevance to guys. Girls saying such things will usually get no shortage of (dubious) offers.

DON'T MENTION YOU ARE ATTRACTIVE

It makes it sound like you are full of yourself. By all means mention *facts* like your height, weight, build, facial features, etc., but never add your own personal opinion. Don't fall into the common trap of saying, "my friends say I am attractive," no one cares or will believe you. It's up to the person reading your profile to determine if you are attractive to them, nothing else matters. So just put your best photo up, stick to the facts and let people decide for themselves.

DON'T GET SOMEONE ELSE TO WRITE YOUR PROFILE FOR YOU

Your profile is about what you think of you, not what your friends think of you. It's common to find a profile along the lines of, "I don't know what to put, so I'll let my friend describe me..." What is someone going to think about a person who can't even describe themselves?

DON'T SOUND ANGRY

So you may have had some bad experiences (Internet or otherwise) and you are thinking of adding something like, "I hate such and such people, go to hell all of you." It's not a good first impression, and people will click on the 'Next Profile' button quicker than you can check your email.

DON'T TRY AND SOUND MYSTERIOUS

A profile which says, "If you want to know more you'll just have to email me..." is *not* mysterious or tempting, it's downright boring and people will just move on to the next profile. Really.

DON'T LIE OR STRETCH THE TRUTH

You *will* get caught out eventually.

DON'T MENTION NEGATIVE THINGS ABOUT YOURSELF

Negative things don't sell regardless of how you present them.

THINGS TO DO

Some *good* things that will help improve your chances of getting a reply:

MAKE YOUR PROFILE STAND OUT

One sure fire way to get email is to make your profile stand out. This is especially true for guys. If you make your profile stand out and different to everyone else then you *will* get email.

If you have ever read through hundreds of boring profiles and then come across a real gem then you will know what I mean. The best way to ensure you stand out is to search the other profiles, and write something different. It doesn't matter what, as long as it's different!

THE BIGGER IS BETTER PRINCIPLE

If you can describe yourself and what you are looking for in a few sentences, then people will have no option but to think you haven't got much going for yourself. The more detail you put in and the bigger your profile the better, it will make you stand out. People will feel that they 'know' you better. This increases your chances of getting email from those who are very hesitant about Internet dating, and don't know if they should respond to anyone or not. This is also a sure-fire way to ensure that you stand out from the crowd.

ADD A PHOTO

It is the single most important thing you can add to your profile, so important there is a whole chapter in this book devoted to it.

DO MENTION THE TYPES OF PEOPLE YOU ARE *NOT* INTERESTED IN

It will help reduce the number of responses you get. Ah, but isn't that a *bad* thing I hear you ask? – definitely not. If you say you are not interested in people who live in another state then you won't have to waste your time replying to people from other states. However, it can in some instances be construed as being 'picky' or 'closed-minded', but that is usually only from the people who *don't* fit your criteria. It means they are out of the game and they are just lashing out at you in frustration.

In most cases people view it as being upfront and honest which is a good thing, this will make you stand out from the crowd. Most inexperienced Internet daters have no idea what they want, or if they do they aren't brave enough to say it.

It is not uncommon to receive flame mail if you have too many 'criteria' in your profile. Don't reply back and encourage them; just ignore them. If you are after *quality* dates then you need to be specific in your profile. A different date every night might sound great, but if they are the wrong type, you can be just wasting your time. This is not for everyone though; some people are after quantity and not quality. Or they might simply be looking to meet good friends. It's all up to you.

SOUND POSITIVE, UPBEAT AND FRIENDLY

People respond well to friendly and cheerful carefree sounding people. Why reply to some miserable whining snob, when you can reply to someone who is full of life?

PROVE IT

If you are humorous, sarcastic, witty or articulate then don't just say it, *prove it* in your profile. There are few things more boring than yet another profile that reads, "I have a great sense of humour," but it's the most ho-hum profile you have ever read. Anyone can say it, few actually prove it. A big 'wow' factor is on offer here, take advantage of it.

BE HONEST

People, especially females (listen up guys), like it when you are honest. Genuine honesty is not all that common on the Internet or in real life for that matter, so you will stand out above the rest. This does *not* mean you simply say, “I’m honest.” Prove it by what you say and the way you say things in your profile.

CHOOSING A HANDLE

Your ‘Handle’ is your nickname on the personals site. It’s the name of your profile and the name by which people will know you and possibly email you by anonymously. Eg, *handle@site.com*

A good handle can mean the difference between getting responses and staring at an empty email inbox. Many people, especially females, will judge, or at a minimum, rule out a profile based on the handle. In which case your profile will never get read, so obviously it’s very important to choose a good handle. You will most likely find that obvious ones will already be taken, so you may have to pick something unique. If you want to remain anonymous then be sure not to reveal any part of your real name in your handle.

You can tell a bit about a person by the handle they choose, so try and let it reflect your personality, your job, your interests, or what you are looking for. It might be ‘*MsFitness*’, ‘*IloveFlying*’, or ‘*RUthe14Me*’.

Try and avoid the sleazy ones such as ‘*SexMachine*’ or ‘*Iwant2BinU*’; they won’t endear you to too many people.

If you are doing something fancy with capital letters, like ‘*RUthe14me*’ (which is ‘Are You the One For Me’), watch out for sites that automatically change it to all upper case letters. It won’t have the same ring to it and might be completely misunderstood.

Some sites allow you to change your handle as often as you like. Be *very* careful if you decide to do this, and avoid it if at all possible. If you change your handle then people may not be able to email you back or check out your profile for further information. Choose one carefully and stick to it.

THE INTRODUCTORY TITLE

Most sites will require that you put in a short ‘Introductory’ message of a few dozen characters or so, maybe more. This message gets displayed on the search result list next to your handle, and will be the first impression people get of you, so make it count.

You might have the perfect profile and the perfect photo, but the fact is that many people will not even get that far. They will simply look at your introductory message and decide if your profile is worth reading. So it’s just as important as the profile itself.

Just like your profile, there are no hard and fast rules, but there are good and bad things to say.

GOOD THINGS

- Make it catchy
- Make it original
- Make it understandable (avoid ones that are only decipherable by you)
- A smiley face or ASCII rose —<—@ can make it stand out

BAD THINGS

- Anything with sexual connotations
- Pleading messages like “Read my profile-please!”
- Anything that makes you sound miserable
- Anything un-imaginative like “Hi, I’m Jason”

As usual, watch your spelling and grammar, one slip here can mean it’s all over.

TYPES OF PROFILES

On those sites that allow the user to enter their own profile text, every profile will be different. But after you have looked at a few you will find that they usually fall into some basic categories. If you aren’t sure what you want to put in your profile, then this list may help you choose which styles to incorporate and which ones to avoid.

Note that these are fairly simplistic and generalised overviews, but it will give you a rough idea.

PROFILES TO BE WARY OF

THE SIMPLE ONE PARAGRAPHER

The simple one paragraph profile is one of the most prevalent you will find, partially among female profiles. A major reason for this is that you usually need to create your own profile in order to use the service, and so many people will simply put the minimum amount of information required.

EXAMPLE:

“Hi, I need to put something here, but I’m not sure what, so I’ll just say that I’m 28, with blonde hair and blue eyes and I love having a good time, email me to find out more.”

PROS:

- It is the minimum required in order to get your profile listed. At least you are ‘out there’.

CONS:

- It says nothing about you that other parts of your profile don’t already say.
- It makes you look inarticulate and like you haven’t got much going for yourself.
- It looks like half of the other profiles out there, and it contains nothing to make you stand out.

OVERVIEW:

Avoid at all costs:

If someone can’t think of anything to put in their profile then they typically won’t have anything else to say when you email them. People will know this and not bother. You will need a supermodel picture to get any response at all with this one.

THE 'ADVERTISEMENT'

One profile type that you will often find is the one where people will advertise themselves like a car, or a little puppy that needs a home.

EXAMPLE:

“Good home required. Cute, affectionate, big brown soulful eyes, toilet trained, well groomed, loyal, faithful and playful.”

OR

“Classic 1967 sports model. Low maintenance, low mileage, all original parts, pristine condition, doesn't run on alcohol, no cigarette lighter, and good handling performance. Test drive today!”

PROS:

- Cute and catchy if done correctly. But don't overestimate your ability to write one.

CONS:

- Doesn't state any facts about you. It's all just fancy talk, anyone can say it, and you aren't proving anything.
- There will be many profiles in a similar style; it's not all that original.

OVERVIEW:

This technique can work if done correctly, but it really needs additional information afterwards and a great deal of originality to make it work. Can make a great catchy introduction for a much longer profile but doesn't stand up well on its own.

THE LONG WINDED WAFFLE

This profile is characterised by long sentence structure, mindless drivel, bad grammar, and endless boring facts that lead to excessive

yawning on the part of the reader.

EXAMPLE:

“I’m 32, like taking my dog for a walk, playing scrabble, listening to the radio, watching television, reading the newspaper, eating breakfast, going to work, driving my car, grocery shopping, driving back home from work, picking the most suitable tie to wear to work, visiting my mother and then going back to work again. I am also very good at all the above things, and like to do new things. I’m looking to meet someone nice who likes the above things and likes to do new things, email me and we can exchange conversations and find a mutually agreed time to meet for further conversations about our future.”

PROS:

- There might be someone out there as boring and robotic as you perhaps?

CONS:

- Way too much mindless drivel that people don’t care about
- Poor grammar and sentence structure makes people wonder if you graduated primary school.

OVERVIEW:

This kind of profile makes you sound monotonous, and obviously not very attractive. If this is all you can come up with then you really need some help in writing your profile (among other things)

THE ARROGANT PROFILE

Yes, you get arrogant people on the Internet as well. Usually accompanied by a professional photo in a skimpy outfit showing off what they think is a fabulous body.

EXAMPLE:

“You’ll love me. I’m smart, good looking, wealthy, successful, well educated, only drink the finest champagne, dine at the finest

restaurants, love driving my Porsche, and going to the most exclusive parties in town. Only reply if you are gorgeous, successful, wear the finest clothes and live in any of the following classy areas. No other losers need apply."

PROS:

- Attractive to other arrogant people.

CONS:

- *Only* attractive to other arrogant people.

OVERVIEW:

The profile everyone loves to hate. You really are limiting your target audience with this one. Not many people like arrogance, it's not a good look, and it can come across even worse via the Internet. Think seriously about who you are after, and how you may be alienating some otherwise perfect potential partners. Expect some flame email.

Whilst some of the facts stated are generally very attractive, if you tone down the attitude you'll get a much better response rate. But if that is the real you and that's what you want to say, then good luck to you, it has been known to work.

THE PLEASING EVERYONE PROFILE

Some people try and be all things to all people and cover as many bases as possible.

EXAMPLE:

"I'm intelligent, honest, reliable, attractive, funny, witty, active, good natured, adventurous, down to earth and easy going. I like movies, music, travel, going out, staying in, and love playing all sports or just sitting around watching TV. I'll try anything. I don't care who you are, what you look like, how old you are, if you have kids, etc., so long as you are nice. I love to chat to anyone about anything."

PROS:

- Can make you appear open minded by not having any set requirements.
- You might sound like you lead a full life to someone who doesn't know any better.

CONS:

- Everyone likes most of those things to some extent, you aren't being specific.
- You haven't proved anything you have claimed.
- It's obvious you are just trying too hard to appeal to everyone. Nobody loves playing *all* sports, or doesn't care about who they date for example.

OVERVIEW:

The traits are good as long as you can back them up with examples. No specific information on things you like is a big downfall.

THE AVERAGE PROFILE

Some people like promoting themselves as 'average'.

EXAMPLE:

"I'm an average bloke, nothing special, ok looking, and lead a fairly normal life. I don't get out all that much, but it's nice when I do. I have open and varied interests much like everyone else. If you want to email then I'd like to hear from you, if not then that's ok."

PROS:

- May strike a chord with some people perhaps.

CONS:

- There is absolutely nothing to make you sound the slightest bit attractive.
- No mention of who you are looking for, or mention of *anything* for that matter.

OVERVIEW:

This technique rarely works. With so many profiles to choose from, people are going to go for the more interesting sounding profiles. If you are lucky you'll get a response from someone who just happened to like your photo. You need to promote yourself in a positive light and this is not the way to go about it.

THE OVER-EXCITED PROFILE

You get the occasional person who is so excited they are going to burst.

EXAMPLE:

*"I'm a 25yo male!!, and live in the Eastern suburbs!!
I love swimming!!, the gym!!, and watching movies!!
I don't read all that often!, but like newspapers – *hehe*!!
I love to talk to anyone!! Drop me a line!!
WOW!!
"SEEYA!!!"*

PROS:

- Some people like excitement.
- Excited people are usually willing to meet.

CONS:

- Way too many exclamation marks.
- Can make you sound like you haven't got too much grey matter between the ears.

OVERVIEW:

As a general rule, avoid the use of exclamation marks and actions like *hehe*. If you word things right, the right people will get the point without the use of these annoying additions.

THE BRUTALLY HONEST PROFILE

Some people really don't beat around the bush when it comes to describing themselves or what they want. They have no fears about

expressing their opinions.

EXAMPLE:

“I am totally self obsessed, confrontational, love the way I look, and I always get my own way.

“ONLY reply if you are >5’9”, have black hair and green eyes, an athletic body, a professional high paying job, are vegetarian, don’t smoke, and like art-house movies, cats and crystal healing. All other people go away and bother someone else.”

PROS:

- Honesty can be a good thing.
- You know what you want and are willing to say it.

CONS:

- You can appear closed minded.

OVERVIEW:

There is nothing wrong with being upfront about who you are looking for, but this example is taking things too far. Be more realistic, a little less direct, expand things more and you have the making of a decent profile.

THE PERFECT PROFILE

There really are no hard and fast rules for making the perfect profile. But from experience the following points pretty much makes up the ‘perfect’ all-round profile.

- It starts out with a catchy (non-sleazy) Handle and Introduction.
- Some form of catchy introduction that shows off your personality, be it humour, poetry skills or sharp wit.
- Thank the person for taking the time to view your profile.
- Have the body of your profile slow flowing from one aspect to the next, and not jumping all around the place with random facts. i.e, make it ‘read’ well.

- Go into some detail about who you are looking for, more is generally better, but don't over do it. Be realistic with your expectations, but don't sound like you'll date anything with the right gender and a pulse.
- Don't just mention you like generic things like 'music, movies and sports'. Be specific. Give people something to be able to say 'wow, I like that too, we have something in common'.
- Make it stand out from every other profile.
- Put in something that makes you sound genuine and honest.
- Pick the right photo(s), it can make or break you. You can't beat a good smile. Smiles get emails, frowns get the delete button.
- Tailor the profile for the site being used and ensure that it displays correctly.

EXAMPLE OF A GOOD PROFILE

Here is an example of a good detailed profile which would be successful at attracting quality replies:

“Mr Unique seeks Ms Unique for Lifetime Quest...”

Thanks for taking the time to view my profile, most kind of you indeed.

About me:

I'm unique, intelligent, creative, easy-going, independent, honest, reliable, fit, financially secure, health conscious, have a great sense of humour, a great smile, don't smoke or drink, am a perfect gentleman, make a great friend, am confident yet not arrogant, and am different from anyone you have ever met!

I know who I am, where I am, what I want, what I am doing, where I am going, and what I am capable of.

I'm fun, full of life, always smiling and full of surprises.

I'm a professional engineer, programmer and part time small businessman. I love my career, but I value my life outside of work even more.

I take health and fitness very seriously and am looking for someone who is fit and active. I have no hang-ups, skeletons in the closet, debts, hidden agenda, revengeful ex-girlfriends, health problems, bad habits or weird tendencies (or at least that's what I think, others may disagree!)

I rarely get angry, upset or stressed, am very considerate of others, treat ladies with the utmost of respect, and am tolerant of most things except for those that I have strong opinions against. I'm always cracking jokes and can usually be relied upon to come up with a one-liner at the most opportune time. Ladies without a sense of humour need not apply!

Appearance:

I'm 5'9", 70kg (but look <65kg), have short black hair, brown eyes, pale skin, the odd freckle or two, and am very slim but have a very athletic/muscular build. Broad shoulders and faultless posture. 7% body fat in case you know or care about that sort of thing.

Take a look at the photos and you can make up your own mind, a picture tells a thousand words. One ladies dream is another one nightmare!

I have plenty of other photos, all you have to do is ask :)

What I do in my spare time:

You'll typically find me at the gym (almost every day of the week), camping, canyoning, bushwalking, sitting in a park reading a book, working on a new project, at the movies or an outdoor cinema catching the latest Hollywood blockbuster. Going to live shows and concerts, visiting and helping out friends, or just at home relaxing while surfing the Internet. Designing a web page, or trading my shares, among a multitude of other things...

I love bush walking and canyoning, and have been known to organise the occasional group expedition through this personals site. YES – complete strangers have followed me into the bush and came out alive, written testimony can be provided on demand.

There are few things more invigorating than sitting on the edge

of a cliff overlooking a breathtaking landscape with nothing but your thoughts and dreams... or swimming through an awe inspiring canyon with towering cliff lines rising above... If that's your idea of an ideal weekend, then we really should talk!

I always have something to do, but I always have time for other people. I love helping people out, it gives you a warm fuzzy feeling inside. I live a relaxed and carefree life, would you like to join me?

Who I am looking for:

I'm looking for a best friend who shares common interests, with the potential to lead to something more. Intelligence, creativity, a great smile and a great sense of humour are a must. Someone I can do things and share my life with. Be it movies, shows, sports, travel, adventure, quiet nights, or just hanging out chatting. I'm after someone who can keep up with me both physically and mentally. Ideally I would like that to turn into a lasting relationship and lifetime partnership. In a nutshell, I'm looking for my soulmate (isn't everyone?).

Bonus points are awarded for being able to build an electron microscope out of simple household items, and hating cats and caffeine.

So if you are reading this at home alone on a Friday or Saturday night instead of out doing something a tad more interesting, and think that I sound halfway decent and/or intriguing, please drop me a line. I would love to hear from you. Or better yet if the hairs on the back of your neck stood up when reading this then why wait another second?, email me now!

It's FREE to respond to my profile, I've already taken the liberty, so it won't cost you a cent.

You have nothing to lose and an entire lifetime to gain, so why not give fate a chance...

Regards.

P.S. Replies with a photo would be much appreciated, but not a necessity."

Phew!

Yes it's a rather large profile, but here are some of the good aspects:

- There is a thank-you message for taking the time to read the profile.
- It's detailed enough to allow people to get to know you.
- It's broken down into readable sections.
- There is a detailed physical description stating facts, with the invitation of more photos.
- It touches on what the person does for a living.
- It mentions what they do in their spare time, which shows that they lead an active, fulfilling and exciting life.
- There is a touch of humour and wit embedded in there.
- There is a realistic list of qualities that the person is looking for in a potential partner. Enough to show that they have standards and know what they want, but not enough to be construed as being picky.
- It appears as though a lot of thought and detail has gone into it, thus showing that they are genuine.
- It has a catchy original title

Obviously this profile will not appeal to everyone. In fact, many people will positively hate it and think the person is a complete loser. Everyone has their own opinion, you cannot appeal to everyone.

What this kind of profile does do though, is appeal to the kind of person they are looking for. It will strike a chord with those people and it will sound like the greatest profile on earth. This is what you want, a trade off that allows you to get the people you want, but ward off the people you don't want. The best way to do this is with as much information as possible.

There are many things that can be added to enhance this profile, but the basic framework is there.

Don't use this as a template for your own profile, yours needs to

be original and to reflect your personality, which is *absolutely vital* for getting quality replies.

Use the tips provided and get to work on your masterpiece.

MULTIPLE PROFILES

There is nothing to stop you having a profile on every personal site on the Internet if you are so keen. Likewise there is also nothing stopping you from having multiple profiles on the same personal site.

The former is almost essential. You should not be relying on just one personals site for your entire Internet dating scene, you will be greatly limiting your chances. Join as many personals sites as you can manage to maintain, it really is worth your while.

There are pros and cons to having multiple profiles on the one site, but in general it should be avoided. If people spot that you have two profiles they may think you are desperate. Better to stick to one and keep it active every day.

TAILORING YOUR PROFILE

You may have written your perfect profile on paper or your word processor, but that is a far cry from having the perfect profile on the Internet.

Every personals site is structured differently, has different features, displays profiles differently, requires different information and the list goes on. If you want to create the perfect profile then you really must tailor it to the site you are using.

There is no point choosing a fantastic photo if it's the wrong size, or writing a ten-page essay if the site limits you to 1000 characters.

Some sites require answers to endless specific questions, are you prepared?

Search around the site and some profiles first to get an idea of what information is required and the various limitations. Take this information and tailor your profile to suit.

SETTING UP A WEB SITE

Setting up your own web site can be a great supplement to your profile, which is often limited in what information you can present. Your own web page will allow you to express yourself in-depth, and allow you to add as many photos and as much information as you like. You won't be bound to the limitations provided by your personal profile.

Not many sites allow you to put web links in your profile, so just mention that you have a web page with more information, the address of which will be provided when they email you.

These days it's easy to set up your own web page; there are countless free services out there that will take you step by step through the process and will create the page for you. They will also give you an abundance of disk space to store all your photos and any other information that you want to share with the world.

THE PHOTO

What is there to know about a photo? You pick one you like, scan it in and add it to your profile right?

Well, you can do that of course, but there are a great deal of things to think about that will help improve your profile, so lets discuss them now.

DO YOU NEED A PHOTO?

So you believe that looks aren't everything, and you aren't interested in someone who only cares about your looks right? Well that is a personal decision, but like it or not human beings are innately visual creatures, and we can tell so much about someone from their looks. Potentially a vast amount more than what we can tell from a few paragraphs in a profile. In the world of Internet dating photos are indeed the hottest ticket in town.

In the on-line medium your personality is a very difficult thing to show, so a photo is a great, and often the only introduction, it can really make your profile stand out.

It's not uncommon to have your profile up for months with no photo and not get a single email. Then when you add your photo you get inundated with responses the same day. Photos work.

For guys a photo is a definite must. If you don't have a photo then you can be out of the race altogether. On some sites guys are lucky to even get one email, and that's if you have a photo. A photo will greatly increase your chances of getting an email for several reasons:

- 1) It shows that you are genuine.

- 2) Many women are hesitant to make the first move and a photo will help them to feel more at ease.
- 3) Women have an innate ability (or at least they think they do) to be able to judge whether a guy is nice based on a photo. Not fair from the male perspective, but there is nothing we can do about it guys.
- 4) Because a large percentage of guys on these sites already have a photo, many women will only search for profiles that have one in the first instance (which is a search option on most systems), so if you don't have one you are drastically reducing your chances.

Some sites are promoted as being 'picture personals' and display screen after screen of thumbnail photos, so the person just clicks on a photo that appeals to them which then brings up more information. It is required that you have a photo to join these sites.

For girls a photo is entirely optional. You are going to get replies to your profile whether or not you put your photo up, but a photo will cause an avalanche of responses. Sometimes a photo can work against you and you can get more responses than you can cope with. It is not uncommon for a nice photo on a female profile to increase the response rate 100 fold.

Girls, if you have a nice photo and you don't mind showing it then by all means feel free to put it up; it won't hurt your chances. It is very common to not put your photo up but say in your profile that you do have one and will send it if asked, this is a good safe solution. You get to decide who you show your photo to.

DISADVANTAGES OF A PHOTO

There are only a few minor disadvantages to putting up your photo. One is that it can potentially turn away people who might have otherwise have been attracted to your personality and interests but were put off by some aspect of your photo. It's a double-edged sword so there isn't much you can do about this.

The other disadvantage is that it, of course, gives away your

anonymity. So if you don't want any one to know you are doing this then you are taking a chance by putting up your photo. Online personals are so popular these days that there is every chance that a friend, work colleague, ex-partner or relative might come across your profile.

In general though the benefits of a photo far outweigh the disadvantages, so don't be shy, go ahead and show the world your smile.

WHAT SORT OF PHOTO?

This is probably the most important decision you can make for your profile. It can affect what type of people respond and how many respond, so your photo is the key part of your profile.

Is a bad photo better than no photo? That depends on the definition of bad. If it makes you look downright unattractive then the answer would have to be no, do, however, get a second opinion on this. If it's just a blurry or dark photo then that is OK, at least you are making an effort to put a photo up and showing that you are genuine.

BAD PHOTOS

Here are some types of photos you should avoid putting up at all costs:

THE SEXY SWIMSUIT

Males being males, they will statistically speaking be drawn towards profiles with more sexually attractive photos. So if your photo shows you in a skimpy size nothing swimsuit dripping wet then obviously you can expect a barrage of responses. This might be fun at first but you will get annoyed with it pretty quickly. So stay away from the swimsuit photos, there are better options.

THE BOOB SHOT

Girls, this one is simple. If you want a guy to like you more for your nice smile, eyes and your personality, then a boob shot is clearly

not the way to go about it. It's generally considered pretty tacky to put up a photo where your chest is obviously the highlight, and the quality of guys who reply will almost certainly reflect that. Certain bait attracts certain fish; beware.

THE PASSPORT PHOTO

Everyone looks like a terrorist or drug dealer in their passport or driver's license photo, so why put it up in your profile? The same goes for any drab photo that shows you standing there looking like a stunned mullet.

The golden rule is if you aren't smiling and looking like you are having a good time, then it's not the right photo.

THE BODY BUILDER PHOTO

Guys, if you have a ripped body, 20" biceps and an awesome six pack, you can be doing yourself a disservice by showing it off in your profile. Sure you might think you look buff and that your six pack is just to die for, but the reality is that most genuine women are not going to be impressed. They will just think that you are an egotistical self-obsessed loser. Use a topless shot at your own risk.

THE YOBBO PHOTO

Guys, not many woman are attracted to men in shorts, torn T-shirt, thongs, gut hanging out and a beer in one hand while making rude gestures with the other hand. Sure you might think it's a funny photo but women will go running for their lives.

The same goes for the photo of you leaning on your hotted-up street machine, most women want to date you, not the car.

THE CUT-OUT PARTNER PHOTO

Try not to use a photo that has your ex-partner cut out of it; it's so obvious and can make you look desperate and spiteful. Only do this if you have no other photos available, and at least do a good job of editing the picture to hide the other person.

THE BED PHOTO

A photo of a person lying on a bed obviously has certain sexual connotations. So if that's not the kind of image you want to project then don't use that sort of photo.

THE WEB-CAM PHOTO

Web-cams are of course extremely popular today and are an easy way to get a digital photo of yourself. However, resist the temptation of just taking a shot of you staring into the computer, it's not a good look. Web-cam photos are obvious and can give the other person the impression that you are nothing more than a computer nerd that spends their entire life on the computer. Rarely do you get a flattering web-cam photo; they almost always turn out like passport photos. This is not surprising considering they are a very poor quality digital camera.

THE GOOFY-PHOTO-BOOTH PHOTO

You could hardly have missed those photo booths that allow you to take 'goofy' photos of yourself against all sorts of ridiculous backgrounds. Avoid at all costs for obvious reasons.

THE TOURIST PHOTO

Try to avoid the photo of you on top of or next to a big landmark, you will just be this little blurry spec in the picture. What good is a picture of you standing next to the Eiffel Tower taken from 30 metres away. Sure it says, "I've been to France," but you can say that in your profile. Your photo should be up close and personal.

THE BABY PHOTO

These are a big no-no. They have absolutely no relevance to what you look like today. Most people do not care about or like baby photos. You are better off putting a fake cartoon character photo that is more fun.

THE FAKE PHOTO

Using a fake photo you found on a web site or in a magazine is not a good idea for several obvious reasons, yet it seems to be a relatively common technique. Needless to say you will get caught out in the end. So a fake photo is nothing but detrimental to your cause; it wastes your time and other people's.

However, some fake photos can be good for your cause and are a great way to show that you have a sense of humour, albeit at the expense of losing the benefits of having your real photo up there.

If you don't have your own photo or are very hesitant about putting one up in public (which can be understandable), then a funny and obviously fake photo will help you in lots of ways. First and most importantly of all it will allow your profile to show up in search results. It will also show that you have a sense of humour and are making an effort to make your profile stand out. Girls might like to put a photo of an ugly wrinkly old lady, and guys might like to put a photo of Mr Puniverse, both of which can be very funny and can help attract people with a good sense of humour. Both of those types work on the reverse psychology principle, in that if you show an ugly photo you must be a stunner in real life. Rarely does it hold true though.

Cartoon characters are popular, and can help show your personality and likes. The list is endless, so if you aren't putting a photo up then an obviously fake one is highly recommended. However, not all sites allow the use of fake photos, and they are usually screened by the webmaster before they are displayed.

GOOD PHOTOS

We've seen what makes a bad photo, now here is what makes a good photo.

Four major things that make a good photo are:

- A great smile.
- Showing that you are enjoying yourself.
- Showing your entire body, or at least your torso.
- Appearing presentable.

If you can get all of those points in one photo, then that is the photo to use. If you can't get them all in the one photo, then choose other photos as well and make up a mosaic.

THE ACTIVITY PHOTO

A photo of you doing a sport, hobby or something that you enjoy is one of the best photos you can use. For example, it might show you bush walking, rock climbing, skydiving, flying an aircraft, paddling a kayak, the list is endless. Just make sure that it at least shows your face. A shot of you racing your motorcycle with your helmet on is essentially pointless.

If you are a rock climber for instance, then showing a shot of you hanging under a cliff looking like you are having the time of your life is ideal. Don't worry if you think it's not the most flattering photo of you, people are generally more attracted to someone who looks like they are fun and having a great time, especially if it's something they enjoy doing as well.

THE PROFESSIONAL PORTRAIT

Selecting a photo is easy right? Just pick one of those professional portrait / airbrushed ones that look like a million dollars. Sure they look fantastic, and feel free to use it if you like, but the point is it's a manufactured photo. Anyone can be made to look like a model by a professional photographer; it's just not the real you. It can really give the other person a high expectation of you. I strongly suggest making it your second choice behind a good real life photo. It's a good choice for a mosaic though.

DON'T HAVE A SCANNER?

If you don't have a scanner but you want to put your photo up then you have several ways of doing it.

The first and best is to find yourself a scanner to use for 10 minutes. You should be able to find one at work, university/college, Internet Cafe's and Technology Centres, public libraries and photo shops. Don't forget your local computer store, who are usually more

than willing to let you 'try out' the machine. So you really shouldn't have too much trouble, if you can't find a scanner somewhere then you probably aren't trying hard enough. Don't forget to take a blank floppy disk along with you to save the photo onto.

The second way is to send a copy of your photo by snail mail (the postal service) to the company running the personals web site. They usually have the facility to scan your photo in for you and add it to your profile. Be careful though, some sites charge for this service.

EDITING YOUR PHOTO

There is a lot you can do to improve your profile by editing your photo. The first step is to read the web site's guidelines about adding photos, they will often contain tips as how to best format your photo. Many sites will resize your photo to fit into a standard 'frame' on your profile page, and this can make your perfect photo look like something from the Twilight Zone if you don't pay attention.

Your photo might be stretched, distorted, compacted and downright mangled to allow it to fit into the frame. So if a website says your photo must be 400x200 pixels and no more then that's what it's got to be.

Other sites will place your photo in its original size to the side of your profile, which will 'push' your profile text into a smaller and smaller column on the other side depending on the size of your photo. You can edit, resize or rotate your photo to avoid this and it will probably require some trial and error. But it's well worth the effort to ensure your photo and profile look just how you would like.

With the mind boggling features available in today's photo editing packages and 'morphing' programs it can be very tempting to 'jazz up' your photo with lots of frilly bits, borders, backgrounds, etc. Unless you have an artistic ability, don't even attempt this. It can turn out worse than you think. One of the most common borders is a 'love heart'; cute but distractive and pointless. *You* are the focal point of your photo, not the border.

THE MOSAIC

A photo 'mosaic' of more than one photo is a great option and will really add to the impact of your profile. It gives you lots of scope to show off many aspects of your personality. Of course, only include the good photos, and try not to make the mosaic too large. Resize and edit each photo accordingly and fit them neatly together. Try and edit it into one single large rectangular photo, two or four photos is ideal, six and more is going to the extreme. Having the photos blend together is ideal, you don't want ugly looking gaps and borders.

Try and include photos from different angles doing a variety of things, also with you dressed differently. Four consecutive shots of you pulling faces in a photo booth is hardly a standout mosaic. Don't worry if some of the photos aren't all that flattering in some aspects, as long as it's made up for in another shot.

It's beneficial to have a few mosaics on hand in different arrangements so you can pick the right one for each particular site. Generally, one formatted horizontally and another formatted vertically will be more than adequate.

Mosaics are highly recommended if you have the ability to do it, but be sure to spend a bit of time editing and getting it right. Don't skimp here, it can make or break you.

SCANNING YOUR PHOTO

If you haven't used a scanner before and don't know much about it then it's best to get some advice, as it's not just as simple as putting in your photo and disk and clicking a button!

Most sites will only accept photos in .JPG or .GIF format as these are the only formats recognised by web browsers. Some sites will automatically convert your photo for you if it's in another format; but really you should be prepared and have your photo in one of these two formats. JPG format is by far the best and most common, don't bother with GIF if you can avoid it.

Your photo should be in true colour format and less than 100KB in file size. The size is very important and allows your photo to

upload and display faster. Some image editing and conversion programs can change the *quality* of your JPG image to reduce the file size, and you will probably be surprised that it makes very little or no difference to the quality of the photo. Some photos can easily be halved in file size or more and still retain the same quality, such is the flexibility of the JPG format.

The file size is especially important when sending your photo as an attachment via email. Most people are not amused when they just jump on the Net quickly to read their email only to find that they have a 2MB image file as an attachment that takes 20 minutes to download! You only have to have this done to you once to realise how frustrating it is.

Many scanners will default to high resolution like 300dpi (dots per inch) and bitmap image formats like BMP or TIF. These are useless for our needs unless you are scanning for image editing at a later stage. You will find 75 or 100 dpi to be the best options when scanning photos, as this will give you reasonable detail, small file and image size without any conversion. So make sure you select JPG format and the dpi resolution before scanning. The smaller the resolution you select the smaller the final file size and actual image size will be.

You should be aiming for a final image size of less than about 300 pixels square, anything bigger than that is fine for sending to people by email but not for uploading onto sites.

Lastly, keep your photo in a handy folder or directory on your drive so you can easily upload it onto sites and attach to emails. It's also a good idea to keep a copy somewhere publicly accessible on the web, that way you can send the URL address directly to people when in chat rooms, etc. It will also allow you to access it away from your home machine. Some sites also allow you to specify the URL address to upload your photo from, so you don't have to be at your own machine to upload it.

PASSWORD PROTECTING YOUR PHOTO

Many sites allow you to put a password on your photo which forces

people to email you and ask you for the password. You get to decide if you want that person to see your photo. This is a good and often used option by females as it gives you a sense of control. Guys should not bother; either put your photo up or not. Every other guy will have his photo displayed so why would a girl waste her time paying to email you to find out your password? She would have to *really* like the sound of your profile. Males with a password on their photo are generally considered as having something to hide. The same can also be said for females to a slightly lesser extent. Avoid using a password unless you have some compelling reason to do so.

GETTING MAXIMUM EXPOSURE

It doesn't matter how fantastic your profile is; if no one can see it then you might as well not have bothered. There are many ways to make your profile more visible, and in some cases ensuring that your profile is seen by everyone that enters the site.

The one thing any serious Internet dater should *not* do is to just write your profile and forget about it. You must actively check and continue to refine your profile while at the same time keeping a close eye on the competition. If you are pro-active then you will find that your response rate will go through the roof. If you're not, then you will instead be sitting around wondering why Internet dating isn't working for you.

PAYING FOR EXTRA EXPOSURE

Some sites allow you to pay extra money to have your profile made more visible, which can mean putting you at the top of search results or displaying your profile on the main page.

The smart and serious Internet dater will use this to get ahead of the pack, as a little cost is nothing when it comes to looking for your perfect match. It can cost less than a typical dinner date, so it's a wise investment.

These techniques work, and work well, use them to your advantage. Or choose to ignore them and let your competition get all the dates.

However, be careful to make sure you have a good profile and photo to go along with it or you'll just be wasting your money. Obviously if you look like a serial killer and spell worse than a seven

year old, then people aren't going to be very tempted to email you, even if your name is up in lights and you can be emailed for free.

Also there is little point doing this for unpopular or unsuitable sites. It goes without saying if you are looking for someone from America it's silly to pay for your profile on a mostly Australian site. Choose your site carefully. Use the site first and get a 'feel' for it and how it works before deciding to hand over your money for extra exposure. Some sites, especially ones that have just started up can be very user unfriendly, and in some cases be almost unusable. They will also have very few profiles. Stick with the popular well known sites.

MEMBER OF THE WEEK

Some sites will have member of the day/week/month, which will have the privilege of having their profile plastered over the main page. If you get on here you can expect some serious email.

How do you get on there? Well this all depends on the site, but most of them will mention how the members are selected. Usually it involves having been emailed recently, in which case you can send yourself an email (or three) and boost your chances that way. Sad maybe, but hey only you will know. Emailing yourself may cost money, but if you have paid to have your profile listed for free (you should if you are serious) then you can email yourself for free which makes for even better value.

Some sites only give 'free email' status to those who are event organisers; yet another reason for organising an event. Imagine if out of tens of thousands of profiles, yours is the only one that can be emailed for free; you can do it if you are keen enough.

GETTING ON TOP OF THE SEARCH RESULTS

When you do a search, the results appear in a specific order. If your profile appears near the top of the search result list your chances of getting an email are vastly improved. Users are far more likely to email the first few dozen people on a search result list, so it's absolutely vital that you are up there. The reason for this will be

obvious when you start searching for profiles yourself. You will find that your patience and attention span wears thin after reading a few dozen profiles.

How do you get up the top?

Some sites will allow you to pay to get listed at the top, but in most cases it is just a matter of being recently active on the site, so make sure that you log into the site every day and/or update your profile so that you can stay up there. The time of day you actually log in can also make a difference. Being online just before or during peak time means you'll be right up the top. This is most important for sites that have hundreds of thousands of profiles.

This really is a vital trick of Internet dating, as many people wonder why they get a flood of initial emails, which trickle off to nothing after a week or two.

Make sure you check the policy and mechanism behind these schemes, as at least one well known site will happily take your money to list you at the top of the search results. But what they don't tell you is that the person searching must select various (non-default) search options before your profile will show up. Make sure you use the next few tips about searching for your own profile to guarantee you are getting your monies worth.

SEARCHING FOR YOUR OWN PROFILE

Believe it or not, many people just submit their profile and don't even bother to check if/when/how it's listed. So make sure that you do a regular search pretending to be the opposite sex using wide search criteria and see where your profile turns up. For instance, if you search the entire country for people +/- 5 years your age, and your profile pops up near the top of the list then you are doing fantastic. If your profile doesn't show up against your direct competition then do something about it *now*. You never know who is logged on and doing a search.

Do a search with wide criteria first. If you are on top of this list then you will also be up the top on more refined searches.

CHECKING OUT THE COMPETITION

Imagine you are the opposite sex who has just logged onto a new personals site; what are you going to do? Obviously you will do a search for profiles that match some criteria and then you'll browse through the top of the search result list until you are tired of it. You will then email the ones that sound *interesting*.

Now obviously if you aren't in the top of the search results then the other person isn't even going to see your profile.

The other key point there is the word *interesting*. If your profile, and your profile headline don't stand out compared to your competition then you might as well not have bothered. You might get lucky if you have a photo up that appeals to someone, but don't bet the farm on it. You need to get the whole package right to make it stand out and look attractive.

If you have a profile with a dark blurry photo and a single paragraph saying something like, *"I like music, movies and going out and having a good time. Email me to find out more,"* and your competition has a great photo mosaic with pages of detailed information about what a fantastic and interesting life they lead, who would you email?

Your profile must stand out from the crowd, it's that simple. If you want lots of email and Internet dating to work for you then this is single biggest thing that you must get right.

Do a search for the competition and see how many responses they get (beware of fake numbers generated by people emailing themselves). If your profile isn't as good then you have your work cut out for you.

GET IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

It is very important that you get your profile right the *first time* you submit it. This is because on many sites your profile stands the best chance of being seen in the first few days after you have posted it. The most recent profiles get listed first on the top of the search result lists, and more importantly they might get emailed out to members who request all new matching profiles get sent to them.

These are also the people who are most keen to meet someone, so it's the time you get the *most* exposure to the *right* people.

If you just register with the site and put up a *'My profile isn't complete yet, come back next week when I have updated it'*, message then you have just wasted the most important time that your profile is visible. No one is going to bother to come back next week and check it out, and you will wonder why you get no mail.

Another reason to get it right the first time is that it can take anywhere from hours to days to update your profile, during which time it will usually be 'offline' and not visible to other members. This is to allow the Webmaster to screen the profile and/or photo to see that it complies with the guidelines. So if you are constantly updating your profile to fix every spelling error, grammar mistake, and add the latest thought that popped into your head then your profile may never be visible.

UPDATE DURING OFF-PEAK PERIODS

If you have to update your profile then you should realise that there will be down time when the profile is offline for checking. During this time you could potentially miss the person of your dreams. Naturally you don't want this to happen, so to minimise the chances you should update your profile during the 'off-peak' periods when people use the site the least.

The best time is after midnight on a weekday morning, as most people (in your time zone) will be in bed by that time and your profile will hopefully be updated first thing in the morning, thus having minimal impact on your profile visibility.

The *worst* possible time to update your profile is after 5-6pm on a weekday and anytime on the weekend, as this is the peak time when people are using the sites (when they are at home). This is also when the webmasters are at home as well, so your profile won't get updated till the next day or longer.

A day or two might not seem like much, but it can mean the difference between meeting the person of your dreams and spending another Saturday night staring at your email inbox. If you are a

smart and serious Internet dater you will want to maximize every possible chance of being seen.

Also don't make the mistake of emailing a bunch of people directing them to your profile for more information, and then go and change your profile immediately after. Your profile will be offline and they won't be able to get at the information. Some of them may not be impressed and decide not to email you back.

CREATING A NEW PROFILE REGULARLY

Some sites won't allow you to get back up the top of the search result list regardless of what you do. The only way around this is to create yourself a new profile entirely. You can do this one of two ways. The first is to delete your profile from the site if they allow you, and then join the site again using your existing email address. The second option is to get yourself a new Yahoo! or Hotmail address and create a new profile using that.

Once you create a new profile you will immediately get all the benefits of having a newly created profile mentioned previously. Do this when your email in-box starts to look bare, and you will get a new flurry of emails and dates.

CHEATING

Can you cheat at Internet dating?

You sure can, but cheating can work both ways - beware. Skip this chapter if you are too honest for your own good.

Good, you kept reading. You know it's a dog-eat-dog world, and you want to know more about the shadier side of Internet dating right? If anything so you can avoid being taken for a ride yourself. Cheating at Internet dating is all about improving your chances of getting an email or date, be it by a little white lie or by technical means.

So make sure no one is looking, put on a pair of inconspicuous sunglasses and read on...

GETTING AROUND PROFILE LIMITATIONS

Most personal sites will impose limitations on what you can put in your profile. They generally have these limitations in order for them to make money by charging a fee for contacting people and using other features of the site. Whilst this is perfectly understandable (a company has the right to charge for their services), some limitations have no logical reason to exist and can be very annoying. There are ways around many of these, some of which I will explain now.

Note: In no way am I condoning doing anything against the terms and conditions of the web personals site. If you do so you risk being barred permanently from the site. You also risk ruining your chances as your profile will be deleted, that's obviously not what you want.

Some of the most common limitations are:

NO DIRECT EMAIL ADDRESS

Some sites force you to use their site to send and receive your messages. There are two types of sites that do this. In one case you must enter the site to read and send messages. This is the most annoying type, and has the greatest number of disadvantages. On the other hand it does have the advantage of being the most anonymous. With the second type of site you can use your regular email program, but you never see the other person's real email address, it is masked behind the personals site as an anonymous email account. For example, you may only see the email address as 'UserHandle@personalsite.com'

With both types, you are relying on the site being operational to send and receive your emails. If the site is down or very slow, which happens occasionally with the Internet in general, you may not be able to make contact. Not good. You also may not be able to send an email from your work computer if it does not have web access.

A good personals site will give you the person's direct email address if you pay for it. If not, be sure to tell the person your direct email address in your first message (and ask for theirs), and tell them that they should use that address when replying instead of just hitting the reply button. That way the site still gets the money they are entitled to, and you get the person's direct email address without having to keep sending mail back and forth through the personals site. There is also no need to clog up Internet bandwidth any more than necessary either. Sending a direct email is quicker, more reliable and uses up less Internet bandwidth.

There is really no need for anyone to use an anonymous email address through a personals site for continuing correspondence. If someone is not willing to give you their direct email address then there is cause to be suspicious. Hotmail and Yahoo! email addresses can already be anonymous.

PROFILE SCREENING

When you post your profile, many sites will automatically run a program that searches for contact information like email addresses, ICQ numbers, phone numbers and personal web site addresses. Adding contact details such as these to your profile is against the policy of most sites that charge a fee for contacting someone. Many people try and get around this in the vain hope that they will somehow get more email. But doing so just makes you look blatantly dishonest, and this is obviously not the best first impression. It is in fact one of the worst things you can do.

People use many elaborate ways to try and get around these limitations. Some of them are in fact so elaborate and cryptic that most people do not even recognise them, so it's simply a waste of time.

In general the only thing these techniques do is help attract low quality replies. These people are often not serious, and are just trying to get something for nothing. These techniques are unfortunately becoming very popular, and their proliferation is jeopardising the livelihood of some very good personals sites. Most people get caught out eventually, and their profile is removed. They have just ruined their chances, in which case you can thank them for giving you less competition.

Some people also try and edit their photo to include their email address or other contact information, which may seem like a clever trick at first, but it's guaranteed not to work. Photos are always screened by the web master before going online.

CHARACTER LIMITATIONS

Many sites will impose a limit on how many characters you can have in the text part of your profile, usually around a thousand at most. This may seem like a lot, but you'd be surprised at how restrictive it can be if you have a lot to say, and you *should* have a lot to say. There is no logical reason why this limitation should exist, and it is one of my personal pet hates.

Unfortunately, there is no easy way around this one except for

setting up your own web page and trying to direct the person to that for extra information.

Some sites have different text fields for 'Introduction', 'Ideal Partner', 'Interests' etc. These will usually have their own character limits (maybe 500 characters each), so there is extra space you can use up in there if you need to. Don't worry too much if the things you say are in the wrong category, just use up that space any way you can.

HTML

HTML tags can add impact to your profile by allowing bold characters, different fonts, etc. Unfortunately, more and more personals sites are barring these very useful embedded tags and there is generally no way around it. All you can do is try it and see if it works.

Some common HTML tags are:

` Bold Text `

`<I> Italic Text </I>`

If you don't know anything about this then don't worry, it's only for those experienced with HTML programming, in which case you'll know what I'm talking about, so go try it!

STRETCHING THE TRUTH

Yes it's true, believe it or not people lie and stretch the truth in their profiles, you never would have guessed right? In fact, almost everyone does it to some extent. After all, you are trying to sell yourself, and who's going to admit to being a fat lazy slob with a tendency to make rude bodily noises. Instead, you might describe yourself in a positive light – "I'm an average looking, outgoing carefree person..."

Now I'm sure that no one is impressed when your date turns out to be someone completely different to what they described. But when the shoe is on the other foot and you are trying to get a date, you'd be surprised at how many people are willing to stretch the truth.

This would have to lead, without a doubt, to the biggest shock people get when meeting people in real life. They are often nothing like what they described themselves to be.

But you met them right?, and that's the whole point. Stretching the truth is an easy way to increase your chances of getting a date, and it really does work. A few choice words in your profile can make you sound like a dream come true. Likewise in that the wrong choice of words can make you the biggest loser of all time.

However, you really must be careful about what you stretch the truth about. It might be ok to say you have a great sense of humour when you have never laughed a day in your life, or you are intelligent even though you can barely add two and two. These are all subjective things that are not judged equally by either party.

Maybe you are thinking that a little white lie isn't going to hurt anyone, and when the person does actually meet you they'll fall in love with the *real* you, so what will it matter how you got the date right? – Wrong. People don't like being lied to, and it's bad enough when you don't turn out to be what *they* had pictured, let alone what you told them you were.

Of course, we are talking about things that are immediately obvious here, and an example of one of the easiest things to judge is a person's body type. If you say that your body type is 'average' when you are really obese or anorexic, it's pretty easy to spot and your date will most likely not be impressed. It's tough, but that's the reality of Internet dating and real-life dating in general.

The rule would have to be don't try and stretch the truth about things that will be immediately obvious when someone meets you. For example, your body type, hair colour, height, or the number of body piercings. A 'nice wholesome down to earth person' does not mean pink spiked hair, tattoos and nose ring, even if *you* think you look average and down to earth. You really should try to put aside your personal opinions and think how society in general judges you. Some people won't care, but the majority will.

So how about stretching the truth a bit on less obvious things... 'customer sales executive' when you are really a checkout chick at

the supermarket, 'financially secure' when you really owe the bank half a million, 'carefree' when you are really seeking stress counselling?

Obviously these are things that people may not find out until such time as you tell them, and by then you are once again hoping that you'll be in a perfect relationship and it won't matter right? Wrong again, you run the risk of digging yourself an even deeper hole than when you first started. Try it at your own risk.

If you are in any doubt as to how to word something in your profile, then it is best left out altogether. That way at least you cannot be accused of stretching the truth.

So stretching the truth in your profile is a very fine but blurred line, and you really have to understand what you are doing before you even attempt it. The Internet gives you the power to be anyone you want to be, and everyone attempts to use it to their advantage to some extent. How far you take it is up to you, just be ready to accept the consequences.

Honesty is always the best policy in the world of Internet dating, but fibbers get more dates!

FUDGING YOUR HIT COUNTER

Many sites will include a 'counter' on your profile that tells everyone how many times you have been contacted. Some even allow you to search and sort profiles based on who is the most popular.

This can be a double-edged sword. If it appears as though you have hundreds of responses, then pessimistic people might think that you are already taken and hence not worth the effort because they wouldn't stand a chance. On the other hand, optimistic people might think that you must be a great person to be getting all this email, and that you must have something going for you. In general, you will get more email if people can see that your profile is popular, so this is a good thing to aim for.

You can increase your hit counter in two ways. Having the best profile possible (which you should do anyway) and sitting back to wait for the emails to roll in. Or, you can increase your hit

counter by emailing yourself. Emailing yourself can cost money but it may just be worth it. Alternatively, if you pay to join the “free profile” list then you can email yourself free, a real bonus.

If you have the biggest, best and most unique profile on the site and you are also the one with the most number of ‘hits’, then every other profile will look positively pale in comparison. You don’t have to be all that good looking, nor have a nobel prize in literature to become the most popular person on a site. It’s all possible, by putting a lot of work into your profile and indulging in a little bit of cheating here and there.

DISHONEST PERSONAL SITES

Unfortunately, there have been (and may continue to be) less than honest personals sites that will try and part you from your money. There are several ways that they do this, and some of them are quite elaborate schemes, read on to help avoid being caught out.

Do note, however, that most (if not all) sites operating today are honest businesses that do not and have not attempted these scams. The seedier ones have fortunately been run out of business. But where there is money involved there will always be the potential for people to take advantage of others. ‘Buyer beware’ as they say.

THE FAKE RESPONSE

One big well known personals site once ran a scam where they would send out emails to male members pretending to be a female responding to their profile.

It went something like, *“Hi UserName, my name is Jane. I really liked your profile... I would really like to get to know you UserName, please read my profile and respond if you would like to get to know me. Lots of love and kisses, Jane.”*

There was more to the email than that, and some parts were very suggestive, but you get the basic idea. Obviously, they had written a program that inserts the person’s username into a standard cover letter and automatically emailed out to members who were in a similar age and location category to the fake ‘girl’.

To complete the scam they set up a fake profile with a fake picture and told you how to access it in the email. Of course, you couldn't just reply to the 'girl's' email address because the email came from the sites server. You had to log into the site and then pay money or join for x-months before you could send an email. The income generated from a lot of gullible people would be very significant. It works on the principle that if you email enough people you are bound to get a few suckers. This is the same principle that spam email works on.

What really gave this scam away was the wording of the profile, and the obvious insertion of the 'UserName' multiple times in places in the text that didn't really make grammatical sense. Very similar to regular Spam email and junk mail in your letter box.

This scam *can* be made almost undetectable though if they put more effort into the writing of the profile and the cover email. They work because most guys would be so rapped at actually getting an email, they throw all caution to the wind and hand over money to respond without even questioning if the email is genuine.

You can have an extra safeguard for detecting this by having two profiles on the one site. If you get the same email to both accounts then it's time to be suspicious.

THE FAKE PROFILE

The fake profile is the most common scam. Very effective, simple to do, easy to get away with, and easy to be duped by. Beware.

It involves the creation of a fake profile with a fake picture, and bogus information to entice people (usually males) to part with their money. There are also fake male profiles to entice females but these are few and far between as the financial benefits are potentially much less (males are more willing to pay to email than females).

It is so easy to do, anyone can do it in a few minutes. Just create yourself an anonymous email address, create an account with the site and submit the profile and photo and then forget about the whole thing. Any replies to the profile will end up in the

email in-box of that email account, but there, of course, is no genuine person behind it to send a reply. Now whether it is someone just doing it as a joke, or someone with other intentions, the result is always the same – the personals company gets the money and the trusting victim gets nothing. Make sure the trusting victim is not you.

It is also common to see different fake profiles of the same person but with slightly different photos on the same site. Not very intelligent, as it's blatantly obvious to the keen eye. But would not be visible to the casual visitor who only views one of the profiles.

HOW TO SPOT A FAKE PROFILE

The general rule about spotting a fake profile is simple. If they look and sound too good to be true then that's exactly what they might be, and it's the first sign that you should be suspicious. Common sense plays a big part here.

The photo is obviously the first thing to analyse. Photos of professional models are fairly easy to spot, but what if the person really is a model and they really do look like that (Yes, there *are* real models and even celebrities using Internet dating sites)? You will have to dig deeper into the profile text and try to decide for yourself.

You should be suspicious of profiles that use a professional modelling photograph (not just a 'glamour' shot) accompanied by a single paragraph profile riddled with bad grammar. Especially if they mention nothing about being a model. A nice detailed profile with a message that says *"The photo is a shot of me doing a bit of part time modelling for a magazine"* shows that the person is genuine.

Another very effective technique is to scan through a lot of profiles and build up an overall picture of the site in general. If someone is placing multiple fake profiles then the grammatical style and in some cases complete phrases will be identical and it will be fairly easy to spot.

There are some personals sites out there, usually ex-dating

agencies, that will write profiles for their 'clients'. These profiles, mostly written by the same person will of course sound very similar, but they will be spotted by the wording being in the third person. ie, "Claudia is a lovely lady looking for a genuine male..." Some sites even charge you *extra* for emailing these people because they went to the effort of writing the profiles for them. These are not fake profiles, they are just written by the people who run the site on behalf of their 'clients' who may not have an Internet connection or even know what the Internet is in some cases.

Generally if a profile is long, detailed and different to all the others then you can be pretty sure that it's a genuine profile. Let your common sense and intuition play a role.

SEARCHING PROFILES

Searching profiles can be a whole art in itself. Every personals site has a different set of search criteria, rules, and their own unique way of operating. To really get the best out of any particular site you must spend time on it searching to get a feel for how it works. If you don't get the search criteria right, you can potentially miss out on a huge range of people who would otherwise have been suitable.

One of the first things you should do when searching is to check to see if the site allows you to browse people who can be contacted for free. After all, why spend hours searching and then paying money to email someone when they have already paid so that you can respond to them for free? Take advantage of this if at all possible.

The first plan of attack when searching is to start with your most strict search criteria and work backwards from there, relaxing your criteria only when you can't find any suitable matches. This is not something you should just make up on the spur of the moment. Before you even begin Internet dating you should have a good idea of the type of person you are looking for. Without that you will end up wasting your time searching through endless profiles.

You will need to know at least the following basic criteria, every personal site should allow you to search for this basic information:

Sex, age range, location, body type, smoking, drinking, race and religion.

Of course, some of those items may not matter to you, and you don't have to specify them, but they are the basic ones in most 'simplistic' search options.

Other niceties include:

Height, eye colour, hair colour, star sign etc. The list is endless on some sites.

THE 'DRINKING' FIELD TRAP

There are usually three options for specifying whether or not you drink. 'Non Drinker', 'Social Drinker' and 'Regular Drinker'. All is not what it seems; actual drinking habits vary widely.

From experience it is found that 'Non Drinker' can often mean a once a week drinker, or they may even be a once a day wine buff and not even count that as 'drinking'. Most people who are completely alcohol free will often say so in their profile text. If this is you, then it pays you to mention it in your profile as well.

'Social Drinker' has the biggest uncertainty. It can literally be anything from one glass of wine at the office Christmas party a year, to a few beers at the local pub every day. Everyone has a their own definition.

If you are looking for a genuine non-drinker, then do not limit yourself to only searching for 'Non drinker' profiles. Many non-drinkers just tick 'Social Drinker' to fit in with the crowd.

'Regular Drinker' usually means pretty much what it says, regularly, every day or every weekend without fail.

THE 'RELATIONSHIP' FIELD TRAP

Be very careful when searching using the 'relationship' field. Most sites allow you to choose from match options like:

Friendship, Casual, Romance, Pen-Pal, Relationship, Marriage, etc.

Most people do not fill in this field or fill it in incorrectly, and it is very easy to miss otherwise matching people if you try to use this field as a search option. The best thing to do is to leave this field blank and only use it as a last resort.

The relationship field may sound like a good option to use, but it can severely limit your chances of finding a match.

When creating your profile makes sure you tick all of these fields

so that get the benefit of people searching without knowing the traps.

When searching, it is best to leave it out altogether and it will automatically search all of them by default. The same goes for most other fields.

‘When in doubt, leave it out’ is the key to searching profiles.

THE ‘INTERESTS’ FIELD TRAP

The ‘interests’ field is basically a complete waste of time. Some sites allow you to search for generalised things like Movies, Music, Sports and Travel. These options are so broad that they can’t possibly work as search criteria. Don’t even bother trying, just leave it blank.

But when you fill in *your* profile, ensure that you tick all the boxes, that way you will get listed no matter what option other people put.

SEARCH FOR NEW MEMBERS

Most sites will have options that allow you to search for new members, or members who have visited in the last few days or weeks. Make use of these options at all times. People who are new or are regular visitors are fresh, keen and ready to meet. Their profile should say when they were last active on the site, go for the people who have been active most recently, your chances of a reply will be greatly improved. New people (especially females) also won’t have had time to be inundated by replies, so you have the chance to be first and make a great impression.

By all accounts, the first few people to email someone have by far the greatest chance of getting a date. Make sure it’s you.

BE REALISTIC ABOUT YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Unfortunately, Internet dating is not going to make you any more attractive than you already are. Sure it can help you get a first date with that gorgeous model or celebrity, but it won’t help once you actually meet them in real life. Once you meet someone face to face

you will be subjected to the same kind of judgmental scrutiny that everyone is used to. Nothing can change that I'm afraid. Although this is not a positive thing to say, you really should be realistic about your expectations.

The Internet is unlikely to suddenly change everything for you. If certain types of people were not attracted to you before, then you can expect little difference on the Internet.

But you never know your luck in the world of Internet dating; by all means give it a try. The Internet makes it easy to approach those people who you always thought were out of your league. Best of luck.

NEVER GIVE UP

If you have been Internet dating for a while without much success, then it can be very tempting to relax your 'requirements' a bit in the person you are seeking. Unfortunately, more often than not, this will not help the situation. Stick to your guns and don't give up, there are new people joining every day, and there are plenty of other avenues to take and personals sites to explore.

AUTOMATED MATCH REPORTS

Most sites will have an option that will allow you to be notified by email when new members that match your criteria join the system. These are often called 'Cupid' services along with various other names.

The smart and savvy Internet dater will make this one of their primary tools. After all, why spend an hour or two searching through a bunch of different sites every day just to find the new people, when you can have them automatically emailed to you?

As you should already know, new people are keen and ready to meet, and provide the greatest chance of getting a reply. These people are the ones you should be targeting, and they just happen to be the ones that these Cupid services allow you to target.

Be sure you get your match criteria right as mentioned previously, otherwise you could be missing out on lots of potential matches.

As soon as you get the email notifying you of the latest members, make sure you check them out and respond straight away. Thousands of other people are getting the same email as well, so make sure you get in there first.

One word of warning. Do not use these automated match services as your *only* tool for finding people, not all of them work the same way a full profile search does. The information they send may also be out of date.

Some sites include a photo and brief description for each profile. This can be of great benefit when sorting through report emails. Others may only include the persons Handle, Age and Introductory message. This will force you to look through each and every profile

to find out more details. In this case it may pay you to use the more powerful search options available on the site instead.

INTERPRETING PROFILES

There are several things you can tell about a person from their profile. Their photo of course has a relevance all of its own. However, interpreting what they write, how they write it, and what they list in the various information sections of the profile can potentially tell you a great deal more about them.

While a golden rule of Internet dating is not to assume anything about the person before you actually meet them, it's always good to be able to find out more basic information before you email them.

Obviously, all of the following information is highly subjective and relies on educated guesses, hunches and plain old assumptions that may turn out to be totally incorrect. Nonetheless, in the hands of an experienced intelligent person it can be very beneficial.

SPELLING AND GRAMMAR

One of the standout things in a profile is the spelling and grammar they use. If English isn't their first language then it's often really obvious. A non-English speaking person has grammar quite different from just a slack English speaking person using slang. If you are experienced in such things then you may even be able to ascertain their nationality from what they say and the way they say it. For example it is common for Asian people to use 'la' as a short hand form of representing laughter, whereas most other people might use 'hehe', '*giggle*', or an Internet abbreviation like 'LOL' (Lots of Laughter) which only correlates to English.

This is especially useful if the other person chooses not to list

their nationality.

In contrast, if someone writes a 10-page profile with perfect grammar and sentence structure, you can be pretty sure they are well educated and articulate.

USE OF SLANG

The use of slang and certain phrases can indicate interests and social circles not mentioned in their profile. For example, *"I likes hanging wif da boyz and driving mad carz n party'n hard allz nite,"* It's pretty clear that this person is most probably *not* your clean-cut boy/girl next-door type who is studying to be a lawyer or doctor.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

The way people write and present their profile can give you an indication of how technically adept they are. For example, if their photo is scanned in incorrectly, be it upside down or full of white space, it's a safe bet they don't know how to use a scanner properly. On the other hand, if their profile is perfectly formatted with HTML tags then they are pretty hot stuff when it comes to the Internet.

Why would you need to know how technical adept someone is?

It's important because people who aren't Internet aware usually don't spend all that much time online, or have much experience with email and the web. With these people you stand the biggest chance of not getting a reply. Not because they don't like you, but many of them will simply not get your email, accidentally delete it, lose their login details, crash their computer, or simply not remember how to get back online. Don't laugh, there are many people out there who stumble across a personals site, create a profile and have no idea how to follow it up.

Aim to email people who appear technically competent. They are usually online regularly, and chances are they will get your message and be able to reply quickly.

FOCUSING ON ONE THING

If they mention the same thing time and time again in the profile then obviously that is something they really want you to know and accept. In this case, if you don't like what they have mentioned then you stand a good chance of going to the bottom of the email pile. On the other hand, if you like the same thing then it's safe to say that they will take notice of your email.

CHAT ROOM TALK

You can often get a good feel for people when you are communicating in real-time in a chat room. Seeing how they respond to questions instantly, how they lead conversations and so forth can give you many insights.

This, however, can be a dangerous game. Many a soulmate has been passed over because of a trivial sentence.

Don't be too fast to judge people by what they say in chat rooms, it's not the same as interacting face to face. The general rule is look out for *major* obvious flaws that are not part of your basic requirements for a partner. Ignore the minor things and give them the benefit of the doubt.

RESPONDING TO A PROFILE

So you've spent hours searching through all the profiles and you've picked out a few that you like the sound of, and maybe you've forked out some money to get their email addresses, now it's crunch time.

Easy you think, I'll just introduce myself and he/she will realise we are a perfect match. We will meet, fall in love and live happily ever after right?

Well, nothing could be further from the truth. It doesn't matter how perfect a match you are; first impressions are everything. Believe it or not there are easy mistakes to make that give your email a high probability of not even being read at all. Read on and find out how to avoid these traps

Here are some useful tips when sending someone a message/email for the first time:

- Add a meaningful subject heading. Many people get lots of spam/junk mail and just delete them without opening based on what the heading says. So if your message has no subject title, or something generic like *"Hi"* then it stands a good chance of being tossed in the trash can! Make it something meaningful like, *"Hi from MrSport – XYZ Personals site,"* or *"Hi, I liked your profile..."*
- Introduce yourself in the first line. Something like, *"Hi, my name is John,"* is simple and straight to the point.
- Include your direct email address, especially if you are sending a 'message' via the personals site. This gives the person a direct means of contacting you without having to send a message back via the personals site, which can usually cost money or require them to

be a paying member, etc. So they may like you and not have any way of getting back in contact with you, wouldn't that be tragic?

- Mention that you saw their profile, that you liked the sound of it and you would like to get to know them better.
- Provide some basic details about yourself, such as age, location, occupation, physical description, basic interests, and any other details you may think are relevant.
- *Personalise* your response by mentioning things that you saw in their profile that you liked and prompted you to respond. It might be that you have some common interests. A lot of people do mass emails by just sending a standard message, these can be fairly obvious and if the recipient has been Internet dating for a while they will spot it and won't think all that much of you.
- If they had a photo mention that you liked the photo and nothing more, or don't mention it at all. It's not a good first impression to say that you thought they looked sexy or have a great body.
- Don't write your entire life story, make it simple and to the point, some people (especially women) get lots of email and haven't got the time nor the patience to read an essay.
- Give them either a direct link to your profile, or details on how they can find it.
- Attach a photo of yourself, but make sure it's *small* in file size. Sending big image files is a great way to really annoy people.
- Make sure that your email program has the correct details set for your return email address, name, etc. The last thing you want is for them to hit the reply button and not get the correct address. If you are unsure then include your email address at the bottom of the email.
- If you want to remain anonymous then make sure that you don't have any email footer, tagline or attachment that reveals your details. The same goes for the name definition in the email set-up.
- Check and double check your spelling and grammar; most email programs these days have a spell check feature so it would be silly not to make use of it.
- Don't use acronyms such as LOL, and try not to use any 'Internet

Speak'. If the person is new and not conversant with it, then it can make you look like a fruitcake.

- If the person strongly mentioned in their profile that they don't want email from certain people and you happen to be one of those, then try and respect that and *don't* email them. Sure you might think that you would be a good match, but the fact is the other person knows what they want, and it's not you, so just move on and don't waste everyone's time and your money.
- Resist the temptation to 'flame' people whose profile you don't like for whatever reason. It's stupid, not nice and a waste of everyone's time.

Yes there are a lot of 'rules' and things to know when emailing someone, but they really are important, ignore them at your own risk. Once you've emailed someone once and goofed it, that's it, you only get one shot at making a first impression.

SHOULD YOU EMAIL JUST ANYONE?

You may be thinking that it might be worthwhile to email as many people as possible, without giving too much credence to who they are. Perhaps you'll email that boring one paragraph profile with no photo, thinking that there'll be no competition? Or that there might be a chance they'll end up being a real stunner?

Does 'Internet dating by sheer statistics' work?

The basic answer is no, especially for guys. You get the most responses from people that you have researched as having similar interests, and who are looking for someone with similar qualities to yourself. It's more productive to spend your time and money searching for and pursuing better quality matches.

People who get such 'bulk' emails will know that you have just randomly selected them, and it isn't exactly an impressive introduction. If you are lucky then the other person might actually like you, or they might just be willing to take a chance on you. In reality this is quite rare, most of the time you will have wasted your time and possibly money.

USING TEMPLATES

When you have selected a number of profiles to respond to in one hit, then you can save a lot of typing time by using a template email. Basically this involves writing a standard cover letter as described previously, but leaving out any profile specific information. Then when you go to write your email you can just copy and paste the template into the email and fill in the blanks. Make sure you add in information specific to each person, and be sure to proof read everything before emailing. It's easy to make a mistake and make yourself look like a goof by talking about your Elvis record collection to the wrong person.

Templates can be really obvious if you don't edit them and make them look seamless. If you are unsure as to your grammatical ability to be able to do this, then it's probably best not to use this technique.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET A REPLY

So what do you do when you get an email from someone? This is your big chance, seize the opportunity!

REPLIES FROM PEOPLE YOU HAVE EMAILED

FIND OUT WHO IT IS

The very first thing to do is work out *who* it is that emailed you. This may sound basic, but if you have recently emailed a bunch of profiles in one sitting then the response could have been from any one of them. Your documentation principles will come in very handy at this point. It's most embarrassing having to email back and ask for their profile name again.

In some cases there may be no initial clue whatsoever as to who they are, even if your documentation is perfect. Remember that people can use anonymous emails, multiples names and handles, appear different to their profile, etc. It's not always easy to figure out who's who, but the more documentation you have available the better. You only have to have this happen to you once to figure out how embarrassing it is. No one will be impressed if you have to ask who they are.

SPEED IS PARAMOUNT

First of all, send an email reply then and there. Don't hesitate or leave it for later. You never know when that person is next online to check their email. Hesitating for ten minutes could mean the difference between them getting the email straight away or next

week when there are a dozen others in their inbox. People are very impressed when you reply promptly; it shows that you are keen and courteous. Bonus points are on offer here, take them.

GAUGE THEIR LEVEL OF INTEREST

This person has replied to your email, it's time to suss out if they are interested in you. Many people will be upfront and say, "thanks but no thanks." If you get one of these responses then take it on the chin and move on, there is no need to reply. But feel free to thank them for being honest, it's a nice thing to do. Don't think that you can persuade them to give you a chance, it won't work. They have already decided that they are not interested.

As a general rule, the more someone writes in their email, the keener they are. No one will write a ten-page essay to everyone; if you get something like this then your chances are very high indeed.

WHAT TO WRITE

Always thank them for replying, it's common courtesy. The next thing to do is make sure you sound excited and enthusiastic. You emailed them and they have replied; now it's up to you to take the initiative.

DIRECT REPLIES TO YOUR PROFILE

This is the big one. Someone has seen your profile, liked it, and went to the trouble and possibly expense to reply.

DECIDE IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THEM

From all the information available to you, decide if this person interests you. Don't be nit picky here; people are almost always different in real life than they appear in their profiles, so give them the benefit of the doubt.

DO SOME RESEARCH

Whether someone has emailed you, or you have emailed them, you will want to get to know them as best you can. Don't just rely on

what they tell you, do some snooping on your own. One way to do this is to search the Internet for information about them. The Internet contains information about almost everyone who uses it. Be it as simple as which ISP they use, where they work, what school they graduated from, what sports they play, or their entire life story on their personal homepage.

There are many ways to find this information, but the first and easiest approach is to use an Internet search engine like Google.

The list is endless. Their use will almost certainly be familiar to you, it's one of the basic ways of surfing the Internet.

You can use these search engines as a basic way to find information about someone. Try typing in their full name and some other detail about them into your favourite search engine. For example, if you know that Jane Doe is an engineer, you might type 'Jane Doe engineer'. You never know your luck; she might have a personal or work homepage, online resume, or anything else that she didn't tell you about. Most search engines allow really advanced Boolean searches if you know how to use it.

If you have their email address (you should), then you might try searching the Usenet archive to see if they have contributed to any Newsgroup discussions. Give it a try:

http://groups.google.com/advanced_group_search

You can often find out a great deal about someone by using these methods. You may even find out some things you don't like about them, and save yourself the time of having to meet them. Likewise you might find detail that makes them more appealing, and it can certainly make for some interesting dinner conversation. Amaze and impress them by knowing things that they thought no one could possibly find out.

By all means, use these techniques in the background when chatting online. Appearing to be psychic by knowing things about people really gets their attention!

One of the great benefits of this, is that it's information that they

have not manufactured for a personal profile, it's the real person.

Not everyone has this sort of information on the Internet, but it's worth a try. If you can't find anything, it doesn't mean that the information isn't out there, it's just that it takes some looking. Searching the Internet for information is often an art in itself.

In case you are thinking that *your* information could be out there for anyone to see, it won't be if you take precautions. If you don't use newsgroups, have a homepage, work or study related page then there should be little information out there on you, if any. This is the case for most casual Internet users.

If you do have information out there, then following the precautions in the 'Staying Anonymous' section will keep all this hidden. Be careful what you say in chat rooms and emails and no one will be able to find out anything.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU DON'T GET A REPLY

So you meet all of their requirements, they meet yours, and you wrote the perfect first email, but it's been a week and they still haven't replied. What's wrong?

There are many reasons for no response, but the most common ones are:

THEY DIDN'T GET YOUR MESSAGE?

Not likely if the person recently put their profile up. Email is very reliable. On the other hand, the person may have lost their email password, had computer problems, accidentally deleted your message, found someone already, or simply have given up the Internet dating game for whatever reason. Try and send it again if you like but not more than twice.

THEY DIDN'T LIKE YOU?

Somewhat surprising to some this is the most common reason. Most email gets read, and if they haven't responded in a reasonable time then it usually means they were not interested and they couldn't be bothered replying. Or perhaps they don't have the time to write a "thanks but no thanks" reply. Try sending again if you like, but if you get no response the second time just give up and move on. You may think that you are the most perfect match in the world, but in reality you can have no way to know what the other person is looking for. They are the judge, jury and executioner. Such is the reality of Internet dating.

THEY ARE TOO BUSY?

This is a common reason, especially for women. They may have been inundated with messages and don't have the time to reply or even read each email yet. If you have ever had to respond to even a few dozen emails then you will know how time consuming this is, so imagine if you had hundreds in a few days. In general you should give someone at least a week to reply before trying again or giving up all hope.

THEY DON'T CHECK THEIR EMAIL FREQUENTLY?

Another common reason. Many people can only access email from work or university, which in many cases means weekdays. So if you sent an email on Friday and don't hear back from them over the weekend, then give them a few more days before starting to panic. You can usually get some idea from a person's email address. If it's a Hotmail or Yahoo address then it's likely they can access it from home or a public web terminal. If it's a **.edu** address then they may only be able to access it from a school or university, and likewise for an obvious **.com** company name which they can most likely only access from work.

YOU SENT THE MESSAGE FROM THE INTERNET SITE AND YOU HAVE A FUNNY FEELING IT DIDN'T GO THROUGH?

This is a common fear, which in most cases is unfounded. But it has been known for the message systems on personal web sites to be unreliable at times. Try and avoid sites that won't give you the persons direct email address if you are concerned about this. Crossing your fingers and toes doesn't help, the Internet has a mind of it's own.

IT'S AN ABANDONED PROFILE?

Before emailing someone, make sure that you check the date they last visited the site, it should be listed on their profile. If you try and email someone that last visited the site over a year ago then obviously you don't stand much chance of getting a reply. A lot can

happen in that time.

IT WAS A FAKE PROFILE AND YOU HAVE BEEN HAD?

Yes there are fake profiles out there, some (very occasionally in the past) perpetrated by the site owners, others by people unknown. Read the chapter on 'Cheating' to avoid getting caught again. Unfortunately, there will often be no way to know if it was a scam.

THEY ARE JUST WINDOW SHOPPING?

Many people who place profiles are just 'window shopping', with no intention of actually meeting or replying to anyone. They do it just out of curiosity. Next to impossible to spot.

In general, try and not to take it personally if you don't get a reply, chin up and try someone else.

THE GUY/GIRL FACTOR?

Guys should be aware that the response rate to your emails can often be very low, even down around the 5% mark, as women can afford to be very choosy.

Girls on the other hand should be expecting a very high reply rate, around the 95% rate; yes it can be *that* much of a difference! So girls if you really like a guy and didn't get a response within a week, do try again, and again.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR POTENTIAL DATE

Once you have made the initial contact with someone there are several methods available to get to know them better.

EMAIL

Email is the traditional means of getting to know someone over the Internet. It's convenient, everyone has it, and it's compatible across any hardware and software platform.

Be sure to turn any HTML option *off*. Sure you can do fancy things with it, but not everyone likes it nor has the capability to read it. Plain text is much simpler and smaller in file size. If you don't know what HTML is then don't worry about it.

With email you can reply any time you like, from any machine (if you have a web-based email account like Yahoo! or Hotmail), and edit your text as much as you like, so you can say exactly what you want to say.

The only real disadvantage is that if you have a lot of email, it's surprisingly easy to forget to reply and think that you never heard from that person. They in turn won't think you are interested anymore because you didn't reply, and that's the end of that!

Countless Internet relationships have never gotten off the ground simply because someone forgot to reply. Don't let it happen to you.

PUBLIC CHAT ROOMS

Public chat rooms have been well and truly superseded by the Instant Messaging services now available. Unless you met in a chat

room and have no other means available then steer clear of public chat rooms when getting to know someone. You won't be able to chat in private, exchange numbers or organise a date without everyone else knowing. Also, each person's attention is diverted by what else is happening in the room; it's an unpleasant and impersonal environment.

INSTANT MESSAGING SERVICES AND PRIVATE CHAT ROOMS

Popular Instant Messaging Services include ICQ, Yahoo! Messenger and MSN Messenger. All of them let you see when people are online, send messages instantly, chat in real time in a private chat room and do other things such as send files and even talk to each other.

You shouldn't have any trouble finding someone else with access to at least one of these services, and even if they don't you can send them an automatic email telling them about how to join the service step by step. All you need to know is their email address and the system will do the rest. Note, however, that it's good to let them know that you are going to do this. Some people don't appreciate getting such requests to join a service. To find out how to invite someone to join, visit the homepage of the particular service or look in the menu options of the program.

If you have already set up an email account with Yahoo! or Hotmail then you will be able to use each one's particular messaging service. Just go to the homepage and download the program and install it, it's fully automatic.

There is not much difference between the Yahoo! and MSN Messenger services, so which one you use will depend on which service you are with and who the person you want to chat to is with. The smart Internet Dater will have both a Yahoo! and Hotmail account and both services running, along with ICQ of course.

Basically it's advantageous to have access to all three systems. It doesn't cost you anything, so why not? Instant messaging is the quickest and most convenient way of getting to know someone online, so by all means let the other person know you have this

service and when you are usually online, even in your first email.

PHONE

There are pros and cons of getting to know someone via the phone. Many people like to 'talk first' before they meet. Typically it only works if both parties are 'phone people' who love to talk on the phone. More often than not one person won't be, and it can make for an awkward conversation.

Many people (especially females) are not willing to give out their phone number either as it blows the entire anonymity aspect.

By all means ask the other person for their number and if they would like to chat, but if they hesitate then give it a miss. But feel free to use the phone to say hello and arrange a date. Always remember though to reserve your judgment until you meet them.

FACE TO FACE

Nothing beats meeting someone face to face. The ultimate goal of Internet dating is to find someone, and the sooner you arrange a face-to-face meeting the better.

You can only learn so much about someone via other mediums, and some people would say that you can't learn anything about someone other than face to face. From all of my experiences I would have to agree.

Internet dating is kind of like playing the stock market. You can be miles ahead on paper, but until you've actually sold your shares, it's all virtual and worthless. Likewise in Internet dating, you can have as many potential dates lined up as you like, but until you actually meet them they are all virtual and can disappear at any moment. And disappear they do. So one of the golden rules of Internet dating is to meet as soon as possible, don't wait thinking that they will still be there next week.

THE DATE

This is what it's all about – THE DATE!

You've put all the time, effort and possibly money into Internet dating, now it's time to reap the rewards. First of all, congratulate yourself on a job well done; Internet dating has worked for you. Whether or not that turns out to be good or bad will only be decided after the date, but it has worked none the less.

You might have thought that it wasn't all that hard to get a date, and it isn't if you have followed the advice, done the right things, and throw in a bit of luck. But there are many people who have been Internet dating for years and not had one single face-to-face meeting. Spare a second to thank them for being such bad opposition, it increased your odds.

BLIND DATE

Dates arranged via the Internet are essentially 'blind' dates, even though you may have seen each other's photo, spoken on the phone or even video conferenced. There is a reason for considering Internet dates as blind dates – *people always turn out differently in real life to what you had imagined.*

If you don't believe it, then wait and see for yourself, it's almost always the case. Obviously the more you have seen and heard about the other person, the more chance there is of them turning out as you had imagined. But if you have not seen a photo, then be ready to expect *anything*. It's not uncommon for a 'slim' person to actually weigh 300 lbs, and an 'attractive' person to be the most unattractive person you have ever met. Add in unexpected bright hair colour,

body piercings, bizarre clothing choices and anything else you can possibly imagine, and your blind date can really turn out to be totally different to what you imagined.

If you have seen a few photos or maybe video conferenced, you will usually get a good indication of what they are like. But there are many things that can be hidden in photos, grainy video, and phone calls, so still have an open mind.

Not that I want to scare you, there is nothing to be scared of, just be prepared. The vast majority of people turn out to be surprising 'average', even if they are different to what you imagined.

These surprises are often the most interesting and fun part of Internet dating. So have some fun, have a laugh, and enjoy the ride.

MAKE THE TIME

When it comes to the date, it's important to make time available to meet them. If you want Internet dating to work for you then you must be flexible. If you lead a very busy life then you must make the decision as to what is more important to you, finding the love of your life or finishing that report for work or visiting your friends. There is no excuse for not being able to spare at least half an hour of your time to meet someone.

One of downsides of trying to arrange a blind date with someone you met on the Internet, is that it's so easy to delay and or cancel a date. Many an Internet first date has never happened for the simple reason that the other person is 'too busy'. Make the time available, or seriously risk loosing the date. People won't wait around when it's so easy to get another date online.

SPONTANEOUS DATING

Some people want to meet right *now*, or forget it. Are you up for it?

This often happens in chat rooms early on a Friday or Saturday night. Some people hop online to find a date for that night. This can be great fun, throwing all caution to the wind, no thinking about it, just get dressed and head on out to meet a complete stranger. Why not give it a try?

WHERE SHOULD YOU GO?

He/she has agreed to meet you, now it's time to decide where. Don't wait for them to suggest something, you should take the initiative and suggest something yourself. Most people like it when other people take charge of situations such as this. This is especially the case with beginners.

There are an infinite variety of options available to you, and some are a lot better than others.

FAMILIAR GROUND

If it's you who is suggesting the place then it's a good idea to try and pick a familiar place that you know and feel comfortable in. No point feeling out of place if you have a say in it. It will also help you come across better if you are relaxed and comfortable.

Now for some places in detail, in no particular order. In each one we will discuss the basic advantages and disadvantages, and provide a general overview. Obviously some things are not for everyone, and everyone's idea of the perfect date will be different, but hopefully these will give you some good ideas to get you started.

THE MOVIES

The good old-fashioned movies.

Advantages

- It's a rather intimate environment.
- It (hopefully) gives you a lot to talk about after the movie.
- Can give you a good excuse to 'call it quits for the night' after the movie. Most people readily accept this.

Disadvantages

- Two hours watching a movie is two hours you *aren't* getting to know that person.
- Being an intimate environment, it can be rather awkward. Body language on a date at the movies is a big thing.

Overview

A plausible option if you combine it with dinner or something else, but not all that good on it's own. Great if you are both movies buffs, you can talk about it all night long. Better suited to a second date though.

DINNER

Dinner would have to be the #1 blind date destination.

Advantages

- It's a 'safe' choice and is generally acceptable to most people.
- You get a few hours to talk to person face to face. This allows you to check them out up close.
- You have something to play with (your food) if your date is a total bore.

Disadvantages

- There is always the inevitable argument over who pays.
- Good restaurants aren't cheap.
- Some people are very picky about their tastes. Suggest the wrong restaurant and you could be written off before you even get a chance to meet.

Overview

Nobody has ever lost a date over suggesting dinner. A good safe choice if you don't want to be too creative.

Avoid inviting them over to your place for dinner on the first date. For girls, you are inviting a stranger into your house, and proposing anything at your place can be suggestive in ways you didn't intend. For guys, women will be suspicious of your intentions, save it for the second date.

PICNIC LUNCH

A nice picnic lunch in the park.

Advantages

- It's inexpensive.
- A picnic in the park can be very romantic, and it allows you to get to know them in an intimate environment.
- It's above the ordinary.

Disadvantages

- Ants and rain at a picnic are a pain.
- A 'quick lunch' can appear that you don't have time for them.

Overview

It's pretty hard to beat a nice picnic. Make this one of your top choices and you can't go wrong.

COFFEE

Meeting for coffee is one of the time-honoured traditions of blind dating.

Advantages

- The obvious advantage is that it's quick and convenient. It can be all over and done in less than 30 minutes. Not much time wasted if you don't hit it off.
- It's safe because you are meeting in a crowded public place.
- It's a socially acceptable blind date.
- Usually good enough to 'scope someone out'.
- It's inexpensive.

Disadvantages

- It's hard to get to know someone in the often-limited time available. If someone suggests coffee then it usually means they only want a brief meeting.

Overview

It might be a socially acceptable first date, but lets face it, it's boring. Unless you really can't spare the time, try and choose something

more creative.

DAY OUTING

A great way to really get to know someone in depth on the first date is to spend the entire day with them. Be it a bushwalk, boat cruise, day at the races, long drive, joy flight, the list is endless.

Advantages

- Spending the entire day with someone shows them that you are really genuine and are willing to give them a chance. Giving up an entire day shows much more generosity than meeting for ten minutes over coffee.
- You can really get to know them in depth.
- It improves your chance of ‘clicking’. The more you talk about, the more chance you have of finding things that you have in common. People mostly remember the positives and not the negatives. It might only take one simple remark and they are sold.
- For guys – girls generally like guys who communicate. The more of it you do the better your chances.

Disadvantages

- If either of you are stuck for things to do or talk about then you’ll be in for a really long day.
- A day is a lot of time for some people to dedicate to someone they’ve never met before. It can mean losing half your weekend if the person turned out to be a waste of time. Having this happen often can put you off Internet dating really quickly.

Overview

Obviously this has to be something that both of you agree on, enjoy doing, and feel comfortable with. But if you have that in common and a free day to spare then it’s definitely a great way to go about it.

NIGHT CLUB

For many, one of the traditional places to meet singles. Some people

make it their first date destination as well.

Advantages

- Well, at least it's a date?
- There are usually bouncers there that will prevent any trouble. This might make you feel more at ease.

Disadvantages

- Turn your back for a second and your date will get hit on.
- The only things you will get to learn about your date are how well they can dance, and how many drinks they can consume. You certainly won't be able to hold an intelligent conversation with them on the dance floor or barstool.
- Good luck trying to find them again if you lose them in the crowd.
- Guys, you won't be able to not look at the other women in their low-cut skin-tight dressed-to-kill outfits (admit it!) and your date won't be impressed. Women have eyes in the back of their head.

Overview

Avoid the night club at all costs, unless it's the only thing you both enjoy doing.

A SHOW

A show could be a concert, musical, stand-up comedy, play, etc.

Advantages

- It's extravagant, which can impress.
- It gives you and your date an excuse to dress up.
- It's a good way to use a spare ticket if you have one.

Disadvantages

- It can be expensive.
- You can't talk and get to know each other during the show.
- It's a fixed date. Not good if someone has to cancel.

Overview

This is a great idea if you have a spare ticket. Shows are expensive, and your date may not want to spend so much on a blind date. So don't suggest it unless you are willing to pay for the other person, or you know they want to go and pay for themselves.

Make sure you combine it with dinner or drinks afterwards. Better suited to a subsequent date.

SPORTS ACTIVITY

A sports activity could be anything from a workout at the gym to water skiing.

Advantages

- If it's something you both enjoy then you will have something to talk about all day.
- It's different.

Disadvantages

- You dress to the occasion. This may mean that you are not being seen at your physical best.

Overview

Only suggest this if you are both really passionate about that particular past time. Better suited to a subsequent date.

ADVENTURE

Adventure might involve taking someone flying, skydiving, canyoning, abseiling, rock climbing, or some other adventurous activity.

Advantages

- Many people will relish a new challenge.
- Some adventure sports can get real cosy.
- It's totally different. You'll earn big bonus points over the competition that just take them to dinner.

- You'll have plenty to talk about and plenty of time to do it.

Disadvantages

- If you don't know the other person's capabilities, things might get difficult.
- It usually requires the best part of a day, which limits it to basically weekends when most people may have other plans.

Overview

A great option if you have the time and inclination. Usually more suited to a subsequent date.

INTERNET ORGANISED SOCIAL EVENTS

Internet organised social events have been mentioned before as a possible place to meet people. Well it's also a place you can arrange to meet someone for a first date.

Advantages

- It provides a relatively safe environment to meet.
- It's a good excuse to bring a friend along for support.
- If it doesn't work out there are plenty of other single people to meet that night.

Disadvantages

- It does look rather tacky, inviting a blind date to a singles function. They will most likely think that you aren't all that serious about getting to know them, and that you are looking for an easy way out should things not work out.
- It's crowded and next to impossible to talk quietly and get to know them.
- Your date will be hit on, guaranteed, and you risk losing out to someone they think is better.

Overview

Don't suggest this unless the other person insists on it themselves.

ROMANTIC INTERLUDE

Here, we are talking about the candlelit dinner on a beach under the stars that you see in the movies.

Advantages

- Some women might be taken by it. Pull it off successfully and you could be on a winner.

Disadvantages

- It's not a done thing on a first date. There is serious risk of looking silly.
- Most guys have no idea how to pull something like this off, so unless you have the experience, don't attempt it.
- It usually requires a lot of planning and preparation. Remember it is a blind date; you could be wasting your time.

Overview

Avoid at all costs, unless you know (not just think) that the other person will be impressed. Save it for your first anniversary.

THE GREETING

The first moment you meet can be rather awkward. Do you shake hands, hug, kiss, or just stand several metres apart with hands in pockets and give a polite nod and grunt? Don't laugh, it happens!

There are some basic rules:

- The most common blind date greetings are the peck on the cheek and the handshake.
- Hugs are usually reserved for someone you have had quite a deal of communication with and know quite well. A simple, "Hi, lets meet." Email is usually not a huggable event. Still, some people are just the 'huggy' kind.
- You can't go wrong with the handshake. If they turn it into a hug or kiss then well and good. It's the safest option.

ACING THE GREETING

The greeting can often make or break the date. You only get one shot at the first impression, so make it count.

The key to acing the greeting is to *smile*. It puts people at ease and shows that you are friendly, and more importantly, not disappointed in your date. Showing excitement is another key. If you look and act excited, odds are it will rub off on the other person.

Whatever you do, resist the temptation to check them out from head to toe, it makes most people feel uneasy.

DOING THE RUNNER

It's not uncommon for someone to turn up for an Internet date, hide in the bushes to scope out their potential date, take one look and exit stage left. Obviously no one likes to be stood up, and this is certainly considered a rude thing to do.

Everyone gets nervous with blind dating at some point, so if you feel the urge to back out, just let your date know before hand, they will understand. Don't show up and then do a runner. If you go to the trouble of showing up, then go through with it, you owe it to yourself and the other person.

If the person you meet with doesn't quite fit your expectations, do try and see the date out and see how it goes. You never know, you might be pleasantly surprised and end up meeting a great friend or maybe more. Some of the best dates I have had from the Internet have been with people that I would never have pictured myself meeting if I knew what they looked like. Give everyone a chance.

SAFETY FOR GIRLS

While Internet dating is one of the safest ways of meeting people in today's society, many women are naturally apprehensive when it comes to meeting a blind date. It can never hurt to be over cautious, and there are many safety precautions you can take to make you feel more at ease.

Generally, just follow your instincts, use common sense and you'll be fine. Internet dating is fun and safe, relax and have a good time.

Once you've done it once you will wonder what all the fuss was about. Here are a few tips only for those that think they need them:

CHOOSING A SAFE MEETING PLACE

Everyone knows that it's safer to meet a stranger in a public place. The benefits are obvious. There are plenty of people around to help you, and one simple shout of help is all it usually takes. People are also less likely to make a scene in a public place. Some typical places include restaurants, cafes and bars.

GET AND LEAVE DETAILS

If you feel the need, by all means ask the guy to send you proof of who he is. For instance, ask him to scan in a copy of his driver's license and email it to you. Any genuine guy that wants a date is not going to say no. Leave these details with someone, along with where you are going and what time you are expected back.

MEET, DON'T GET PICKED UP

The less personal details your date knows about you the safer you will be. If they don't know where you live then they can't find you. If they don't know your number then they can't harass you on the phone. If they offer to pick you up, then politely decline and meet them at the destination. This is a popular option for most females.

CONTINGENCY PLANS

You should not have to sit through the 'date from hell'. If during the date you find the other person unpleasant and/or unbearable, then by all means leave using whatever means possible. Preferably by stealth, to avoid any confrontation.

If for instance you are at a restaurant, excuse yourself to the bathroom and ask the waiter for the nearest discreet exit. Don't just leave them hanging though, ask the waiter to inform them you "had to go."

GETTING A STAND-IN

Some people get so nervous at the prospect of meeting someone that they actually get a friend to stand in for them. You can get away with it if they haven't seen your photo, and if your friend is roughly (or exactly?) what you had described yourself as.

Not much point doing this though, your date won't be impressed and you risk losing an opportunity. Not to mention that your friend and your date could hit it off instead!

BRINGING A FRIEND

Many women feel the need to bring a friend along on the date for moral support and safety. If you choose this option then be sure to inform your date; don't just turn up friend in tow. The idea of a date is for the two of you to get to know each other, not for your date to get to know both you and your friend. This doesn't impress most guys, so do it only if you have to.

THE FAKE PHONE CALL

A great way to make you feel safe is to get a friend to call you at a predetermined time, say 30 minutes into your expectant date. This way you will have a ready excuse (sick grandmother or whatever) if you need to get out of there. Ensure that you have some form of coded signalling phrases arranged with your friend so that it's not obvious what is happening. For example: "Ok, yeah I'll do that first thing Monday," might indicate that everything is fine, then you can just say it was work calling you.

If you are getting along great with your date, then by all means tell them all about the fake call and you can both have a great laugh about it. This can be an excellent icebreaker if things are going a bit slowly.

GENERAL DATING TIPS

Here are some general dating tips that can make or break a blind date, or any date for that matter:

- Don't be late.

- Don't talk about ex-partners. Feel free to share and laugh about Internet dating stories to lighten the mood if you like, but don't mention ex-boy/girlfriends unless the other person brings it up. In which case don't linger on it.
- Keep good eye contact.
- Smell good. This is absolutely essential, body odour will kill any date within a 10 m radius.
- Dress for success, be it a black-tie dinner, coffee, gym workout or a bush walk. Don't save your best outfit for tomorrows date, today's date could be the one.
- Dress to the occasion. A thousand dollar suit and tie is a little over the top for the movies, and shorts and sandals don't cut it for dinner.
- Fill up with petrol before you leave. You don't want to have to stop to fill up when you are with your date, it can ruin the mood. It can also make you late and leave you smelling like a petrol pump.
- Make sure your car and/or apartment are clean inside and out if your date will see them. Bonus points are on offer here, no one likes a slob.
- Make sure you know how to get to the date venue and your dates place if needed, and know where to park. Allow an extra 15 minutes for every 30 minutes anticipated travel time. Being early is better than being *late*.
- Make sure you have your date's mobile number if you have one, and that they have yours.
- Carry plenty of cash.
- Do your homework. Read up on your date before you meet, and by all means take a copy of their profile or emails in your pocket for a last minute read. This way, instead of talking about yourself or being stuck talking about the weather you can ask more about certain things that they have mentioned before. This always impresses.
- End the date before they do. It can get awkward towards the end, and your date might start getting nervous about what your intentions are.

- Be polite and see the date out with a smile, even if your date is not what you expected. Although the two of you may not have hit it off, they may have friends who they can introduce you to.

Guy Specific Tips:

- Getting a female opinion on clothes and cologne can be of great benefit.
- By and large, most women are still impressed by a chivalrous male.
- Don't talk about yourself unless she asks, women are not at all impressed by guys that talk endlessly about themselves.
- Don't try and impress her with a fancy car or flashing money around. They rank very low on a woman's wish list.
- Be articulate and speak clearly.
- Get there before she does, and never keep a lady waiting.
- Always smile, girls like it, and it helps them to feel comfortable with you.
- Whatever you do, resist the temptation to look at anything but her face.

GIRL SPECIFIC TIPS:

- Most guys find being 'fashionably late' downright annoying, even if we do smile and say 'no problem'.
- Don't play 'hard to get', it puts the guy in two minds and makes him go elsewhere. All but the most persistent and confident male will give up long before a girl stops playing games.
- If you like a guy then show it. Don't throw yourself at him (unless you want to!) but show interest by smiling, flirting a bit, or accepting another date. It has to be obvious for him to get the point. Most guys have no idea how to read women, and they don't even try.
- Let him be a gentleman, and give him ample time to offer to pay. Some guys really like being chivalrous, it's not completely dead.

AFTER DATE ETIQUETTE

Over the years, some basic after date etiquette rules have evolved. They are generally accepted, but are by no means definitive.

IF YOU DIDN'T LIKE THEM

Email provides an easy way to let the person know that you are not interested. If you are not interested in seeing them again then it's considered good etiquette to email them and say, "thanks but no thanks." A simple, "*It was nice to meet you, but I don't think we are compatible. I wish you all the best,*" email takes no effort and will not leave the other person hanging.

Remember that the other person may have liked you, and might be looking forward to hearing from you. It's impossible to gauge what the other person thinks of you, so don't leave them hanging, it's not nice.

YOU LIKED THEM AND WANT ANOTHER DATE

If you liked the person then don't wait for them to contact you. Contact them first and let them know you are interested and would like to see them again. Don't waste any time either, do it as soon as possible. They could have another date lined up for tomorrow, or even that very day, you should get the word in first to improve your chances.

They can only turn you down, and it's better to know than to be left waiting for them to contact you. Girls, this means you too. If you like the guy then take the initiative and let him know, he will be flattered.

ASKING THEM OUT AGAIN BY EMAIL

Once you have met someone in real life, email instantly becomes a bit impersonal for further communication. Obviously if email is the only contact details you have then that's your only choice. But if you have their phone number then by all means use it.

SEND AN SMS MESSAGE

Most people will have a mobile phone these days, and if you have their number then an SMS message is a great way to thank them for the date or to ask them out again. It's a hip thing to do, and it's more personal than email. If you really want to surprise them, then send an SMS message a few minutes after you have parted company. They will be pleasantly surprised, and it will earn you big bonus points.

If you don't have a mobile phone yourself, then there are many ways to send an SMS message via the Internet. ICQ has this facility, and most mobile phone service providers have the facility available. Check out their websites or ask around the chat rooms or newsgroups. Some services are completely free, others will charge you a fee.

PHONE

They would not have given you their number if they didn't want you to use it right? So if you have it, give them a call.

The phone is the most personal way of asking out someone again. It does, however, have a couple of disadvantages. The first is that they will not be expecting your call; this puts all the pressure on them. If they are a 'phone' person then this isn't usually a problem, they will love to get your call. But not all people are comfortable talking on the phone, let alone talking about a second date. In this instance, an SMS message or email will make it easier for them, and give them time to respond.

VIRTUAL FLOWERS

Sending 'Virtual Flowers' or a greeting card is a novel (although

sometimes overused) way of saying thanks and letting them know that you like them.

There are many online greeting card and virtual flower site on the Internet, use them to your advantage.

Stay clear of the ones that generate an executable .EXE file, which you then attach to an email. Many people are reluctant to open email attachments for fear of virus infection, and rightly so. Most greeting card sites today send an email message to the recipient with a link that points to their greeting card online, these are the best option.

You can get almost any kind of greeting card you can think of, just make sure you don't pick one that's too corny. Virtual hugs are a good choice.

Another way to do this is to email them with your own poem or whatever, and a picture attached. It's a good idea to search the Internet for a nice JPG photo of some roses, teddy or whatever, and then save it locally so you can send it any time you need too. Guys, take note.

WHAT IF YOU DON'T GET A RESPONSE?

If you email them asking for another date and you don't hear back from them, then it usually means that they are not interested. By all means, try emailing again, or maybe sending an SMS message. But if you still don't hear back from them after that, let it be and get back online to find another date.

THE PROBING EMAIL

If you aren't the kind of person that likes to say things upfront, then by all means try sending a 'probing' email to gauge their interest. This involves sending a subtly worded email along the lines of, "It was nice to meet you, I hope we can do it again some time."

If they respond in the affirmative then it's a good indication that they are interested in a second date. But, of course, you will still have to ask them out again, as it's unlikely that they will. The only danger of this is that the other person can get the impression that

you are not interested, and that you are just too scared to turn them down.

This is not the best after date etiquette, try and learn to be upfront, you will get a much better response.

THE FUTURE OF INTERNET DATING

Here is a bit of educated crystal ball gazing:

As more and more people get connected to the Internet and learn how to use it, Internet dating will only continue to get bigger and more accepted. It's been happening since the mid 90s and will continue to do so, that's a certainty.

It is not out of the bounds of possibility that Internet dating in whatever form it will take in the distant future, might become the dominate way to meet people. It really does have that much advantage over traditional means.

THE PERSONAL PROFILE SITES

No prizes for guessing that the traditional personal profile sites will be around for the foreseeable future. They have too much going for them – low hardware/software requirements, convenience, anonymity, ease of use, availability, and the sheer number of them around. They have evolved little over the last 5 years, and will continue to simply refine what they already offer.

Some sites are already so large, that finding good quality profiles is getting harder and more time consuming. An alternative to this might be more 'exclusive' sites that charge for *placing* a profile and editing it for you. With strict rules on the minimum amount of information provided, much like traditional Introduction agencies. There can be many benefits to this, and it would almost guarantee a site full of quality profiles.

If it's free to respond to your profile then you will get plenty of

responses. But will this just swing the pendulum from window shoppers placing profiles to window shoppers responding to them? Time will tell.

CHAT ROOMS

Chat rooms are also here to stay. Chat software will continue to be refined and become more user friendly. Voice communication is already commonplace, and will continue to grow in popularity. More 'singles' and 'dating' channels will also appear.

VIDEO AND VOICE

Although Internet video and voice are pretty much standard on most computers these days, it will not greatly effect Internet dating as such for several reasons.

The primary reason being that it takes away the anonymity aspect, which is central to the success of Internet dating. People will get bolder in the use of these technologies as the years go by, but by and large they should not have much of an impact for many years to come.

INTERACTIVE VIRTUAL WORLDS

With the bandwidth of the Internet ever increasing to meet the demand, fully interactive video and voice 'chat rooms' and 'clubs' are bound to make some form of appearance.

These will only be of novelty value at first, but maybe in 5-10 years time the more adventurous Internet daters may find themselves visiting 'virtual clubs' to meet potential dates.

GADGETS

We are at the stage now where you can buy personal 'matchmaking' electronic key rings that contain a detailed profile of you and who you are looking for. You carry them around with you, the idea being when you pass someone in the street, the key rings 'talk' to each other by a wireless link and match up your respective profiles. If

both of you match then it alerts you. The advantages of Internet dating in a real world environment without being connected! A novelty item for sure, but an interesting application of electronic matchmaking.

Mobile phones are and will continue to be the most popular consumer electronics item. At the moment it is possible to access the Internet via some mobile phones. This technology will improve in the next few years, and will become mainstream. You will be able to access Internet dating services directly from your mobile phone. Whether or not that becomes a practical means of meeting people, only time will tell.

Who knows what the next 'killer application' or technology will be?

GLOSSARY

Bandwidth – The amount of information that can be transferred through an Internet connection at any one time. Specified as Bits Per Second (bps)

BMP (Bitmap) – An older image format than GIF, and really big in file size as it is not compressed. Storing images in this format keeps all the original picture quality at the expense of enormous file size. It is not supported by web browsers, but is popular with scanners and many other programs.

BOT – A program that automatically searches the Internet for information. For example, a SearchBot is a program that searches web pages, which are then indexed and added to a search engine.

EMAIL – Electronic Mail. Allows you to send and receive electronic messages almost instantly over the Internet.

Embedded Tag – A HTML command that when inserted into text displayed on a web page will allow formatting of the text or page.

Flame – An abusive email or message.

Flame War – A continued exchange of flame messages. Unwinnable against a Troll.

GIF – Graphic Interchange Format. An older image format. Not as versatile or small as JPG. Along with JPG, these are the two official image formats used on the web.

Handle – A users nickname in a profile or chat room.

HTML – HyperText Mark-up Language. The ‘language’ used to encode and display web pages.

ICQ – An ‘Instant Messaging’ program that allows instant communication, file sharing and more. ICQ is a play on words for ‘I Seek You’.

IRC – Internet Relay Chat. The first ‘chat room’ system available on the Internet. It is now very outdated but still popular with seasoned Internet users.

ISP – Internet Service Provider. A company that provides you with a connection to the Internet.

JPG – The most popular image file format used on the Internet. It stands for Joint Picture Group, after the group that developed it. JPG files are very small in size as they are compressed to around 1/10th the normal image bitmap size.

KB – KiloBytes. 1KB=1024Bytes. The basic unit of computer memory storage.

MB – MegaByte. 1MB=1024KB.

Netiquette – Internet etiquette. An informal set of rules that are usually followed in all manner of Internet use. For example – using ALL UPPER CASE is considered shouting, and hence bad netiquette.

Newbie – Someone who is new to something on the Internet.

Signature – Text that is automatically added to the bottom of an email or message. This can include the person’s name, email address, web site address, funny quote of the day, or anything else they choose to put.

SMS – Short Message Service. A system used to send text messages to and from mobile phones.

SNAIL MAIL – The regular postal service. So called because it's “as slow as a snail” compared to email.

Spam Mail – Unsolicited bulk email. Just like junk mail in your letterbox. They usually involve some money making scam, or are selling products or services.

Thread – A list of responses to a message.

Troll – Someone who deliberately says or does something provocative to illicit an enraged response, which often starts a Flame War. Only defence is to ignore them. They can be found in chat rooms and newsgroups.

Usenet – The proper name for newsgroups.

WWW – The World Wide Web. This is what most people know as ‘The Internet’. It is in fact a method used to navigate and interact with the Internet using a web browser. The WWW is what made the Internet popular and accessible to the average user.

POPULAR INTERNET ACRONYMS:

AFAIK	– As Far As I Know
AFK	– Away From Keyboard
AKA	– Also Known As
ASAP	– As Soon As Possible
ASL	– Age? Sex? Location?
B4	– Before
BF	– BoyFriend
BFN	– Bye For Now
BRB	– Be Right Back
BTDT	– Been There Done That
BTW	– By The Way

CU	– See You
CWOT	– Complete W aste O f T ime
F2F	– Face to F ace
FAQ	– F requently A sks Q uestions
FWIW	– F or W hat I t's W orth
GF	– G irl F riend
IC	– I See
IMHO	– I n M y H umble O pinion
IOW	– I n O ther W ords
IRL	– I n R eal L ife
J/K	– J ust K idding
LMAO	– L aughing M y A ss O ff
LOL	– L ots O f L aughter, or L aughing O ut L oad
OIC	– O h, I see.
OMG	– O h M y G osh
OTOH	– O n T he O ther H and
PIC	– P icture/photo
ROFL	– R olling O n F loor L aughing
SIG	– S ignature
THX	– T hanks
TIA	– T hanks I n A dvan C e
UR	– Y ou're
WB	– W elcome B ack
Y	– W hy

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David L. Jones is an Electronics Designer, Programmer & Technical Author from Sydney Australia. He has been intensely involved in Internet dating from its early days. Has explored, pioneered and researched many aspects of Internet Dating, contacted thousands of people, and helped others to find their soulmate along the way. After meeting countless people over the years via the Internet, he finally met his soulmate via a personals site on Valentines day 2001, whilst in the midst of writing this definitive guide.

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www.artofinternetdating.com