

Internet Dating: Advantages, Disadvantages and Advice

By Nicholas Boothman

Author of *How to Make Someone Love You Forever in 90 Minutes or Less*

In 1727, Helen Morrison, a lonely spinster in Manchester, England, placed the first lonely hearts personal, advertising for a husband in the local weekly newspaper. In response, the town mayor committed her to a lunatic asylum for a month. But in hindsight, Helen Morrison was a pioneer. Exactly 240 years later, and just a few miles away, the Beatles recorded "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." One year earlier, their "Eleanor Rigby" ("All the lonely people/Where do they all come from?") had half the world humming to Helen Morrison's dilemma. The Beatles were pioneers, too. Flash forward 30 years, and the explosion of online dating services has created a new way for lonely hearts to wait at the window, looking for true love. It sounds pathetic when you phrase it like that, but people sitting alone in front of their computer screens is only one side of the coin. On the other, I've heard about many happy couples who met online. Internet dating is here to stay, and it's only going to grow. Here are some thoughts to take into consideration. First we'll run through the advantages and disadvantages, then I'll suggest some maxims for making your search more productive.

Advantages

There's no question that everyone on the site is looking to meet someone. So, there's none of the awkwardness and uncertainty you have in some social situations, where a person's relationship status or even sexual orientation may not be obvious.

- By reading people's profiles closely, you can quickly weed out people whose interests, age, values, religion or whatever else don't appeal to you. Ditto when posting your own profile: Describing yourself honestly and being clear about your values and interests makes it more likely that someone compatible will write to you.
- Typically, a photo or even multiple photos will accompany a person's profile. The eyes truly are the windows of the soul, and being able to pair a face with the words in the profile definitely helps give you a clearer idea of the person you're writing to.
- The initial anonymity of the 'Net empowers shy people to approach people and make moves that they never would in person.
- You can meet people you wouldn't otherwise meet because your social and/or business circles don't intersect, or because you don't frequent the same places.

Disadvantages

- You can get hung up on Internet flirting: It's addictive and it's easy, and it's a short-term remedy for loneliness or boredom. But it's essentially blind: Our instincts about a person are based not just on what ideas they want to communicate, but on appearance, body language, facial expressions and tone of voice -- all subtleties that are lost when communicating via computer, no matter how many emoticons you use. Unless you get beyond the e-mail stage, the Internet will do you no good at all.
- Internet dating is limiting in the sense that you'll only be meeting folks who spend time on the Internet, which excludes a whole raft of people.

Advice

Here are a few good rules that should help those just getting their feet wet with Internet dating and also those who may have been using a service but haven't gotten the kind of results they'd hoped for.

- **All Internet dating sites are not created equal.** Just like bars or clubs, different sites tend to attract different types of people, but that isn't often obvious until you've read a number of profiles.

- **Make sure your profile serves you well.** You want your profile to reflect your best self, so invest the time to make it well written and lively. Also take the time to get a good photo of yourself. A survey commissioned by ThirdAgePersonals.com asked, "When looking at someone's online profile, what makes you want to contact them?" Men rated a great smile, a good sense of humor, and a good figure/physique as the top three turn-ons. For women, a good sense of humor and similar taste in music, movies, books, etc. took the top two spots, with strong family values and a great smile sharing third place. When it came to turn-offs, both men and women listed people looking to cheat, negative attitudes, couch potatoes and poor spelling or grammar as the worst offenses. And regarding the photo, the survey found that weight matters more to men than women; tacky clothes and a bad haircut matter more to women than men.
- **Be honest when creating your own profile, and keep your radar up when reading others'.** Many, many people have told me that when they finally meet someone they've been writing to, they find that person misrepresented him- or herself. Men seem to be the greater culprits in this regard. One woman I spoke with spent several weeks e-mailing with a man who claimed to be 40, but when they finally met he was closer to 60. His explanation? "Younger women didn't write to me when I put my real age." Well, duh! When reading others' profiles (and their e-mails, if you start to correspond), imagine you're reading their resume. Does anything read strangely? Any mysterious gaps? Does anything just give you a funny feeling about the person? As for creating your own profile, resist the urge to punch up your image. Instead, just say who you are and what you're looking for in life. After all, you want someone who'll be attracted to you, not to some mythical person you've invented.
- **Save yourself from your own imagination: Make a date as soon as you decide you might like someone.** Often, people will e-mail for weeks before one of them suggests a face-to-face meeting, and during that time they can build up mental images of each other that bear no resemblance to the real people. As I said above, a person's appearance, body language, facial expressions and tone of voice are the real primal elements of attraction, not whether your taste in movies and books match. So, when you meet someone online and feel a twinge of attraction, act. Ask the person for a drink or coffee, or to dinner if you've developed a particularly good connection. Consider this part of the first simple rule I've written about before: "Arrange dinner or an outing once a week." (Caveat: Because Internet dates are essentially blind dates, but without common friends who could vouch for the other person, it's wise to err on the side of caution, especially if you're a woman. Arrange your first encounter at a public place like a cafe, and don't accept a lift home until you've gotten to know the person well.)
- **Don't fall into window-shopper syndrome.** When you do a search and find 800 possible matches, it's very easy to start collecting people in your favorites folder, then end up never writing to any of them. Be bold: When you see someone whom you think you'd like to meet, write to him or her immediately. All it takes is a few sentences, because they'll be able to read your online profile to get the bigger picture. And remember, not everyone you write to will write back, just as you probably won't respond to everyone who writes to you. As in the real world, your odds of meeting people improve the more you put yourself out there.
- **Practice discretion.** Don't reveal your full name, phone number or address in the early stages of a relationship.

(Excerpted from the book *How to Make Someone Love You Forever in 90 Minutes or Less* by Nicholas Boothman. Published by Workman Publishing. All rights reserved.)

KINDS of FAMILIES

(excerpted from *Nontraditional Families: A Guide for Parents*, by Jan Hare & Lizbeth A. Gray, Extension Service, Oregon State University, 1994)

Married Nuclear Families ...In these families, both adults are the biological or adoptive parents of the children. There are three types of married nuclear families. In the traditional, married nuclear family, the man works outside the home while the woman works inside the home caring for the children. This traditional family is now a minority form in the United States.

In the second type of married nuclear family, the woman works outside the home and the man cares for the children. This constitutes only a small number of families.

In the third kind of married, nuclear family, both the husband and the wife work outside the home.

Cohabiting Families ...In this kind of family, the couple live together but are not married. Either one or both of them are the biological or adoptive parents of the children.

Single-Parent Family ...In this family there is only one parent in the home. Primarily because of high divorce rates and adults choosing not to marry, this is currently the fastest growing family form in America. Currently, 90% of these families are headed by women.

Blended Families and Stepfamilies ...These families are generally created by divorce and remarriage. In blended families biologically unrelated children live in the same household.

Grandparent-led Families ...Sometimes children are raised by their grandparents when their biological parents have died or can no longer take care of them. The number of these families has increased by 40 percent in the past 10 years. In addition, many grandparents take some primary responsibility for child care, particularly when both parents work.

Families in Which the Adult or Adults are Lesbian or Gay ... Children are sometimes reared by a lesbian or gay single parent or two gay or lesbian adults filling parenting roles. Adults may bring children from a heterosexual relationship to these families; other children may have been adopted or conceived by medical procedures, such as alternative (artificial) insemination.

Commuter Families ...In these families, the parents live and work in different towns or states. One parent provides the primary residence, and the other parent comes home for short periods of time, such as weekends and holidays. The number of commuter families is growing due to the difficulty of finding two professional jobs in the same city or to displaced rural workers requiring retraining for jobs in urban areas.

Foster Families ...Foster parents often provide a substitute family for children referred by the courts or government agencies. While problems with their parents or guardians are being resolved, the children may live in these families.

Community Families ...A community family is a group of people who live and work together and share the responsibilities of raising the children. One well-known community family that is popular in Israel is the kibbutz (meaning gathering in Hebrew).

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

1. Complete the following sentences with one of the expressions from the box in the correct form. Use a dictionary to help you if necessary.

go round in circles on the rocks heart's in the right place go out together split up with love at first sight fall out about off the deep end
--

- a) I'm very sorry to hear that Christine has _____ her boyfriend. What did they _____ ?
- b) When Sebastian and Julia first met it was _____. They have been _____ for years but have never married.
- c) Their relationship has been _____ for some time. I don't know why they still live together.
- d) We can't keep arguing like this. It's pointless. We're just _____ .
- e) He's all right. His _____ but unfortunately in a row he always goes _____ and gets very unpleasant.

2. Look at these words about weddings and explain the difference between the pairs of words.

bride / bridesmaid

groom / best man

fiancé / fiancée

bridal shower / bachelor party

to marry / to get engaged

matron of honour / godmother

religious ceremony / civil ceremony

reception / honeymoon

3. Fill in the gaps with the suitable words from the box which make word partnerships with the word *wedding*.

chapel diamond dress golden March ring shotgun silver vows white

- a) A _____ wedding anniversary is the date that is exactly 25 years after the date of a wedding.
- b) A _____ wedding is a wedding that has to take place immediately because the woman is going to have a baby.
- c) A _____ wedding is the date that is exactly 50 years after a wedding.
- d) A _____ wedding is the date that is exactly 60 years after the date when two people were married.
- e) A wedding _____ is a building used in the US for wedding ceremonies.
- f) A wedding _____ is a long dress, especially a white dress, worn at a traditional wedding.
- g) The Wedding _____ is a piece of music that is traditionally played after a marriage ceremony when the bride and groom start to walk down the aisle of the church.
- h) The woman was wearing a wedding _____ with diamonds circling a blue sapphire stone.
- i) Wedding _____ are the promises you make during your wedding ceremony.
- j) A _____ wedding is a traditional wedding at which the bride wears a long white dress.

4. Fill the gaps in these paragraphs with a suitable word from the lists on the right.

<p>Sarah has been going ¹ _____ with Bob for five years. When they first met at college they fell in love at first ² _____. Although they've been ³ _____ for nearly two years they still haven't fixed a date for the ⁴ _____.</p>	<p>1 back in out up 2 glimpse look sight view 3 promised engaged fiancés intended 4 funeral honeymoon marriage wedding</p>
<p>Their friends Anna and Tony ⁵ _____ last April – on the same date as Anna's parents 25th wedding ⁶ _____. Bob was Tony's ⁷ _____. They invited all of their friends and ⁸ _____ but not all of them could make it. Still there were over 60 ⁹ _____ and the ¹⁰ _____ afterwards went on till the small hours.</p>	<p>5 got married became married married each other married themselves 6 anniversary birthday celebration jubilee 7 best man bridegroom bridesmaid eye-witness godfather 8 next of kin in-laws parents relations 9 guests hosts invitations visitors 10 ceremony procedure reception service</p>

5. Match the expressions with the correct definitions.

Expressions	Definitions
<p>arranged marriage break-up of your marriage civil partnership common-law marriage domestic partner (AmE) engagement marriage certificate marriage of convenience mixed marriage newlyweds open marriage spouse to annul marriage to be born outside marriage to propose marriage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • marriage between people of different races or religions • the end of your marriage • to be born when your parents are not married • to ask someone to marry you • to officially state that a marriage no longer exists • a marriage in which your parents choose a husband or wife for you • a relationship that is considered to be a marriage because the man and woman have lived together for a long time • an official relationship between two people of the same sex, which gives them the same legal rights as two people who are married • an official document that proves that two people are married • a marriage for political or economic reasons, not for love • a marriage in which both partners accept that they will have sex with other people • a husband or wife • someone who you live with and have a sexual relationship with, but who you are not married to • an agreement between two people to marry • a man and a woman who have recently married

Just a piece of paper?
How the world deals with divorce.

IRELAND

Divorce does not really exist in Ireland. Legal separation is permissible, but separated couples cannot remarry.

BRITAIN

To divorce after less than two years separation you must prove unreasonable behaviour or adultery.

FRANCE

Quickie divorces by mutual consent have been available since 1975. If one party contests the case, divorce will only be granted in case of unreasonable behaviour or separation lasting more than six years.

RUSSIA

Legally, divorce is easily obtainable. In practice, the divorce rate is kept down because the severe housing shortage means couples that break up often have to continue living together.

CHINA

Divorce can be instantly granted by marriage registration office if both parties agree. If just one partner wants to end the marriage, divorce is granted after the failure of mediation attempts.

AUSTRALIA

Australian law has abolished the term 'divorce' to make the procedure less painful. Divorce is now a straightforward question of changing your civil status.

IRAN

The right of men to divorce wives by saying "I divorce you" three times still exists in fundamental Islamic countries. Others grant divorces through temple officials who will impose a cooling-off period.

ZIMBABWE

Legalised polygamy means the divorce rate is negligible. Men are entitled to simply add another woman to their family without bothering to divorce former wives.

ISRAEL

Under Jewish law divorce is easier than marriage. Before the wedding the husband must set aside a sum of money that will be used to care for his wife in case of divorce.

1. In which country:

- a) can men divorce their wives by saying they want to?
- b) is it hard to get divorced in less than two years?
- c) is it possible for couples to separate legally but not get divorced?
- d) must you normally wait six years if only one party wants the divorce?
- e) can you get divorced quickly if both parties agree?
- f) must men save money for possible divorce before marriage?
- g) can men have more than one wife?

2. Answer the following questions, according to the text.

- a) Why do couples in Russia often continue to live together after a divorce?

- b) What do Chinese couples have to do if only one partner wants to end the marriage?
- c) Why is divorce in Australia now easy?
- d) How do couples in Iran have to try to improve their relationship before getting a divorce?

3. Describe the divorce procedure in Ukraine. Is it easy to get divorced in Ukraine? Do you think the existing laws strengthen marriage in Ukraine? What would you change?

4. In groups, discuss the following questions and give reasons for your answers.

- a) What are the main reasons for getting married and what are the drawbacks?
- b) What is the best age to get married? Why?
- c) Is there too much social pressure on people to get married? Should other kinds of partnership be more acceptable?
- d) Should weddings be religious?
- e) Is it acceptable to have more than one partner at the same time?
- f) What makes a good marriage?
- g) Arranged marriages never work. Do you agree?
- h) Why do people get divorced? Is it too easy?
- i) What problems are there when people decide to get divorced?

What is important for a good marriage?

Expressing opinions

Which of these, in your opinion, are very important, quite important and not important for a happy marriage? Give your arguments.

- Being honest with each other
- Having clear roles of who does what (e.g. the husband does the DIY, the wife does the cooking)
- Sharing the same sense of humour
- Having children
- Liking the same music
- Being faithful to each other
- Allowing each other their space (e.g. freedom to go out with friends but without their partner)
- Having a pre-nuptial agreement
- Being from the same religious backgrounds
- Being from the same social class
- Being educated to the same level
- Sharing the same political beliefs
- Having your own place to live
- Having a joint bank account
- Being sensitive to each other's needs
- Having a good physical relationship
- Sharing the same hobbies and interests
- Liking each other's friends
- Liking each other's families
- Remembering important dates (e.g. birthdays, anniversaries)
- Being able to compromise
- Enjoying the same television programmes
- Spending a lot of time together
- Telling each other everything (not keeping secrets)