

## Online Dating

*Love, exciting and new / Come aboard, we're expecting you.*  
Paul Williams and Charles Fox

Just as the television show of old *The Love Boat* promised, this age's version of that sea-bound love romp, the Internet and online dating, suggests that love is indeed in store for the adventuresome individual willing to take a step in its direction. However, despite what yesteryear's Saturday evening television would have you believe, you do not pack your bags and purchase your tickets to set sail on the winds of love. Today there is no longer a need for questing bachelors and bachlorettes to roam about in search of meeting places for other like-minded romantically challenged souls (a.k.a singles parties). Instead, these days we search not by boat or train or even by standard bi-pedal locomotion. In fact, we barely move a muscle because today we blast off from computer chairs into the great big black of space, cyberspace that is.

That's right, with the advent of the World Wide Web you don't even have to leave the comfort of your living room to meet and greet others who are searching for a new

friend, a fresh face, a confidant, or that special someone. Or so the advertisements would have us believe. Being just a bit curious and just a bit single, and aided by a technologically savvy friend, I decided to play the part of guinea pig and venture into this great-unknown world of online dating that has carved out the digital path to romance.

We decided that the first giant step for this man's kind was to find the lucky site that would be our launching pad. We found the choice of sites to be virtually unlimited. In fact, it seems that, whatever your taste, the Web will satisfy it. Not only did we come across the "middle-of-the-road" type of sites geared mostly towards the (and we cringe to say this) "typical" person, but we also found a multitude of sites that cater to particular lifestyles. For instance, we stumbled upon a site dedicated to the gothic-and-alternative lifestyle. There were also religious based sites for people of Christian and Jewish faiths. Moreover, for the "traditionalists" out there who prefer to find their mates the old-fashioned way, you could even choose your bride by mail! After careful consideration we decided that our best chance of success was to choose three of the most popular "middle-of-the-

road" sites with the greatest number of members. We chose Yahoo! Personals, Matchmaker and eharmony.

Generally, the first step in joining an online dating service entails setting up a user profile, usually free of charge. The method and line of questioning differs slightly depending on the site, but, for the most part, they all consist of a formulaic question-and-answer type procedure designed to flesh out the "real you".

I must admit this task left me feeling somewhat silly. The idea that I am being asked to give my opinion on no one other than me and my personality seems to me a bit biased. After all, I am referring to traits perceived essentially by the public and not by me. I'm given free reign to convince a total stranger of something that may or may not be true. I liken the feeling to that of the used car salesperson that has one "unbeatable" deal on this "beauty" of a car. He just happens to forget to mention that it stalls over 50 miles per hour and that the odometer has been rolled back a few times. This is essentially how these Websites establish their members.

The profile forms the interface between you and the online dating community. Members then set their search criteria and press a query button, seeking to match the

criteria to information other members have provided in their profiles. The eHarmony site with its excruciating 500-question form is the exception. Based on this lengthy process eHarmony "scientifically" eliminates 99.7% of the member base and delivers to you by email only those handpicked (so to speak) profiles of candidates who the site's scientists determine would make the perfect match, thereby doing all of the legwork for you. You cannot search member profiles as in other sites however; to communicate with these "perfect" matches requires payment. Because we are but two poor college students, eHarmony has therefore been summarily dismissed as an option.

Whether or not members frequently view a profile depends not only on the parameters that the searcher selects but also on how the profile is packaged. The heading, for instance, should work in much the same way as a newspaper headline does. It should be short and sufficiently eye-catching to grab the attention of passersby who may buy into it. We found that the majority of headings were much the same. Most were along the lines of "princess seeking prince charming", or "fun-loving gal seeks the one" all shamelessly promoting themselves, which left us with the feeling of insincerity. We decided not to

beat around the bush and chose the heading: "Shameless Self-Promoter seeks..."

We decided to offset the absence of a picture in the profile with the thousand words (or less in this case) that a picture is supposedly worth. Apparently, the going rate for words has dropped somewhat, for the results were less than stellar. In three weeks time I had amassed a grand total of two viewers of my profile, with not so much as a nod in my direction, never mind an email.

The next option was to include a favorable picture. Luckily, I found one and uploaded it into the site's databases. The approval process for pictures usually takes a day, just to make sure that the images are "decent". A week after the photo's approval I was contacted by a woman in the area who said she agreed with the nonsensical personal gibberish that was written in the profile, I'm assuming the picture didn't have much to do with it. . . . but I could be wrong. We communicated fleetingly with little email messages in order to get to know each other, but to no avail. My colleague and I hypothesized that a chat session would improve things but some time has passed and now I feel awkward contacting her. The important thing was that I met someone new, albeit a brief encounter, and

all thanks to the Internet, which has reinvented the social makeup of dating. It has exponentially increased the possibility of meeting that ideal someone; a prospect which, and we're sure those with more finicky tastes will attest, was as dark and empty as the great unknown.