



EVERYTHING
YOU NEED TO
KNOW ABOUT

ONLINE DATING

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHERE EVERYONE ELSE IS?

JAY JORDAN

Everything you need to know about

ONLINE DATING

Every tip you will ever need.

How to avoid every mistake that I made.

One man's extensive journey and eventual success within an amazing and sometimes strange cyberworld.

By Jay Jordan

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Exhausting ... **Rasputin** (*St Petersburg*)

Thanks to this book, I'm finally meeting the right women ... **Ron Jeremy** (*Leedsville UK*)

More research than a space program – more fun than Lady Palmer and her five lovely daughters... **Neil Armstrong** (*Invernot*)

I finally understand men... **Oprah Smith** (*Biggleswade*)

For '*she that owns the chickens*'

This book is simply dedicated to every member of the human race who has found themselves bored at one point or another or those who have wondered where everyone else is.

Hundreds of proven tips for successful online dating

Understand why dropping the **Full Stop** will get people talking to you

Understand the power of the word **LADY**

Don't waste time **learning from scratch!** I've done it for you and will share everything I know.

Avoid every mistake that I made (and that's quite a few).

To meet the person you have always dreamed of ... ***then start reading.***

Table of contents

[Why and Thanks](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter one – Why?](#)

[The good old days](#)

[Why I started using dating sites](#)

[Semaphore](#)

[Contrafibularity](#)

[It's not rocket science](#)

[Getting a reply](#)

[99% of men have no idea what to say](#)

[Is internet dating dangerous?](#)

[Free or pay?](#)

[Site Features](#)

[Search](#)

[Who's looked at me?](#)

[Messages](#)

[Chat, IM or live chat](#)

[Video chat](#)

[New members](#)

[Hiding profile](#)

[Others](#)

[My recommended sites](#)

[Freedating.co.uk](#)

[Smooch.com](#)

[Oasis.com](#)

[Pof.com](#)

[Badoo.com](#)

[Specialist sites](#)

[Recommended sites](#)

[Let's get started – screen name](#)

[Your picture. make or break](#)

[Hobbies and profiles](#)

[Your profile](#)

[My first profile](#)

[The long-distance remark](#)

[The dreaded ex](#)

[Adding to your profile](#)

Mantesh

[Do people actually fall for this shit?](#)

[Spot a scammer](#)

[The open question](#)

[The scary profile](#)

[Why did this new profile work?](#)

[Profiles that put me off](#)

[Do people actually read profiles?](#)

[The use of the smiley lol](#)

[Your first message](#)

[The use of txt speak](#)

[Take your time](#)

[What do other men write?](#)

[Our fake female profiles](#)

[The replies](#)

[Tip: the full stop](#)

[Lady with no picture?](#)

[New members](#)

[Rules on who you should message](#)

[Am I being ignored? how pushy should i be?](#)

[Honesty and how to say “sorry, but i’m not interested”](#)

[Opening message](#)

[The lady](#)

[Text messages and the mobile number](#)

[Home numbers](#)

[Home address](#)

[Personal information](#)

[Long-distance relationships \(ldrs\): the ups and downs \(mainly motorways\)](#)

[The ldr and the pain I caused](#)

[The upside](#)

[The make-or-break decision?](#)

[Sense and sensitivity](#)

[The ever fading art of conversation](#)

[The first call](#)

[Date safety \(that’s your safety, not theirs\)](#)

[The date](#)

[The beauty and the beast](#)

[Do not underestimate yourself](#)

[Your children](#)

[Baggage](#)

Mantesh

[From a lady's point of view](#)

[The needle and the haystack](#)

[Txt sex](#)

[Webcam](#)

[Sex and the sights](#)

[Fuck buddy](#)

[Sex friend contract / fuck buddy contract](#)

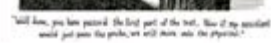
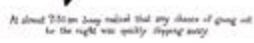
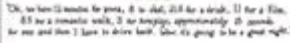
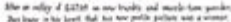
[Leaving](#)

[A story or a warning](#)

[I'm off now](#)

[Thank you](#)

Illustrations



Why and Thanks

I don't know where the Holy Grail is and I don't have a map to Atlantis, but I do know my way around dating sites. I believe that, by following my advice, success is simple, no matter who you are.

Why does this book exist? I was asked to write the following pages by numerous people who at one point in their lives took my advice and joined the slightly strange world of online dating. They had the time of their lives and never looked back. Many are now in steady relationships and living happy lives. Without realising it, it was my input and advice that helped them on their journey. I never knew how much I had learnt and how much my knowledge would help them get to where they are today. It was mainly these people that asked me to write this book, but also those who had become disillusioned by the ever-growing number of clueless members that seemed to frequent the dating sites.

Introduction

Do people actually pick up a book in a shop and read the introduction? I never thought they did, but you my dear reader have. I know that when I pick up a book I open it halfway through and read a paragraph or just check the type size to ensure there's more than one word on each page. And I know of someone who will actually read the last page, which still amazes me. I spent some time in a very popular bookstore watching what most people actually do when first picking up a book, but was escorted out by security before I had gathered any information.

So, here we are: you, me, a book about internet dating sites and a question that I am sure is on your mind ... "Is this book for me?"

Let me save you some time and money, as I admit this book isn't for everyone.

If you are under 20 years of age and have a very active social and sex life, then surely you have the wrong book in your hands and you might be better off in the sexual health section.

If you have so many phone numbers from the opposite sex in your mobile phone that you have to keep updating the size of your memory card so as to make room for more, then take a step back and walk away. Pocket organisers are on the left.

If you are a six foot Adonis with rippling biceps and an eight pack who teaches tennis to rich and very bored ladies in his free time, then let's face it – you probably have a very full life and can swagger away chortling. I would try the early-learning section if I were you.

If you are amazingly good-looking, a member of a popular boy band and have women sleeping outside your bedroom window, then surely you can afford to buy this anyway and don't need to consider anything. In fact, I'm surprised you didn't get your PA to buy it for you. You don't need it though, and if I were you, I would save my money for when you are older and working two nights a week in a holiday camp. That day will come.

If you believe (like many) that internet dating is for losers, then why pick this book up in the first place? There must be some doubt in your mind or at some intrigue as to what goes on? If not, then put this down and find a book called *1,000,000 Pick-up Lines* by Chuck Junior and head to the nearest pub. But I can guarantee that you will be missing out on a world that is very popular and quite simply unbelievable.

If, like me and the rest of the 99.9% of the population, you do not fall into any of the above categories, then maybe this book is for you. It will give you a head start into the massive and complicated world of online dating, which is something I never had and a world where I really did learn the hard way. It became a world where my friends would sit with their mouths open as I relayed snippets of information to them and a world where I was actually scared to open my door in case I found one of my stalkers standing there in her underwear (not good when you have family over for dinner). For me it was just myself and my faithful laptops (always had an array in case one went down) and a lot of hard and fast learning. I didn't always get things right, but I kept a record and studied every single meet or message that went either right or wrong. In the end I managed to take the wrong part out of the

equation 99% of the time, but not always. No-one is infallible.

I dedicate this to every person who has sat and stared at their mobile phone and wondered why a certain person hasn't phoned back or at least sent a text.

I dedicate this to every person that lives in the real world and has decided to make it slightly more interesting.

But above all, I dedicate this and a whole world of knowledge to anyone who has sat at home and wondered where all the single people are.

Let's start where most things usually do – at the beginning.

Chapter one – Why?

There is no such thing as a book for everyone. If there was, I'd love to have written it. This book is essentially about my experiences, embarrassing and eventually very successful, on internet dating sites and not much else. Is it a guide? I like to think not, but I do believe that despite my hardest efforts it will eventually become one. It isn't just a step-by-step manual like the one that came free with your new car or can be seen propping up many tables at car-boot sales, as not many manuals give real-life examples of when things go wrong and why. It deals with all aspects of the dating game from the initial joining to the eventual date. It explains the ups and downs of long distance relationships and explores the benefits and pitfalls of "friends with benefits". It covers everything from the initial profile to the date itself, and I have used real life examples where I dare. You have to remember that some of these ladies still know where I live, so occasionally I have had to proceed with caution.

Online dating is a massive and complicated subject, but in the following pages I have tried to simplify things and explain them in everyday terms. If you have prior knowledge of how things can go wrong, then at least you are forearmed and can attempt to pre-empt most situations. I had to learn the hard way.

I think this book will appeal to people of either sex, even though I was a man (and at last check still am) while exploring dating sites and it has been written from a male point of view. The drafts were examined by a female friend and she went on to read them time and again, not wanting to wait for an updated version to be sent to her. I maintain there is interest in this book for anyone who is a member of a dating site or thinking of becoming one.

The bound pages that you hold in your hand at this moment may not be for you, however. You may be too busy dating perfect examples of the opposite to ever get time to read it. But if, like the rest of the real world, this isn't the case, then this book will provide insight into a very large and ever-growing community of people. It was a world that often made me laugh and one that frequently shocked me. It was a far different world from the old chat rooms that I remember.

Online dating is fast becoming a very popular way of meeting people. With busier lifestyles and work commitments, many are finding it almost impossible to find free time and get out of the house, let alone meet people and make new friends. Many now spend their evenings in front of a computer screen chatting to people, while increasing numbers are joining dating sites. I have seen the rise in popularity of certain sites and some have a massive database of members. In a nutshell, it's a progressively fashionable way of making friends and meeting prospective partners. There's a whole new world out there awaiting new members and fresh blood.

The good old days

For many the thought of spending the night in the local wine bar, club or pub hoping to meet someone is outdated. Why sit there all night wondering if someone is available to date? I myself once plucked up the courage to talk to a lady in a bar. We got on, had a drink and spent a great 30 minutes chatting and laughing before her boyfriend turned up and she left with him after actually shaking my hand. A real life “oh bugger” moment. Online dating is different, and with the touch of a button you can be presented with a whole database of singles (hopefully anyway). Almost everyone now has an internet connection within their home and on their phones. According to some, it’s the “age of communication”, although I’m sure those that say this have never lived in a signal-free area as I did for some time.

A while back, if I said to someone that I was a member of a couple of dating sites, I would’ve got a decidedly weird look varying from horror to sympathy. The words “internet dating” almost screamed “desperate”. I could never work this out, as there were stranger things that were popular, such as “speed-dating”, “singles nights” and “classifieds”. The thought of speed-dating still makes me smile, and if I was to have tried this medium, then I pity the lady as I can talk for Britain. Imagine how I’d be if I had a time limit on my waffling.

I have discussed internet dating with many people over the years, trying to assess what others thought of this medium. I came across many conflicting opinions, some of which were quite shocking. One lady friend of mine described internet dating as “a medium to use and abuse women”, as if they were forced to join and then used by serial daters (someone who isn’t looking for a relationship but likes to date a lot). I was to find out that this was to be true in some cases but not solely male instigated.

I have talked to others who have giggled nervously and quickly changed the subject, leaving me to believe they were secretly members themselves but too afraid or embarrassed to admit it. One guy actually laughed at me and called me “sad”, but as I’ve never been one to back down on a subject, we spent an amazing evening swapping stories about our dating experiences with the opposite sex, much to the delight of those around us. In the end it came down to mobile phones at dawn and so I simply switched mine on and let the waiting messages roll in. Many said, “Where are you tonight?” which proved my point as to who had a more active social life. His mobile was silent, and even though he sat willing it to ring, it never did. I have never been one to brag and that’s not the reason I am writing this, but I will argue for dating sites as I know they work, and I know they bring a lot of pleasure and company into the lives of people who otherwise would have very little.

I have a very close friend who lives on his own and doesn’t get out much except for work. He works alone. He comes home every evening and switches on the TV for another night of boring soap operas. He will go to bed at the same time every evening, and the next morning wake up and do it all over again. Surely his world would be a better one if he came home, switched on his laptop and had a message from a lady asking, “How was your day?” Wouldn’t his evening be better spent building a relationship with someone rather than watching everyone mess theirs up on the nightly soap operas? For him, internet dating would be a whole new world, and provide the company that he needs in his life. We all need company, and the company of the opposite sex, even in cyberspace at first, is a wonderful thing. I will get him online even if I have to set it up while he’s out. His reason for not

being on dating sites is simple: He believes that it's for people who have no social skills in the real world and are desperate. This couldn't be further from the truth, but I admit that some members could fine tune their approach while for others a complete overhaul is needed. He will be the first person to get a copy of this book.

Another group I talked to constantly about dating sites was single parents. Now here we have a category of people who are very mixed about their thoughts, but all seem to come to one conclusion: Internet dating has its uses and where you go with it and what you use it for is up to you. Some will go all the way and date constantly until they meet someone, while others will use it for contacting and making friends. The sites do actually come alive after eight o'clock once the children are in bed. Online dating is full of single parents, as I am sure you can imagine. These are men and women that find themselves on their own every night when their children are in bed asleep. I believe that for these people (like myself) there is no better way to meet and talk to others, even if it is only online at first. It's a way of conversing with like-minded adults and having a few laughs at the same time.

So why was internet dating shunned by some? Why was it taboo (and to some still is)? I believe it's a fear of the internet and the bad press it receives from different news groups. It's the "sad" stigma that is attached to dating sites, which is very outdated and wrong in my opinion. They are, however, entitled to their opinion, although I know they are wrong. Internet dating gives us a choice as to where we meet people. It's another medium that in this day and age works well. We are all capable of going to the pub or into social situations, but it's a gamble as to whether we will meet someone. Not everyone has the courage to walk up to a stranger and strike up a conversation in an everyday situation. The fear of rejection or embarrassment is too great sometimes. Internet dating takes away any fear a person may have and can be done from wherever you are at the time, and at least you know that the ladies you are looking at are single (or at least should be). I admit that body language says a lot about a person and internet dating does not give you this advantage, but it will when you start dating.

Why I started using dating sites

I joined the sites not through choice but through boredom. I did however choose to hit the “join” button, so I suppose I can’t blame it all on boredom. I soon found myself in a very strange world of, for want of a better expression, “single women”. Anyone who has joined an online dating site will agree – it’s a strange place at first. If you have not yet taken the plunge, then I suggest you do it as soon as you can, just so that your normal life will seem 100% normal.

I will never know if I was successful with women when I was younger. My friends had a tendency to lie a lot, something they still do when on the subject while propping up the bar of the local pub, so I do not have a comparison. There were long periods of my life spent without a girlfriend, so as for success, I now believe I was a complete failure.

I never dated (what was dating?) as it wasn’t really the “done thing” within my circle of friends. I was of the naive, rushed, sweaty palmed “Do you want to go out with me?” brigade, and with those nerve-wracking words said and the answer being “yes” (I always checked with her friends first to ensure her answer was of the positive kind), that was that. I do remember one date (if that’s what it was) where I got so drunk that I suddenly found myself at home and without said date. I think I must have forgotten I was with her and travelled back home on auto-pilot. Needless to say I never heard from her again and had to endure a long lecture from my father who had received a rather upsetting telephone call from the mentioned date. I think this is where my fear of dating came from – not the date itself but the talk my father gave me. I was terrified that it would happen again.

Many of my friends would spend their time at the local Ritzy. They would prop up the bar every weekend and dance badly on an under-lit dance floor (10ft by 10ft). This just wasn’t for me and further narrowed my chances of meeting someone. I suppose I was lucky enough to have missed out on a lot of awkward mornings, STDs and being the recipient of a thrown drink.

I did spend some of my time during my earlier life in relationships that eventually became friendships when the spark got soggy, something that frequently happened.

I was also married for a few years until Poland joined the European Union and the marriage certificate was no longer needed. A disaster that eventually led to divorce court, my bank to clear out my very small account before she did, and eventually, dating sites. I suppose I have something to thank her for.

It can be safely said that I was useless when it came to the opposite sex, but unlike a lot of people I know why.

It’s not a big problem, but it’s enough to have left me with a few awkward situations, such as when a lady I thought was a friend turned around and said, “I’ve been dropping hints for two years that I want to be with you, and you haven’t picked up on one. Didn’t the ‘I love Jay’ t-shirt spell it out? Or did you really think I enjoyed wearing that around Oxford St for the day?”

I can't, and never have been, able to read signals, simple as that. On a psych front we could go on all day about how I'm afraid of rejection or how I have low self-esteem (both probably right), but that's it in a nutshell. A lady friend could have her feelings for me written on the side of the Goodyear blimp (by the way, whatever happened to those?) and I would smile and say, "Wow, thanks for that, now how's your love life?" and I would genuinely mean it.

I suppose that some of my lady friends took my innocence/stupidity as a bold brush off which made them even more determined to break through my thick exterior, but it was all just me and my slightly strange inability to read signals of the obvious nature. In the real world I still have this trait and always will, but it doesn't matter for three reasons:

1. Internet dating is not the real world.
2. I am now in a very happy relationship with a very lovely lady who I met on a dating site. She is blunt and to the point, so the usual hints are few and far between. I will of course talk more of Louise and how we came to be later.
3. I was to finally find a way of talking to ladies that gave me the time I needed to construct an answer and read between the lines.

I have always loved words and would be found every day with a crossword (cryptic of course) happily trawling through dictionaries and the odd thesaurus (odd because they are). Words fascinate me. They can be turned and twisted, they have so many different meanings (probably the cause of my signal problem), and as everyone knows they can change a person's life in a second. They have the ability to create such an impact on someone that they can cause total happiness or, at their worst, death. A simple sentence can mould a person's future and all those around them. If you don't believe me, then think of three simple sentences: "Sign here", "I'm sure it's a right turn next" and "Let's ask at that old, secluded cottage."

With my love of words I was to find a medium that suited me so much that I spent a day kicking myself for not joining earlier – I had discovered internet dating.

Earlier I said it was boredom that was to sign my fate, but that's not the whole story. With my marriage happily sailing towards the edge of the world, I was sitting at home one day with my wonderful daughter, discussing the merits of Children's TV CBBC, when I found a lump in my neck.

A lump in one's throat is apparently OK when discussing sad things with one's child, but CBBC and a lump in the neck is not normal. I was soon diagnosed with cancer and went on to be prodded, poked, told what to do, made to stay in bed and generally thrown from pillar to post – a good introduction to internet dating.

After nearly a year of cancer treatment I was free to stagger from the halls of Bartholomew's Hospital, to be taken to a chair in a cottage in the country to recover. I moved back in with my parents, who spent many hours helping me back to the land of the living. Thank you to everyone at Bart's and of course thank you mum and dad. It was at this point that the boredom kicked in. My parents' very nice cottage is also a very remote one, and it wasn't long before I reached for the laptop. Playing cards was alright for a while. Looking at pictures was fine. But eventually I ended up online and looking for something to do. I soon realised that cyberspace isn't a bad place to be, but it hardly gets you out the door. After some thought I guessed dating sites could. I should at least look ... and so I did.

It's not rocket science

I know that for every person on the dating sites, there is someone on them who is a perfect fit. Call them a soulmate, partner, whatever you feel comfortable with. Dating sites are the simplest and sometimes most exciting places to meet new people. There are so many people who want to be in a relationship or just want new friends and it's very simple to break the ice if you have the knowledge.

It's not rocket science; but it's just so much more than sending a message containing your mobile number and a kiss. Maybe this works for some, but for me it wasn't how things were done. After getting to know someone online, I did eventually give out my mobile number many times, which in the end drove me and those around me crazy. It went from a nice quiet little silver box to a shaking, ringing banshee ... and I loved every minute of it. My email went from something I checked to see

who I was being spammed by to quite a scary list of contacts. It was hard to keep up with all that was going on, and some nights I would fall into bed exhausted, only to wake up and start again. What a great life.

I have always had a problem with dating books or self-help books. I watched a video made by a guy who spoke for ages about how he could attract and date any lady he wished and how “you too” could have his knowledge for a small sum. In which case, why didn’t he find a very attractive, rich lady, date her, marry her and retire. That seems like common sense to me.

I have a personal reason for writing this book, and that’s because I don’t have much else to do. I’m now in a very happy relationship and I’m no longer spending my time on the dating sites. Also I’m not 100% better from my cancer treatment, so breaking rocks for a living isn’t an option.

If you think that the man sitting here writing this is a good looking guy who has the gift of the gab, then please think again. I have extensive scarring around my lower face and tend to avoid mirrors at all costs. My ego became non-existent after my treatment and surgery, and I really did believe I was to spend the rest of my time single. I was so very wrong.

I found a medium that suited my lifestyle and the way I was feeling. I remember my first reply as though it was yesterday, and I remember the good feeling I had for hours after. I remember the excitement I felt when reading messages and the excitement of dating. I remember it all.

As I sit in Louise’s cottage and think back, it was certainly a long journey that led me here, but it was to be a journey where I learnt a very valuable lesson: do not dismiss English when picking your subjects at school. My love of words was to help me over and over, and it was something that could be used to my advantage while writing messages and reading profiles. I could quite literally read someone’s profile and take the exact information I wanted to send a message, get a reply and then use the reply to continue correspondence and eventually a meet. I already knew that words are very two-dimensional and can be read many different ways, but even this could be used to strike up conversations with ladies.

I do admit that I had an awful time with a lady from Eastern Europe who took everything I wrote in completely the wrong way, and after a lot of pigeon chat, I had to give up and wish her every bit of luck for the future. Maybe her laptop had a problem with reading the letters “L” and “F” because the reply I got was somewhat nasty. Promising myself to stay away from people who had joined to further themselves with “conversational English” and “anger management”, I continued. It wasn’t long before I started to break things down, analysing and evaluating every part of each site I was a member of. I began to study messages, profiles, pictures, etc. and realised I had finally found a subject I was very interested in.

Getting a reply

I also started to realise that getting a reply wasn't as difficult as I first thought it would be. All it took was the ability to actually read the lady's profile (not many do and I have proof in later chapters) and then of course to choose the correct words to use as an opening message. If the profile they looked at was well presented and well thought out then a reply was certain. All this made perfect sense to me, and it was only after a phone call to a friend of mine that I realised I was having more luck than most – if luck was what it was. He then ran off to number crunch (drink beer) and to speak to other male members, whereupon he realised that I was doing something right for the first time in my life.

I was by this point spending almost every waking hour talking to various ladies from around the UK and answering messages. I could be found sitting at a desk with two laptops going while running five sites at once. And that's without the time spent dating. (This is proof that, given the correct incentive, men can in fact multi-task.)

Picture this. For the first time in my life I didn't need to read signals, as it was pretty obvious that I was chatting to or meeting someone with the potential to take things further. I was well and truly in the dating game, and I was having more fun than ever before.

I can honestly say that I thought every guy out there was doing the same as me ... But after long chats with many women, they were to tell me different.

99% of men have no idea what to say

According to those women I spoke to, I was “refreshing” and “such a break from the idiots on here”. I was to dig deeper and deeper to satisfy my own curiosity and was shocked to realise that many men had absolutely no idea what they were doing. Not all, but a high percentage. This of course wasn’t a bad thing, as it left the way clear for me, and I was happily living in a very busy world.

I had become the 1%.

Is internet dating dangerous?

If (like some) you believe that internet dating is a “dangerous place”, then let’s take a typical Saturday night at the local pub as an example. A group of women end up sharing drinks with a group of men. They get on, get drunk and end up continuing to drink at one of the party’s houses. A great night is had by all, and one couple that has been talking all night decides to continue to date afterwards. This is by no means uncommon and the swapping of phone numbers is a normal thing to do. This is a totally acceptable way of meeting a prospective partner, and in fact, swapping phone numbers is sometimes done within hours of meeting or less. But is this a safer way to meet people than internet dating? Surely not.

At least online you have the ability to take things at your own pace. You know that the member is using an IP address which can be traced if necessary, or even more simply you can just block any person you no longer wish to speak to. With only a mobile and future dates lined up, you have nothing more than the person’s phone number – and this could be a pay-as-you-go, which is not registered and cannot be traced. You know nothing about the person whatsoever, except what they tell you. I have found that when two people meet in a mainstream situation then there is a lot of information given away, ranging from a person’s address to where they work. Is this safer? With internet dating the control is much greater and they do not have your home address or anything else. There’s no chance of them shouting their undying love from your front garden at three in the morning (unless you want them to).

Then there’s meeting someone at a friend’s party. Quite possibly “a friend of a friend”. Many people have gone on to date and live a happy life together from a chance meeting such as this. But what exactly do you know about the person at the outset? Not much. I believe that internet dating is as safe as you make it, and by following simple rules, it can be far safer than meeting someone in a pub or club, etc. It’s also a lot cheaper than propping up a bar all night and talking to yourself.

There are many ways to meet a possible partner, from work to a chance meeting which could happen anywhere. There’s an element of chance in every situation. All hold risks and all have their pitfalls, but at least with online dating it’s easier to keep control and take things at your own pace.

I dated a lady for a while and we got on well. When the subject came up as to what we would say when asked, “How did you meet?” she was horrified that I wanted to tell the truth – that we met online. She believed her friends would be worried for her safety and would judge me immediately. Judge me on what? We met on a dating site and not in the classifieds of *Perverts Weekly*. We had

talked for months and she knew every detail of my life. She had talked to my daughter and even knew the registration of my car, my address and my phone numbers. She knew more about me than if we had met in a pub on a Saturday night. She was comfortable with who I was, but still was not prepared to tell the truth. We had to make up a crazy story which was complicated and made me far from comfortable. The relationship did not last as it was based on a lie from the outset.

It is my opinion that internet dating is one of the safest ways of meeting prospective partners. It's as controllable and safe as you want it to be. It is a wonderful way of making friends and meeting new people. It worked for me on every level, and I am now in a very safe and happy relationship. Although I did find an axe under the bed recently ... but she assures me it's her mother's and I'll meet her at the grand opening of the attic.

Anyway, enough of my waffling. Let's get on to something a little more interesting.

Free or pay?

Joining a dating site can be daunting, depending on who you are. There are so many different sites out there, but some are far better than others. I have spent many pointless hours filling out the form to join, only to discover that “free” is not always “free” and “free to join” means exactly that – free to join and nothing else.

Some sites let you into the database of pictures and profiles only to inform you that you have to be a full paying member to do anything else. You are then left in limbo, unable to send or open any messages you get, and trust me, on these sites you *will* get messages. I’ll leave you to work that one out.

I opened a site recently to find I had over 100 messages but could only open them if I became a paying member. I deleted my account then and there so as to remove any temptation I had to see those messages. Although I never read any of them, I believe that most or all were from the site itself. It’s a clever way to draw you and your wallet in.

I did the only thing I could think of when choosing which sites to join and that was to type into my search engine: “The top ten best FREE dating sites”. I suggest you do the same whenever you read this book, but it’s also worth comparing the compare sites, if this makes sense.

At the time of writing (2012), the results were as follows:

1. Ok cupid
2. Casual kiss
3. Plenty of fish
4. Mingle2
5. Woo me
6. Date hook up
7. Connecting singles
8. Book of matches
9. I can’t do a 9 or 10 as the comparison site only seems to go up to 8. Oh well.

The next search result down came up with these

1. Yahoo personals
2. Perfect match
3. Singlesnet
4. Match maker
5. Friend finder

6. Lavalife
7. Eharmony
8. Easy flirt
9. American singles?
10. Plenty of fish

An article written in the *Telegraph* listed these as the best and even wrote a piece on internet dating. Their advice was as follows:

As the internet plays an ever greater part in our social lives, with sites such as Facebook helping us to keep in touch with our friends, it's inevitable that we also use it to help us run our love lives as well. Here is the pick of the best dating sites – not forgetting our very own website telegraph.co.uk/dating, of course, with over 31,000 members, it's easy to use, safe and free to join.

Internet dating has shed its geeky image and now there are a host of sites offering free online dating, some with millions of members and some with a more select clientele. There are sites especially for singles of all sorts, whether they are disabled, gay or lesbian, Christian or lovers of fine wine. There is even – rejoice! – a site to help you find the perfect millionaire.

Dating Direct
www.datingdirect.com

Newly merged with Meetic, the giant of the dating scene, giving access to nearly 20 million users across Europe and with plenty of high-tech ways to find them.

Match.com
www.match.com

Another heavyweight player: 15 million members, funky, irreverent and boldly guaranteeing love within six months.

My Single Friend
www.mysinglefriend.com

The place for those well-meaning types who can't believe their best friend is single. They push your qualities so you don't have to.

Friend Finder
www.friendfinder.com

Webcam chats, an online magazine and plenty of Good Housekeeping-style tips and advice.

JDate
www.jdate.com

The net's biggest Jewish dating service, with often hilariously self-deprecating personal descriptions.

Gay.com

www.gay.com

Probably with the broadest reach of the hundreds of lesbian and gay sites on the net, plus news, features, travel tips, fashion and gossip.

Christian Cafe

www.christiancafe.com

With the strapline “All Christian. All single”, a worldwide meeting place for believers in search of each other.

Meeting Millionaires

www.meetingmillionaires.com

Where the ultra rich meet other ultra rich – and, yes, they do check your wealth when you sign up.

Large and Lovely Connections

www.largeandlovely.com

A welcome antidote to the size 0 brigade. Big-built men and women and their admirers.

Wine Lovers Meet

www.wineloversmeet.com

For those who connect over first growths and talk of terroir. Includes a wine glossary, features and tips, plus an etiquette guide to get you through that first vintage date. Mostly US but with a growing number of UK members.

SpeedDater

www.speeddater.co.uk

Not a dating site as such, but the quickest route to finding a speed-dating event in your area. Sharpen up that patter and be prepared to woo.

Dating4Disabled

www.dating4disabled.com

Dating and online chat with disabled and able-bodied people around the world.

Flirtbox

www.flirtbox.co.uk

Simple, straightforward and free UK personals site – hugely popular.

Loopy Love

www.loopylove.co.uk

One of the UK’s first dating sites and still in the top five with an engaging blend of fun graphics, “mad” profiles and interactive add-ons for the Facebook generation.

Club Karibu

www.clubkaribu.com

Online personals for Africans and Afro-Caribbeans in the UK.

Dating For Parents

DatingForParents.com

Where you don't have to worry about mentioning the little nippers.

Parship

www.parship.co.uk

Dating with a scientific approach – finding “the perfect match” through online psychometric testing.

Asians4Asians

www.asians4asians.com

Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and non-believers from around the UK and beyond.

Fifty Already

www.fiftyalready.com

Who says dating's just for the youngsters?

Green Singles

www.greensingles.com

Personals for those in the environmental, vegetarian and animal-rights communities and people who value the outdoor life.

There really are so many sites out there for just about everyone, but finding the site for you can only really be done with a hit-and-miss attitude. It still makes my head spin even today. Wikipedia has a comparison page and a lot of information about internet dating.

I found that by using “comparison” and “top ten” sites I could then read reviews and find out how many members belonged to each one. This still left me the fun task of sorting out which site was for me. I joined one site to find it only had ten members, and eight of them were male. Another I joined only had me and a slightly dubious lady in their entire membership. This could have been perfect if she had been slightly more attractive. I'm sure there are a lot of dating sites out there with me on the register that I cannot remember joining.

I did whittle them down to five sites, which I will list later. These seemed to offer different formats but had enough members to keep things interesting. Of the five, one stood out for me as it offered live chat/instant messaging (IM), video chat, messaging and had a great format.

One site I initially joined only offered live chat, but first you had to send an invitation to whoever you wished to talk to, and then if they accepted it was straight to live chat. This was fine but kind of threw you in at the deep end. A baptism of fire, so to speak.

A lot of free sites also offer the choice of upgrading to full membership. Although I never did this, I have read that a full member will be taken more seriously than someone who isn't, and it indicates that you are serious about dating and prepared to go that extra mile. If you are willing to do this, then feel free, but I can honestly say that I never joined or paid for anything and still got along very well.

I have also been told that some women avoid paying-members on free sites as they believe these members to be serial daters. Why join if it's free? It's swings and roundabouts and opinions differ.

I found that the free sites upgrade wasn't expensive and I was seriously considering upgrading just to see what kind of response I got. I decided, however, that if I got any more messages I would never be able to answer them all. Free or pay? It's a choice you will need to make, but I suggest sticking to the free sites for a while. I was shocked at the amount of money some "pay only" sites were asking, and even more shocked that people would pay even though it was all out there for free. Long live free internet!

Site features

I have decided after much deliberation to explain the different site features here as opposed to later in the book. This will then leave us with the opportunity to discuss matters further on and hopefully get the technical side of things out of the way. The features really are quite simple, but some can be a bit tricky. There can be so many different parts to each site that I found I was missing out on certain things. Most are self-explanatory, but others are not. I recommend that you get to know each site and find out what each has to offer by way of different applications. Some have their own way of making things interesting, but the format is pretty much the same.

Search

Basic Search Advanced Search Username Search Marriage

I'm A Seeking Age to All Profiles For

All Ethnicities United Kingdom City Postal Code 200 miles Sort

FreeDating.co.uk Home Matchmaking Forum New Members Latest Photos Search My Profile Messages Favourites Options Help Logout

Search by Search Results | Set / Edit Filters | Who have You Looked at?

Search profiles by keyword: E.g. books, Manchester, cycling, Christian, wine

“Search” allows you to find other members of the site you are using and view their pictures and profiles. It does pretty much what it says, but different sites offer different ways of searching, from “distance” to “age”. Some allow you to refine your search so much that it’s a wonder anyone comes up at all.

Over the time I spent on the sites I found that whether I was using distance, age, etc. the thing I needed to check first was whether the person was still active on the site. I remember one lady that came up in my search results – she was perfect in every way except she had not been online in over four months. Not a good start. Not everyone deletes their profile when they stop using the site. With this in mind I would always start with the “who’s online” search that every site seems to have. This will only show members that are currently online at the same time as you. At least that way I could be sure that the person I was messaging did in fact still use the site and would get the message.

Searching by distance is interesting, especially if your next-door neighbour comes up in your search results. Believe it or not, this happened to me. I never had the bottle to message, and as she never mentioned anything, neither did I. Finding my cousin was another matter though, and when we had stopped laughing we went on to swap some wonderful stories.

Who’s looked at me?

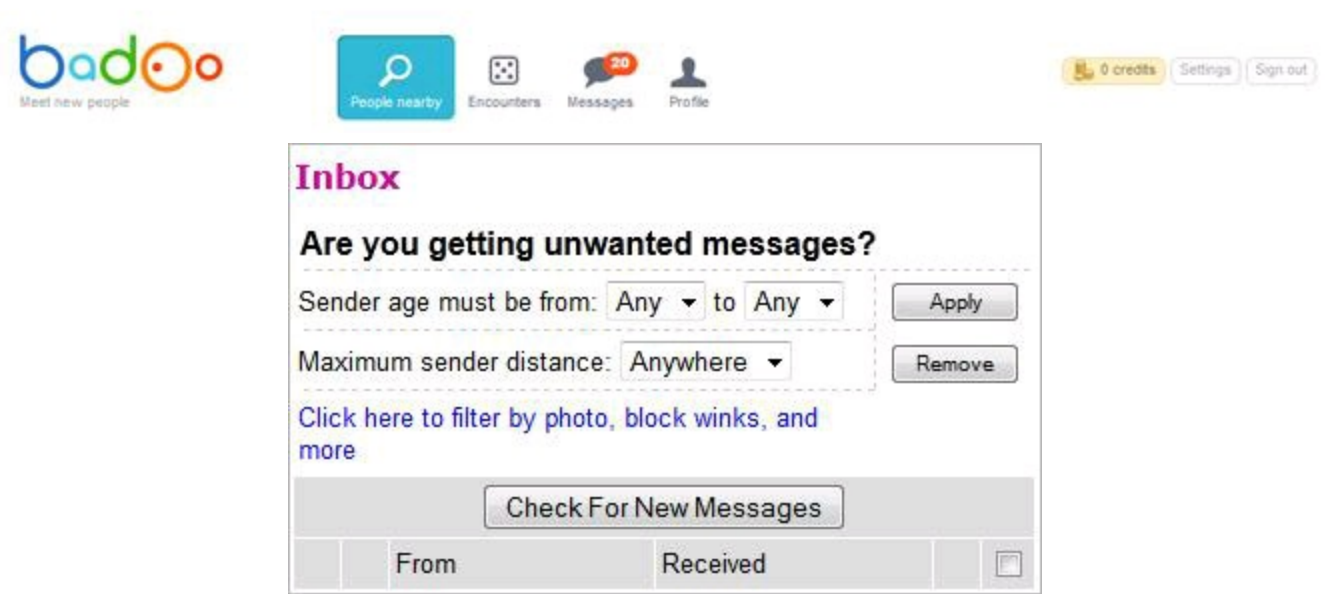
USERS WHO VIEWED YOU - Users who have viewed your profile, sorted by date and time they FIRST viewed you.

[Click to sort users by the last date and time they viewed your profile](#)

Essentially this function shows you who has viewed your profile and when. It's as simple as that. It really is a great little tool.

I have read many times that a person who has looked at your profile is more likely to answer a message from you than someone who hasn't. Whether this is true I really can't say, but I would always start by looking to see who had viewed me, and if there was an attraction then I would message those people first. It's also a good way to ensure that the person is actually logging in to the site, as they have to be active to view you. Some sites do offer a "last logged in" option that tells you when the person was last online, which is good. Some sites will also tell you how many times a person has viewed you. If it's more than once, then you are more likely to get a reply – unless they have clicked you nine times by mistake.

Messages



There are usually "message sent" and "message in" boxes. Hopefully the latter is not empty. The inbox is obvious and contains the messages you have received. The outbox contains the messages you have sent and is useful for keeping an eye on what you have sent and who to. It's also worth checking so you don't send an initial message to the same person twice. Not a good look, and it's then pretty obvious that you haven't really taken notice of them the first time. This can also look pushy or even desperate. Some ladies will never answer no matter what you send, and I found that at times in the beginning my messages had been deleted without even being read. This I found strange, but if there is no spark at all then there is no spark and that's that. Some ladies get hundreds of messages a day and will only read the ones that stand out. There lies the trick and will be discussed later. One thing to remember is that some sites delete old messages after a certain period of time.

Chat, IM or live chat

Sending message after message to a single person can be fun, but can get tedious. Chat, IM, etc. is a wonderful way of cutting down on endless single messages and offers a one-to-one live chat online. This is done via text within a private chat window. Certain sites offer emoticons (little dancing annoying things or faces that cry, laugh, etc.), which can be fun(ish). Live chat can be the difference between a relationship or being cut off for good, depending on how good you are, and will be covered extensively later. An offer of live chat doesn't have to be accepted, and I have often found myself frantically searching out a lady's profile to see what she looks like and who she is, before accepting the chat invitation. I have, however, never declined a chat, as everyone deserves a chance. Live chat doesn't have to be as scary as it may first seem and many men skip the initial message and go straight for chat. I believe this to be wrong and too upfront, as do many ladies.

Video chat

I only know of one free site that offers face-to-face webcam chat, and that's Plenty of Fish (more on this later). Webcam is a great way to see who you're talking to and hear their voice. I was petrified of webcam for quite some time, but now use it as a major way of keeping in touch when I'm away from Louise. It can be strange at first, but is a great way of seeing what someone is really like. Be sure to have a functioning webcam, microphone and speakers. Being fully clothed helps as well, unless otherwise agreed!

New members

This function is not to be ignored, but I have decided to write a lot more on this later in the book. It's a great way to see who has only just joined, and it should be checked often.

Hiding profile

Some sites give you the option to hide your profile but allow you to keep searching. This means that you will not show up in anyone's "who's looked at me" application. It's good for searching anonymously. Remember though that others cannot see your profile and you will not show up under the "who's viewed me" section of their profile.

Another application deserving a mention is one that gives you the choice to leave your profile active but does not allow another user to see that you have viewed theirs. It keeps you anonymous when looking at others but allows anyone to view your profile. This can be found under mail settings. A lot of people find this useful as they can look at whoever they like without them knowing it.

Others

Almost every site will offer their own version of what they believe to be a fun element. Some are hotlists, want to meet, instant flirts, etc. Others have gifts that can be bought and sent, but although you usually get some points to spend when joining, you then have to buy others through the site. These will make more sense once you have joined or refrained, as the case may be.

Anyone who has spent time on Facebook or chat sites should know their way around the basics of any dating site. It's trial and error, but they are easy to learn.

One thing that should be mentioned is that when a person logs out of a site their "online" status doesn't always disappear straight away. Therefore, if you are chatting to someone and they say they are going offline, don't be surprised if they stay in the "who's online" section for quite some time. I know that this has caused problems between ladies and me, before, as they believed I had told them I was logging off only to get rid of them so I could chat to someone else. I know of one lady who actually stopped contact with someone only to learn later that they were actually telling the truth and had in fact logged off. Every site has its quirks and its problems, and things are not always what they seem. Try not to presume anything, as it can be the site that is at fault.

There are so many different things that dating sites use to try and keep matters interesting. At first they do work, but I soon found most to be boring and more of a distraction than an asset. Louise still gets mail from guys who would "like to meet" her; there is a way that a guy or lady can trawl through pictures of members and click "yes", "no" or "maybe" under each, depending on the attraction. If it's a "yes", then an email is sent to that person saying that someone would like to meet them. I got many but never once answered as I found this impersonal and slightly cowardly.

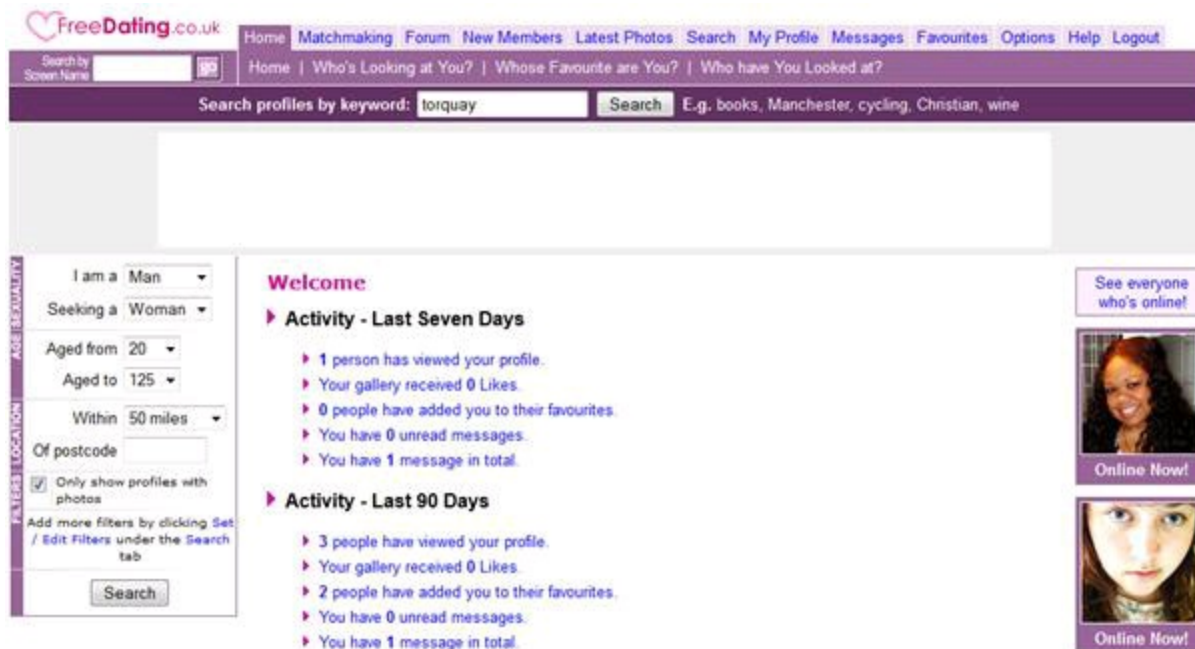
There are favourites, matchmaking, hotlists, forums, intelimatches, fans, chemistry matches, my city, hottest girls, will respond, latest photos and many many more, but if I wanted to play games then I'd be hitting the Xbox and not the dating sites.

All you really need at the end of the day is "search and message", and if the site is a good one then it has as many members as possible. I believed then and still believe that it's not about the different things a site can offer but the clientele it has.

My recommended sites

Every site has its good and bad points, but when they are free to join you can hardly moan. The first site I ever joined had very few applications and did not have any of the usual features (chat etc.) except for search and message, but for me this was enough to start off with. Any more and I think I would never have learnt as much as I did. Freedating was the first site I ever joined, and it taught me a lot.

Freedating.co.uk



Freedating was enough to teach me the ins and outs of dating sites. It has a search facility based on distance, and although I was in another part of the country, I kept my home base as London. Possibly not a good idea if you don't wish to travel miles for a date and get into a "long-distance relationship". This site is laid out well and shows who's online at any given time and where they are. The "new members" tab is good and I used this often to send messages to the recently joined – a great idea as a very high number of ladies will feel obliged to answer when they have first joined. An older member will be wiser and much more cynical. Freedating is essentially what it says on the opening screen, a simple but effective dating site with a lot of members. There are scammers but they are easy to see and delete. In fact, I found this site came down heavy on scammers and they were not there for long. I spent many a good evening on Freedating and met some wonderful ladies.

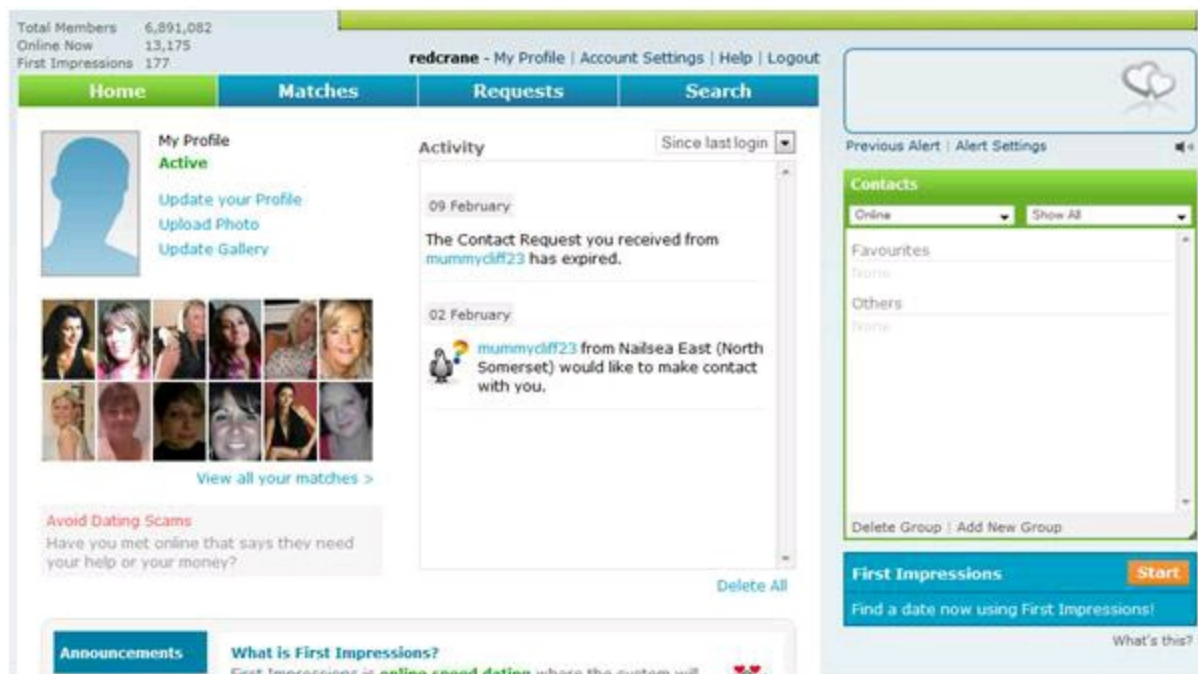
Smooch.com



Smooch was another favourite of mine, and I found this site offered a greater dating experience than the first. With the usual apps, such as “who’s looked at me”, “screen name search”, etc., it also offers Smoochables (yes, I really did type that). This gives free members the opportunity to say who they believe is hot by clicking on a button on their profile. A mail is then sent to the recipient who has to guess from a line up as to who thinks they’re smoochable ... Confused? I was and still am. It was funny for a while, but I soon got tired and it’s not as good as a personal opening message. One part of Smooch, and the main way they make their money, is “The Wall”. Sound ominous? It’s not and I promise there’s no climbing involved. When you first join Smooch you are presented with a wall of ladies’ pictures and the ladies are presented with the same, but with men. By spending tokens you can place yourself on the wall for a limited amount of time and hopefully get noticed. The site gives you a certain amount of tokens when you join, that you spend by putting yourself on the wall. I must admit this does work and I did get more messages when I first started this, but be careful when you put up your picture (if at all). There’s no point in putting it up at three o’clock on a Monday morning only for it to sit there for eight hours with no-one online.

Smooch has the same features as most but can be a little more fun. There’s a live chat facility, which made me jump the first time it popped up on my screen, but I soon got used to it. It does save endless messages back and forth and very rarely went down. It does cut you off after about an hour though, so be careful. It does of course allow you to reconnect. Does any of this make sense? Probably not, but it will.

Oasis.com



Oasis was the site I mentioned earlier, which is based around invitation and live chat. You can still message when a person is offline but only after you have contacted them and they have accepted you as someone they would like to chat with. With this site a good screen name and profile is a must, but there are often ladies who leave their account as “open to chat”, so it’s always easy to strike up a conversation with someone. Once I had worked out exactly how this site works I found it a great way to build up a friend/date base. The only problem I encountered was that when I signed in, I would often be confronted by five or six ladies also online and wanting to chat. With my profile flashing online, it was sometimes difficult to hide as everyone could see I was active. Some evenings all I wanted to do was read profiles rather than chat. The site also sends out an audible alarm to everyone you have been chatting with when you come online so all your friends know you have signed in. I often had to try and manage more than one conversation at once as I hated leaving people on hold.

Oasis also filters your search by who they believe is compatible with you, although you can search on everyone if you wish. It offers gifts to be sent for free and flirts, which can be fun. It also has a whistle above each member for reporting scammers. I did use this feature a couple of times and the team were quick to delete the member. I was impressed with their speed. I just hoped I’d got it right.

POF.com

POF Sign In Help Register

INBOX | Ultra Match | SEARCH | ONLINE (263106) | FAVORITES | MEET ME | CHEMISTRY | UPGRADE

Over 40 million users on POF come together to connect, flirt, and share with each other, resulting in over 1 million conversations each day!

Make an account and meet people in your area for free!

Is your love interest a **Keeper?** | Relationship **Chemistry Predictor** | Relationship **Needs Assessment**
Or, take our **new psychological assessment** that will tell you what you really want versus what you say you want.

Username

Password

Check Mail!

[Forgot Your Password?](#)

Username Search

I'm A Seeking A Age to Seeking All Ethnicities

In Within

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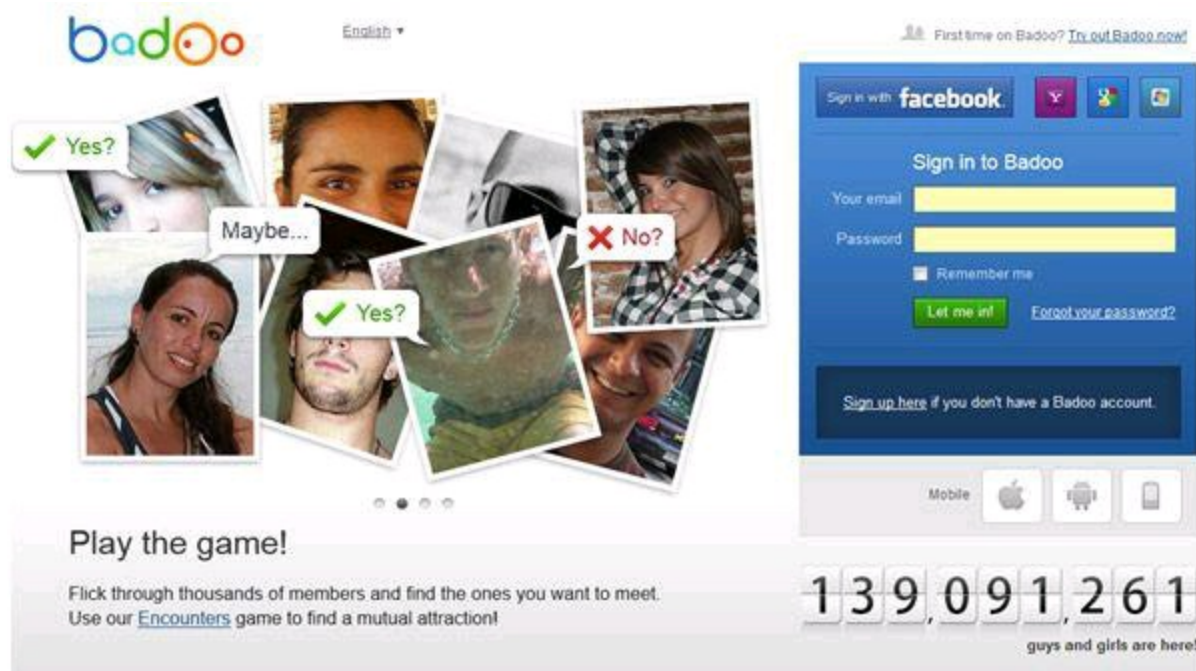
Plenty of Fish or POF was where I spent most of my later time on dating sites. In fact, if I was ever forced back into the dating world, it would be my first port of call. Quite simply it offers everything a dating site should, and it even offers live video chat, which was something Louise and I continued to use even after we had started our relationship, as it was reliable. The whole format of this site is well laid-out and easy to follow. It has a huge membership, and I found a lot of good, honest members. I was told that a lot of the men were “players”, but the female members were, on the whole, far better than on most other sites. I met a lot of members that I had seen on other sites, but they would usually appear on Fish first. The layout of profiles and pictures is easy to use and I found that there was always a large selection of people online. Louise and I made some good friends from this site and had many dates. As to why Fish stood out, I’m still not overly sure. It was possibly the members that made the site so good, and the fact that there was such a varied collection of ladies.

Fish makes it possible to refine your search to within a few miles of your home, and you can also restrict your search to include only those looking for friendship, dating or long term relationships. There is also an “intimate encounter” option that allows you to go online and search only for those looking for sexual experiences. Be careful though, as many ladies will set their message inbox to only receive mail from men who have never messaged anyone for an intimate encounter. This means that if you do message someone who is only looking for sex or an intimate encounter, then the number of ladies you can message after will be greatly reduced. If you decide that you do want to look into intimate encounters, then it could be a good idea to open two different profiles.

You can send gifts through Fish, and when I first joined this could be done for free, but now you need to buy “goldfish” credits (yes, I’m serious) to send gifts. They have to make their money somehow. The “my matches” section turned out to be a collection of ladies who were online and not matches as stated, but it was a handy tool. The Fish I knew then is by no means the same as today, as dating sites are forever changing. It was a shame to see some features are only available to paying members now. I still believe Fish to be at the top of the free dating game and it has a large membership. I would say this though, as I met Louise there, I am possibly slightly prejudiced. Fish also has a “will respond” section, although I could never work out how they knew that the ladies they put in this would actually respond. I tried sending a really tacky message to one and never got a reply, so that put pay to that.

I still like Fish and still go into it sometimes to see who's online, and who is still there. It's almost like a social network as well as a dating site.

Badoo.com



Badoo is essentially a free site, although a lot of features are offered to paying members only and it constantly reminds you of this. It does offer a large database of members and a few features that are very different. The superpowers that are constantly mentioned, I cannot comment on as I never became a paying member. I was intrigued by this though. On the right hand of your search screen is a “popularity meter” that tells you how popular you are or how unpopular you are. A great way to destroy any ego you have. The search is easy and the pictures clear and well presented. But there never seemed to be the concise profiles that the other sites offered.

One feature that stood out for me was that you can comment on individual photographs of each member, and I never tired of reading the tacky comments some men put on. Another feature that was interesting was the “encounters” game. This is by no means new to dating sites, and on Fish it's known as “want to meet”. When you click on “encounters” you are presented with pictures of female members and can click on “yes”, “maybe” or “no” with regards to meeting, or whether you find them attractive. If the answer is “yes”, then the site sends the person an email and they then open the “encounters” window and try to guess who wishes to meet them. I spent hours clicking on pictures of various ladies as I found it strangely relaxing. Badoo is essentially a message, chat and search site but can be a lot of fun and has a good membership.

Specialist sites

The internet is an ever-expanding source that caters to every whim and preference. The number of different dating sites out there in cyberspace beggars belief. They cater for every taste and just about every whim a person can have, from sexual preference to the preferred country. There's dogging dating, adult dating, fun dating, sex dating, bondage dating, kinky dating ... need I go on? It's a big and crazy world outthere. There are specialist sites that offer dating to single parents – I found those

good for me as I have a child myself and wanted to date someone who was in the same situation. There are sites for every persuasion and every person, from Asian to European dating and a whole lot more. Some are more dubious than others.

As I'm sure you will find as you trawl through the world of internet dating, some sites offer a more adult dating experience than others. There are a multitude of sites that cater for everything from flirting to sex. There are sites for couples that are looking solely for sex and others offering adult picture exchanges. If you are thinking of going into this world, then I wish you luck, but remember to practise safe sex and be careful. If you are a man, then wear a condom. If you are a lady, then take one (packet) with you just in case. As I shall write about later, there are some strange people out there.

At times I found that the normal free sites could become adult enough without the need to join the more dubious ones. For some reason I never trusted them, although that is a personal thing. I was also looking for a partner in everything and not just bed. I'd avoided STDs up until then and intended to continue to do so.

I have read recently that a lot of overseas dating sites are full of scammers, but I cannot comment on this as I have never joined one. The thought of having to fly for an initial date never appealed to me, and I couldn't afford it anyway. I had and still have enough trouble filling the tank on my car. There are even the "meet a millionaire sites" ... obviously I never had the required membership fee.

For every country or region, there's a dating site; from the Falkland Islands to Peru. Every part of the world seems to be pretty much covered in the online dating game. I got bored after a while trying to find a region that didn't have its own dating site or was at least part of one. The list of specialist sites is endless.

Recommended sites

The main sites I used were:

www.freedating.co.uk

www.oasis.com

www.smooch.com

www.pof.com

www.badoo.com

There are many others, but these were the ones I became accustomed to and used on a daily basis. I also found these had no hidden agenda and could easily be used without the need for payment.

A few others that I have seen are: Canoodle, OkCupid, Mingle2, etc., but the internet changes constantly and I'm sure there are many others out there. It took me ten minutes of searching and reading reviews to discover which sites are popular, and I suggest you do the same.

Although every site offers different formats and gimmicks, essentially they offer the same thing – meeting new people. I messaged and met ladies from every site I was a member of, but some did stand out for whatever reason, be it ease of use or larger membership. At the end of the day it's up to you, but I suggest that eventually you join as many as you can and check on a regular basis for messages to ensure that you are shown to be active.

No matter what site or sites you join, it all comes down to one thing: getting messages and meeting people. That's what counts in the world of online dating. It's not about which sites have the best applications or the funniest format, it's about finding someone to connect with. As long as you have a search and message capability, then you have everything you need. It's not about anything else except being able to see who you are messaging and getting a reply to your message.

Let's get started – screen name

OK, so hopefully now you have chosen the site or sites most suited to you. Now the form filling can begin. This is the most important part of joining a dating site as it is how you will be perceived by others. The first thing you will be asked for is your “screen name”. This is the title you will go under and will head every message and comment you make. It will also head your profile, so make it a good one.

On every site I ever joined, I used the same screen name. Unless you're avoiding someone, I suggest you do the same. I went under my own name of Jay333 – a name I've had for years, ever since the old chat rooms. Using the same name gives you the opportunity to message someone that you have seen as a member on another site with the good old chestnut, “Have I seen you somewhere before?”... Please don't use that – I was joking!

Many people use the same screen name for whichever site they are using. If I were to see someone from another site, then I could simply send a message asking what they thought of one site compared to another. This would always receive a reply and was a great opening line. Once I had got a reply, I would then ask what they thought of the members. This would give me an insight as to what they were really looking for – and what they weren't – as they would usually give details of what the men were like. This was information I could then work on and decide if we were compatible, and whether we should get to know each other.

A clever screen name can attract questions and needs to be thought out well. It's the name you choose that can determine whether or not a lady decides to answer your message or even click on your profile.

It's the one thing that stands next to your picture, and your chosen name can also be a decider on which type of lady will click on you. If, for example, you are going to choose the name “scabby cock” then I think you can safely say you are onto a non-starter, unless you are lucky enough to find someone called “scabby pussy”.

Try to be positive and avoid anything that can be read as silly (unless it's very funny, but remember humour is subjective and you can alienate a lot of people very quickly). Stay within the boundaries of safe with a screen name. Believe it or not, a bad screen name can put many people off and they may not even look at your profile. It's a simple task to keep your screen name middle of the road. Why reduce the number of people that may look at you simply by choosing something off-putting? “Looking for love” could be OK, but I would avoid it. After all it's a dating site and everyone is supposedly looking for love on there. “Looking for lurve” I would avoid at all costs for the simple reason that it sounds silly and immediately screams soppy. Please remember it depends on who you are and what you are looking for. I only speak from personal experience and what I have been told by different ladies on different sites.

Keep it simple, but try and make it different. I have been told many times that some messages never even get opened because of a poor screen name, and after putting a lot of thought into a message it seems a shame to be let down by something as simple as a name.

I must admit I have read some very strange names in the past. Some have been quite scary, but they can easily be used as an opening message. If, for example, you can surf, then a name like “surfer girl” is probably a good start. Some sites offer a search facility on screen names. This can be a great little tool for finding every person on the site with, for example, “surf” in their name. I personally have never been put off by a screen name, but I know a lot of ladies who have.

A screen name can say a lot about you and cut down your chances of someone even getting as far as your profile. Keep it simple and keep it somewhat plain. Don’t under any circumstances use a screen name that is too soppy or sad. I have written proof that a great number of ladies will avoid these.

When looking at a list of messages in my inbox I would instantly be put off by such names as Back Again, Last Try or Mr Romance ...These names for me imply a lack of backbone, lack of confidence and lack of character. I am not saying we don’t have some of these things about us, but you don’t want to broadcast it, it is just not attractive.

Remember, it’s your profile that will say who you are and there’s no need for your screen name to do this also. Don’t use txt speak in any part of your screen name. I have come across so many ladies that will delete people who use txt speak. It will certainly reduce who will look at your profile. Many, many ladies’ profiles state they will not answer any messages if sent using any hint of txt speak or abbreviations. Why do it when it alienates no-one if you use plain everyday English? I will expand on this later in the chapter on messages.

Your Picture. Make or break.

In a past life, a very long time ago, I was a photographer. In some respects I still am, but no-one seems to want to part with money, so I tend to give them away. I never really had a great business head on my shoulders. I know I keep saying things along the lines of “I can’t stress this enough”, but let’s face it, the picture you use of yourself is pretty important. It’s possibly the first and only thing someone will look at before reading your screen name and deciding whether to go further into your profile. I admit that before I even consider clicking on a profile, I look at the picture. If there’s an attraction or the picture is interesting, then I’ll click on their profile. I have read on profiles that women believe men don’t actually read them, and go solely on the picture alone. This is partly true for me and I do look at the picture first, but I also read the profile. In fact, I study them. Without a good picture of yourself, you will get nowhere.

It’s easy to swap a search from “women looking for men” to “men looking for women” and see what the competition is like. Here you will be able to see what others consider to be a good picture. It’s also worth doing just to make yourself smile as some people’s pictures are awful. I don’t recommend clicking on them though, as you will show up in their “who’s looked at me” section and you may get a message from them. This could be quite awkward.

Remember, some sites offer an “allow a user to see that I viewed their profile” option. If you click “no”, you will not show up on their page.

I sit here now trawling through what some men consider to be pictures good enough for a dating site and smile. There will always be the “naked above the waist” (and possibly below) pictures and the “camera held at arm’s length”, or both in one. I’m not here to tell you what to put up. If you want to have a picture of yourself topless, then feel free. But consider this: there is an open debate as to whether the “six pack” picture is any good. I have been told it puts some ladies off, and others have smiled and said, “It’s OK if they are fit” (my girlfriend for one). This then means that a certain picture runs the risk of alienating certain ladies from the onset. Is it worth the risk?

I realised at an early stage of joining dating sites that there are so many ladies with wide differences in what they are looking for and who they consider to be a possible partner. The main thought I had was not to put people off by using a strange screen name and a picture that some people wouldn’t be attracted to. I wanted my options to be kept open and leave myself with the possibility of making initial contact with as many ladies as possible. With this said, I put on pictures that were pretty much bulk standard but well taken. I wanted a couple of headshots and a couple of me full length. A smile always helps, and not every shot was of me wearing sunglasses as I wanted my eyes showing (one was, but I like my sunglasses). I have been told that it is very off-putting to be wearing sunglasses in every picture. In a nutshell, my photos were mixed but showed me for who I was. I could never see the point of putting old pictures on and I never recommend doing this. If you are going to meet someone then why put up pictures of yourself that are ten years out of date? At one stage I even got someone else to take photographs of me, with the story that I didn’t have any for the album, and I used the timer button to get the rest. Every camera has one, so why take a picture at arm’s length? Another

good idea is to change your pictures regularly, every couple of months for example, as this will guarantee more hits on your profile.

I will say that you should be comfortable with the pictures you put up, and ensure they show who you are and not who you would like to be. The shot should not be blurred and please, please don't use a shot of you and the ex with her face blacked out. Believe it or not, I have seen this.

I have seen more than one profile where a lady is wearing a wedding dress – this beggars belief. The ones of men that will stay with me forever are as follows ... holding a cute kitten, sitting on a bench drinking out of a can of lager, in Speedos (what was he thinking?), in Speedos sitting on the bonnet of what is possibly not his car, a head shot where the whole picture had gone purple, a cute shot of a cartoon character, and the “wearing a baseball cap, sunglasses and a scarf” – not a good look unless it's for robbing a bank.

Also, make sure you check your shot on the site, as I have also seen headless ones where the site's cropping facility got slightly over-enthusiastic.

It's easy to put up good pictures of yourself. Avoid passport pictures as they look like police mug shots, and I would never put my child on there no matter how cute I thought it would be. People do and I'm amazed at this. You don't need to be the ultimate action man with pictures of yourself out surfing Hawaii; you don't need to show yourself as anything but who you are. I have heard horror stories of ladies running home after meeting a man who had put up very old pictures of himself. Do you really need that to happen to you?

I have never seen the point of joining a dating site and being someone you're not. After all, you are hoping to meet someone in the real world eventually and want the meet to go as smoothly as possible. Why, oh why, would you expect a lady to go ahead with a date when you have essentially lied from the outset? I have been told by many ladies that they have cut a date short because the man they met was different from the picture he had online.

A good tip with pictures and something I have used many times is this: Once you know the lady's real name, look her up on one of the ever-popular social network sites. They may have old pictures on dating sites, but they usually have new pictures on social sites. I was talking to a lady for ages and really liked her. We talked on the phone etc. and had a date set up. I checked her out on a social site and was shocked to see that she was not the slim lady that her pictures portrayed. Her pictures on the dating site were very old. I didn't have a problem with her size at all, but I did have a problem with the fact that she had misled me, probably unintentionally, but misled all the same. I never went on the date and soon cut contact with her. I envisaged problems in the future and had no choice.

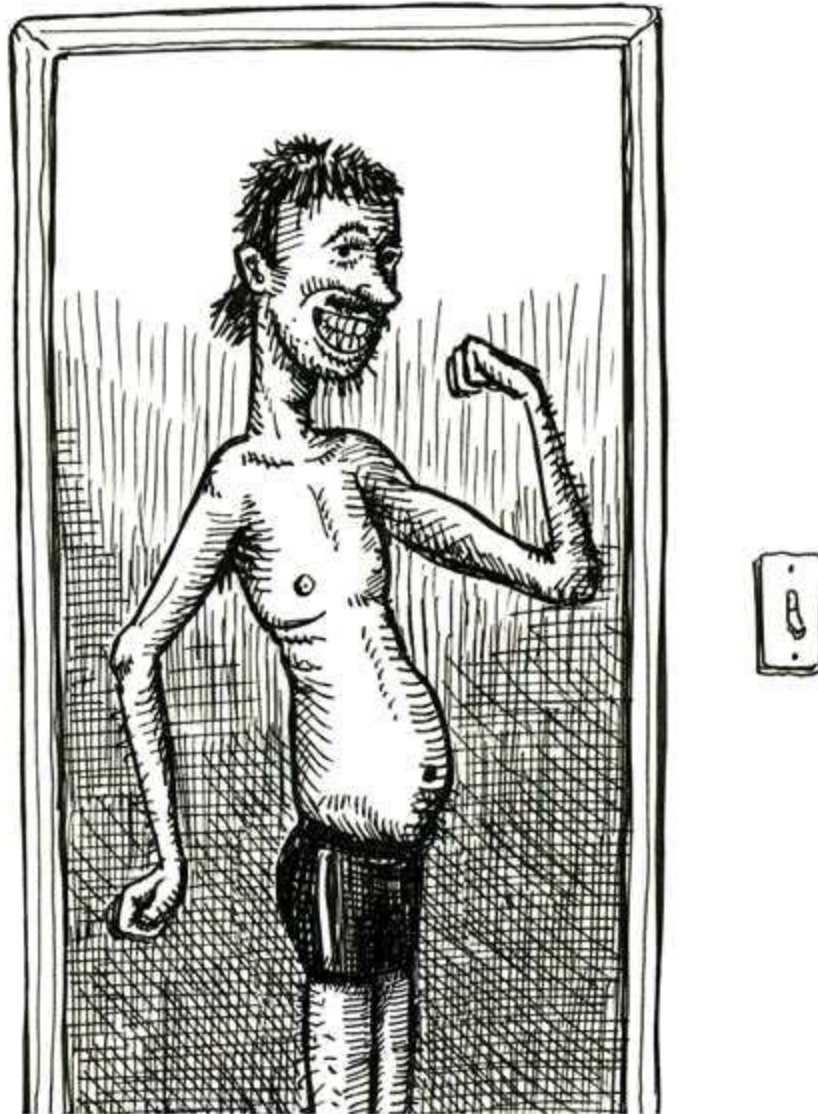
Another lady did the same, but to the point where I could only see her mirage as an outright lie. Her pictures had been taken 20 years previously and I wasted so much time talking to her and getting to know her. I never did get to see the real person but only the person she had been. There could have been a chance if she had been honest from the start, as she was very pretty and a lovely person. My problem being that the warning bells were ringing so loudly by now that I couldn't hear her apology. I cut all contact with her and felt very let down.

This has happened a few times over the years and I still don't see the point. If your intention is to sit at home and spend the rest of your days messaging, then by all means put up fake or old pictures. If on

the other hand you wish to be out in the dating world and meeting real people, then keep it real.

Hobbies and profiles

Hobbies are hobbies and what more can I say. I have noticed, though, that they can be quite funny at times, and people tend to put things in along the lines of drying paint watcher, axe murderer or even professional bunny boiler. I have seen some where the list is endless and I wonder how they fit all their hobbies into their life. Maybe they only do each of them once a year. I kept my hobbies pretty much open, as in “the ocean” and “driving”, etc. I didn’t say anything specific and left room to expand on them later. Try to keep your hobbies varied as this can appeal to a wider audience. Make it funny if you wish, but avoid saying you’ve got a hobby that you don’t have. You may be asked about it later.



After an outlay of £27.84 on new trunks and muscle-tone powder, Baz knew in his heart that his new profile picture was a winner.

Your profile

The profile is where we start to open up a new world. This will determine where you wish to go and who with. I have always believed that every part of a profile is important. If you have decided (and it is your choice) to follow what has been said so far, then this is the part where essentially it's up to you. I will give examples of what I believe to be good and bad profiles. I will give examples of what I believe is funny and what is boring. I will call in the help of other people to give their opinions (especially Louise). I will try and help all I can, but it's your life and your thoughts that will go towards making a profile for yourself.

There is another choice, and that is using an online agency to write your profile for you. All you need to do is fill out a quick online form and for a fee they will do the rest. This isn't a bad option as a good professional profile can bring in so many messages. If you are not confident about writing your own, then I suggest this route. I know of two very good profile writers and they can be found at:

<http://www.dating-profile.co.uk/>

I've mentioned this site because it is where Louise and I can be found working on profiles for many people. This book is never going to pay enough for us to have a herd of racehorses or even Shetlands so we have to do something!

Hopefully we will see you there.

I have read some wonderful profiles over the years and sat in amazement at others. I have seen some that read as begging letters and others where the member has been so full of himself/herself that it was a put-off from the start. The comical tongue-in-cheek approaches are always fun to read, but there has to be a balance in every profile. If a mixture of humour, likes, plans for the future and honesty can be achieved, then your profile will stand out and be well received.

Your profile is your CV of the dating world and can speak volumes about you or very little, depending on what you want. A good profile has balance and shows every aspect of a person, from their humour to what they are looking for. It can draw a person in or push them away, but I believe if it's honest, then it's a good profile. If it shows you are genuine without actually typing "honest and genuine" (used so many times in so many initial messages and on profiles that it became a running joke), then it will be read and not be dismissed like so many are. I spent hour after hour reading profiles and very few made me want to message. Some, though, left me with no choice but to message just to say how original or good it was. I nearly always got an answer when doing this and it was always a good opener. I also tried this approach with profiles that were not very good – and still got an answer. This is a clever way of getting a response from someone, and as it is only a comment on their profile, there is very little work or thought involved.

It has been recommended that a profile should contain your likes, dislikes and your taste in film, music, etc. This is easy to do but has been done so many times that when "trawling profiles" it often became like reading the same one over and over again, though with a different picture at the top of the page. The last thing you need is a profile that reads like everyone else's. There were times when I sat "trawling" that I felt like sending a message to certain ladies, with an offer of rewriting them free of charge as they were so bad and no thought had been put into them. I suppose some relied on their

looks and the fact that men do seem to message a lot. This is OK for them, but if you do message and the message gets read, then your profile needs to be good.

The men's profiles were often worse than the "I can't be bothered to write any more" ladies. I believe there is nothing more attractive than someone who writes a profile with positive plans and ambitions for the future and a love for life. When I joined the sites, I was almost at rock bottom through illness (although I was full of life inside) and I found that reading a well-constructed profile with a good positive attitude attracted me to message that person. No matter how attracted to the picture I was, if the profile was flat and boring I wouldn't want to message – although I sometimes did anyway. I believe that a profile can reflect a person's personality and if there is no life within the words then the person has very little to offer. This is of course a very sweeping statement and some ladies could simply have been shy talking about themselves, but it was my gut reaction that I went on. If you are looking for someone to spend the rest of your life doing the "cuddled up on the sofa with a glass of wine and a DVD", then you will be in message heaven and apparently there are thousands of ladies that want just this. I wanted slightly more. If you want to attract ladies and get them to write to you then you have to stand out and be different. You have to quite simply "sell yourself".

With my initial profile I had a problem – I was quite literally stuck in a chair and being fed through a tube. Hardly an attractive thing to put on my profile and I would have been very dubious of anyone asking for a date at that time.

If, at the time of writing your profile, your life consists of very little except work or you are unemployed (please don't put this), then you need to look at the positive things in your life. A workhorse is by no means a bad thing, but I have talked to many people whose marriage broke up because the husband or wife was continuously at work, so this could well put someone off. I have also read profiles that state: "If you are unemployed (for any reason), then I'm not interested." If a person is given the chance to know you and build an attraction, then I'm sure circumstances will start to mean less. Dating is all about the initial date and the attraction to that person, and not about rules you believe you have or want to have. A simple statement saying "Currently changing careers and looking for a better future" is far better than "Sitting on my arse watching daytime TV". I had a friend who would tell ladies he was "a marine biologist who studies different creatures at varying temperatures" – he did in fact work at a fish-and-chip shop.

If your profile keeps away from certain truths about yourself, then it leaves things open for a wider message audience. After all, it's an outline of who you are and not a life story. I'm not saying lie, as lying will lead to disaster. If for example you say "Have been working way too hard for way too long, and looking for someone to share happy times with away from the grindstone", then it sounds much better than "Spend my whole life at work but might be able to get away for an hour for a drink and a date".

It can be very easy to turn a statement about yourself that could be off-putting into something positive. By off-putting I mean, for example, night security (no offence, I've done it myself). A simple statement of "work all night as a security guard" might put ladies off as it could lead them to believe you're gone all night and sleep all day. This is easy to turn around, to make it look positive and give the same information: "I work in high-level security with a great team of people, which for me is perfect as it leaves every day free and a lot of evenings off." It's a much better way of saying something and is so simple. It shows you have friends and don't live at home with your mum in the

attic, and it shows you have time to give to someone. If you don't have time to give to a future relationship, then what do you have? The internet tells us that most relationships fail because of time apart, so make sure it's stated that you have free time.

As I have said before, there is no point in lying unless you can't help it and are thinking of going to therapy, or you never intend to meet anyone at all. A friend of mine met a man from one of the sites and went out on a date. She had been talking to him online and by phone for a long time and had even talked on webcam. Things seemed fine and off she went to meet her 6ft date – who turned out to be 5ft 1. She's 5ft 8 without heels. Not only had he lied about his height, he was also bald. Something he had forgotten to mention on his profile. In fact, he said he had long hair. While on webcam, he had hid this fact with a cap. The baldness wouldn't have been a problem, but it was a lie, and if he was willing to lie from the start, how could she trust anything else he had said or written? The lady in question said that when her date came walking towards her, she thought he was the brother of the man she was supposed to be meeting and he was there with an excuse for the real date not turning up. The date was finished from the start and she went home upset. He even had the cheek to call her a few choice names when she mentioned his lies, as if it was her fault the date had ended before it had begun. I was concerned for her over this episode but she had followed all the untold rules of first dates so she was safe (something I will write extensively about later as it is very close to my heart). There really are some strange men out there. I think this is a wonderful example of telling the truth within your profile. If you want to get further than a 30-second first date, then tell the truth.

When I first started writing my profile, I was very green within the sites. As I read it now, I'm surprised that I got any messages at all. The first edition was quite simply awful, and although it said something about me, it showed nothing of who I am. It was after much criticism (mainly from myself) that I began to change it. That is the beauty of profiles and the edit function. You can change your profile any time you wish. There were a few times I considered changing my profile to be compatible with someone else's. It's not a difficult thing to do. For example, I had seen a lady whose profile was good and the pictures lovely. While sitting and reading I thought, "What if I were to edit my profile so that we had many common interests? What if I matched her style of writing and expanded on what she had written, so we would have a lot in common?" I was tempted, very tempted; after all, it was possible, but a lot of work for a message. In the end I decided against it, although realising that it was a sure-fire way of getting an answer from someone I had an interest in. I think it seemed too dishonest for my liking.

As I have said before, it has been recommended that a profile should contain your film preferences, music, likes, dislikes, etc. I didn't bother with any recommendations as I soon realised when reading the profiles of others that a list of likes etc. was boring and run of the mill. Does a partner have to like the same music as you or even the same things? I admit it's easier to talk to someone when you have a common interest, but it's not the mainstay of a relationship. Louise and I were worlds apart when it came down to interests and this has not put a barrier up between us. I've enjoyed learning and sharing her world and would never have had the opportunity to learn these things if it wasn't for her. Luckily she does have good taste when it comes to music and films, which is a plus.

Remember: When faced with the daunting task of writing a profile, it feels as though you only get one chance. You do not. Write whatever you like and then go back and edit it to your liking, after checking others on the same, or other sites. Take your time with your profile and remember you can edit at a later date.

At one point I got so bored with my profile that I changed it over and over to see what responses I would get and from what type of member. The final one I used was built on over a period of time, adding new parts and expanding on things as my mood took me. I wanted an honest profile and one that was easy to read. Eventually my profile consisted mainly of me ranting, but strangely enough even this brought in many messages.

My first profile

My initial profile was quite simply...

I'm an outgoing 44yr old going on 20. I have a great love for the ocean and spend much of my life travelling from one beach to another. I was heavily into the surf and skate scene but it's been a long time since I've been out on the ocean. I was a photographer for most of my life but only pick up a camera now for fun. I do have a 7yr old daughter and she takes up some of my time but as she gets older I'm finding myself with more and more time on my hands. She will of course always be my priority so anyone that thinks children are baggage then please move on. I spend a lot of time between Dorset and London, although most of my free time is spent around the Dorset coast. I am an optimist through and through and believe that long distance relationships can work as long as you both work at them. After all, Australia's only a day away. I also believe in smiles, a lot of smiles, so if you are not a happy person or at least looking to be happy then I promise you I'm not for you. I am a genuine guy with no hang ups but anyone can write that. I believe that the eyes and smile can tell more than words.

Cheesy, quite possibly, but it worked. As I said earlier, I have a daughter and didn't wish to date someone who didn't have children. The "baggage" part was a dig as I had read earlier that children are sometimes referred to as "baggage" and this really made me angry. I was to receive a lot of messages about this and was often congratulated but I didn't do it for input, I did it because I believed in my own words. I wasn't looking for a new mum for my child, but I was looking for someone who at the least understood children.

The surf and skate part I was never happy with. I think it's the skate bit more than the surf, but I was and still am very much into skateboarding and probably always will be. I can certainly hold my own in a conversation on the subject but obviously have never had one about skating on a dating site (that would be asking too much). I believe that by writing about my passion for skating I could have put some ladies off by trying to look younger than I actually was, but it was honest. I did say "44 going on 20"...

Mentioning my past employment in photography was a great addition to my profile. With the onset of digital cameras, it's surprising how many people are out taking pictures in their spare time, and I spent hours talking to and swapping pictures with people I had met online. It also made for a few interesting dates while out taking pictures with someone. While out we had something in common to talk about and this kept the dates very interesting. I still don't believe having common interests is necessary. It just makes life easier.

If there was one thing I should have changed about my profile it was the travelling part. It's something that can put people off as it's not good being in a relationship when one of you is forever on the road. As I said before, it was honest, but I know that it put people off as I was told this.

I am an optimist much to the annoyance of certain people sometimes. It's just the way I am and it's a very positive way to be. Being positive in a profile is very important and someone who comes across as negative is not going to get many messages. Negativity is an absolute no-no. Try and be positive without coming across as arrogant. Glass half full is always best (but don't say that in a profile as it's been used many times).

The long-distance remark

The long-distance remark was a way of keeping my options open. In my hobbies I had written "driving" and I meant it. I do love driving. It was a way of ensuring that ladies who were living far from me were still within dating distance. I did get a message from the north shore of Scotland and had to eventually draw the line. I got back a very rude message reminding me of my profile; she never did understand how driving that far for a date was probably going a little too far. She did offer to pay for half my petrol and put me up for the night. In the end I had to cap the amount of miles I was willing to travel for a date and a possible relationship. I was in a "long-distance relationship" or LDR for some time and had learnt my lesson the hard way. I will expand on this later.

The "happy" and "smiles" part is true. I added that to my profile after talking to a few really miserable ladies. I hoped this might put others off, but it never did. It did however bring in messages from ladies who were certainly happier and I got many comments on this. I began to notice that a high percentage of members had recently come out of unhappy relationships (some a bit too recently) and the thought of being happy became very appealing. This small statement in my profile worked wonders, and when it was added my incoming messages increased greatly. One lady who I went on to talk to for a long time and is still a friend had a horse called Smiles, so that was a bit of luck.

I just had to put in the genuine part and I smiled as I wrote the words. I wanted something different from the usual "I'm honest and genuine", so I finished with "anyone can write that". The eyes were an afterthought and brought in some of the hardest messages I ever had to respond to. I dreaded the question, "What do my eyes say about me?" and was constantly asked this. The way to get an answer to their question was quite simple but lengthy. After a quick read of their profile, hobbies, job, etc. I could answer with quite a complex message that more often than not was correct. This amazed the recipient. It wasn't easy to do but ensured further conversations and dates.

The dreaded ex

Not every part of a profile can ensure you appeal to everyone, but you can try and appeal to most without holding back and seeming boring. I can't stress enough about being positive, and please don't mention the dreaded ex or that you have just come out of a relationship. If I was to read that, I would try to avoid the person and would very rarely message. Listening to someone talking about their past partner and how much of "a git" they were is not the most interesting of conversations. If you are not over your ex, then dating sites are not the best place for you. Join with a fresh start in mind and don't bore the arse off someone with endless stories of "how my ex never understood me". There is nothing more boring unless you both decide to do it. This can sometimes be better than a therapy session. Of course, past relationships will be mentioned but try not to harp on this and keep it brief. A positive

future is a much better subject.

Adding to your profile

The next part of my profile came after months of different experiences regarding my illness. I had never before mentioned that I had been through cancer treatment, unless I got to know someone. There was no way I wanted messages from ladies who felt sorry for me. In my opinion that is not the greatest way to ensure incoming mail. I did have to mention it eventually as you don't get the kind of scarring I have from shaving, but I always kept it back until I thought the time was right. I found the different responses I got when I divulged the information simply amazing and was shocked at times with the way certain people would simply disappear. They obviously had their reasons and not once did I get down about it. I did in fact find it funny after a while. It was after an interesting but slightly disastrous date that I decided to write the next part of my profile. It was more of an experiment than anything, and me being me, decided to rant in a way that could put a smile on a few faces. I have the ability to waffle even while writing, and wrote the following in one go without the need to edit. It just flowed, and when I had hit the post button, I admit to feeling much better. I had no idea that I had hit on something that would bring in so many messages and that I would have to spend hours answering them. It also took away the need to tell any future dates about my past. It was obvious as it was in my profile. I suppose the interesting part was that a lot of my mail came from nurses and ladies in the care profession.

The addition/rant:

Ok, time for a rant, although if I was to rant about everything that's gone on with my wonderful time on ##### I would be here all day. I do need to clear something up though.

I HAVE HAD CANCER. On Christmas Eve 2008 I was diagnosed with cancer of the head and neck. I had surgery, 6 months of chemo and over 7 weeks of RT. During this time I lost custody of my lovely daughter. This has kept me out the water for some time now and not because "I've lost my bottle" as one lady said. Now let's get something off my chest.....

It's not catching, you can't get it from contact with me. For those two ladies, please, please, please go and read a medical dictionary. I'm glad I never met you as I believe stupidity IS catching.

Please don't talk to me for weeks and then delete me when you find out I've had cancer. Not a very nice thing to do. For the multitude of ladies who have done this, good luck, and I hope you never find yourself alone over something that wasn't your fault.

YES, I am going to die. But you are going to die as well. This I can guarantee. I do intend though to find someone to love and spend a long and happy life with before I kick the bucket that's been following me around. I'm too stubborn to die yet anyway.

For the lady who asked me what my income was after finding out I'd had cancer, I wish you all the luck in the world. I'm thinking of leaving everything to you just for the sheer cheek you had. If you are looking to have children in the future, then I'm probably not your man. It's not rocket science, is it? You could however take a drive to Barts. My boys are on the third floor, Shelf No 3. They could probably do with some company.

All my pics are up to date.

I could rant all day but won't.

I now believe that I will never get another message off anyone, but you know what? I don't really care. I'm happy with who I am and I happen to like myself. I'm comfortable with myself and after going through treatment and months of not knowing whether I would make it, I believe this has made me a pretty nice and stable guy. Have you ever lived every day like it's your last? I do. I don't send out too many messages, so please message me if you want to say hi. You never know. X



"I suppose at some point I should tell her that I live in an apartment."

Do people actually fall for this shit?

As I said earlier, I did feel better after writing this and it's all true. There are some really strange people out there, but I consider myself strange as well so that's OK. The funny thing was I never believed I would get a message regarding this, but I was very wrong and still get messages even though I'm no longer active on the sites. The rant was possibly one of the best parts of my profile I ever shared and led to me meeting some wonderful ladies. It seemed to touch a nerve with some, and although I shun sympathy, the mail I received was very nice indeed. I preferred the "good for you" and the "go Jay" mail. What works and what doesn't still amazes me, so I was to try different additions to see what attracted different groups.

One I wrote made my online friends question my sanity, and I got a few strange questions from Louise regarding a certain paragraph I put on my profile. She sent me a message saying, "Do people actually fall for this shit?" As I said before, what's right for some is not right for others.

I thought that trying something away from the normal profile would be interesting, and something had been bouncing around in my head for awhile.

I admit to feeling silly, but I can write about most things and I am a romantic when the mood takes me:

I have a castle; it's not a big castle or a small castle. In fact it's different every time I visit. One day it could be a tree-house and the next a cottage but it will always be a castle. Whenever I take someone there they see it as they want to see it as it belongs to them as well. I have spent many years building our castle; I have built it brick by brick, stair by stair, tear by tear. Every brick was made from experience, every stair from every step I have ever taken and the cement to hold it all together from every tear I have ever shed. I have furnished it with smiles and dreams and it is those things that make it special. It sits on a cloud and is surrounded by sea and fields. There are woods and rivers, hills and mountains, waves and dolphins. Horses roam and birds sing. It truly is a wonderful place. It's a safe place, a place where no-one can hurt us. I never built a door and not one part is ever locked as I would never stop anyone from visiting or exploring. It's open to those with a true heart and those who carry no lies within. It's open to those with a true smile and those who do not scheme at others' expense. If you are filled with lies and hate, then the door will never show itself, the castle will remain out of reach. It has rooms for friends and those that are ill, for everyone needs a place to go where they can dream. It will surround all with love as it will us and keep them safe forever. It's warm there and the sun shines whenever we wish but there is also night as there has to be, for without the moon we could never be bathed in her light. It rains on the sea and fields so we can walk hand in hand and feel the world wash from our bodies and mind. We can do what we please in our castle as it is a dream and dreams are most wonderful. There's a fire for warmth and candles for light. There's music for the mood and wine for the spirit. There's laughter and tears but only the tears of joy. There's conversation that's never dull and there's bright eyes that sparkle. It's a safe place where the soul is safe from lies and the mind can rest from life. It's our place. It's our castle in the sky. Just close your eyes and you are there. It's so easy to find.

Quite simply, it worked. I did indeed get mail from the obviously more romantic of ladies. The messages were soppy and I was often congratulated on “a wonderful imagination”. There is nothing wrong with putting something into your profile that jumps into your mind. If it works, then you will soon know. The castle came from just an idea and soon turned into a part of my profile that was a complete contrast to the rant.

A message I cut from one of the sites read ... “that about your castle is beautiful ,had a tear form in my eye .Liz x”.

And another read ... “Hi loved your profile never knew a man could write like that. Think I could tick some of your “like” boxes, maybe take a look at my profile x”.

I did go on to remove the castle as I believed it would alienate some ladies, and I left my profile as it was before. Maybe I should have left it as I was getting messages, but didn't feel comfortable with it and I needed to feel comfortable with everything I had written. There was only so much romance I could take and I was in soppy overload with my messages.



"Maybe I'll send a little extra money so she can buy herself something on the way."

Spot a scammer

With the internet becoming a source of monetary gain for some, there's always the chance that you will be contacted by scammers. Every site deals with these differently, and some have an alarm button that will contact the admin team who will immediately check the integrity of a member. I have been on certain sites for a long time without ever being contacted by a scammer; however, I have also joined some where my first message was obviously a scam. With experience scams are easy to spot. Very bad English is usually a sign, although not everyone can speak perfect English (sic) so be careful who you dismiss.

I found that a scammer would usually be within easy reach of my location, but for some reason or another was from another country and working in the UK, or was from the UK and working abroad. After a while I quite enjoyed stringing them along and asking them about their hometown in England, and would even look up places of interest from their chosen town or city and ask about them. I could imagine them frantically hitting their search engine to find an answer.

The other big give away is they are unwilling to message or chat on the site itself and will offer a Yahoo! address to converse further. DON'T be fooled. There is no reason for them to offer another source of contact except that they know they will be deleted from the site soon.

This is a real and typical message that I have just found in my inbox from one of the sites:

i am miss wanita efua,a young and single girl.I am here to make friends or find serious love,well,i am interested in your profile and i want to know you more so if you fell the same way,then you can contact me via my private mail box(@@@@@@.yahoo.com)for better correspondence.Till i hear from you,bye.

They will open a profile and try and suck in as many people as possible before being kicked off for multi-messaging. It is a scam and they will ask for money eventually. They will clear your bank account if given the chance.

I had a very clever scammer online late one evening. I had made the mistake of saying I was currently in London during our online conversation and got a very quick reply saying she was only a few miles away. Her location was correct and she even knew something of the area. We continued talking and she asked if we could meet that night. This didn't seem a problem except I was told that I could not drive to her for our meet and she would need to come to me. She (of course) had no money and would it be possible for me to transfer some money into her account so she could get a cab? In fact, if I gave her my banking details she would even do the transfer of £10 into her account for me. With this done she would take the money out of an ATM, jump into a cab and be at my place within the hour. This conversation had gone on for over an hour on chat and I was amazed at the quick answers I was getting and the cleverness of the scam. The English was bad, but she said she was learning.

This was my first real introduction to dating site scams and I learnt quickly. Most scams are short term and quick, but there are others that are more long term. No matter what happens, please don't give out your banking details, no matter how genuine the other person seems. Sometimes things are just too good to be true.

I really dislike scammers as they prey on people who I consider to be vulnerable. To be honest, I dislike scammers, full stop. I do remember one lady that I swore was a scammer. Her picture was just too good to be true. I gave her a hard time thinking that it was a scam and she later turned out to be genuine. Some you lose I suppose and I still feel guilty.

The open question

One comment I posted, which was to bring in almost as many messages as the rant, was simple and off the cuff. It came in the form of a simple question that was answered many times. It read:

Just out of curiosity, is anyone else losing their sanity after being on here?

It was only after posting this that I realised a question offers the opportunity for ladies to message me. It really was a truthful question, as I was wondering at the time whether I was in fact losing my sanity after spending so much time online. A simple line had opened a busy world for me. Dating sites can sometimes make you question your own mental health and people could relate to this. Copy it, paste it, and use it. It worked for me.

Another was also simple and I thought of it while sitting locked up in my room on one dating site or another. I had been added as a favourite by a few women but I wasn't impressed that I wasn't a favourite of more ladies. How to change this without begging? The answer took some time but it worked ...

Update ... would everyone please stop adding me to their favourites without sending a message first. Sorry, ignore that last bit as I just remembered it was a dream.

This new part of my profile did the trick and I started getting added to favourites and then getting a following message from people. The wonderful thing about this post was it showed my sense of humour and also did what I hoped it would. I became a favourite of numerous people.

One addition fell flat, even though I thought it was funny. I think I received two messages regarding this:

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R D O F T H E L O N G E S T P R O F I L E O N H E R E

As I said, *I* thought it was funny, but apparently no-one else did. It didn't bring in many messages. While on the subject of long ... there has always been something that from the outset has put me off reading a profile, and that is the length and the amount of words used. I have scrolled down a page many times to find a profile that is bordering on "war and peace". A profile can easily be too short but at least it will get read. An overlong profile will put me off immediately and I will end up scan reading. It's not to do with the fact it may be boring, but I would prefer to listen to someone's life story person-to-person rather than read it. A description of who you are and not every place you've ever been will suffice.

The scary profile

As I said earlier, there are many different types of profile, but very few made me stop in my tracks and really want to message. I think at some point I became so used to the “normal” profile that it took something special or outrageous to make me want to read more.

One such profile was written by Miss BelleDeSade and it read as follows:

I doubt if you're even worthy of my time, most men aren't. What am I really looking for?

A feeble, uninteresting, insular, self-obsessed, pathetic excuse for the meaning of the word “man”. And as most of you fit this category, I expect I shall receive a multitude of skin-crawling replies. That's not bad that's good, because I can spend my spare time ridiculing you, not embarrassing you as I'm quite sure you're more than capable of doing that for yourselves. If I credit you to one nanometre above the intelligence of an amoeba, and your behavioural patterns are 2 evolutionary steps above Cro-Magnon, then you shall be commissioned to pamper me to high heaven, no task I ask shall be too great for you to endure, you shall cater to my every whim and you will shower me with gifts. And if I don't fit your category, though I doubt you possess the intelligence to distinguish, then there's one lesson you should learn ... “most” Ladies think like this, I'm just honest enough to see it through. What shall you have in return? A morsel of my time, something you should be in no doubt of being able to afford. If you can't, stay well away.

This was without a doubt a profile that had to be smiled at for its sheer audacity and I had to message. I will use this profile as an example later on how to break the ice when sending an initial message.

I still smile when reading this profile and still believe it to be one of the best I have read. If you can see through the fog of what initially reads as “quite scary”, then you can see a lady who has a very good grasp of the English language and is someone who has a very good sense of humour (the grammar is awful though). It's poking fun at the usual profile in its ultimate honesty. It certainly beats the usual “curled up in front of the TV with a glass of wine and a DVD” that many profiles seem to say at some point.

Miss BelleDeSade was in fact a very nice lady and not as scary as her profile would have you believe. Yes, she certainly has a very dry sense of humour, but it's still creative and shows someone with an active and funny mind.

It is precisely this kind of profile that would make me want to message. As I said before, it's not all about the profile, and of course, the attraction of the picture has to count as well, but with a good and comical profile the picture becomes less important.

Less than interesting

Miss DM became a friend of mine somewhere along the dating trail. We went on to swap stories and compare notes on how our experiences were going. She would get messages, but each one seemed to follow the same line of timewasters. At first it never occurred to me to check her profile. I suppose at

some point I had read it but for the life of me I couldn't remember what it said. I went back into the site we were both members of and once again read the main part of her profile. It didn't take long.

I'm a fun loving bubbly girl with a personality to match. Bit of a romantic really. I enjoy going to the Theatre I love meeting new people, dancing and generally enjoys life. I guess my quality would be my caring nature.

To me it was obvious why Miss DM didn't get many serious messages. Her profile said little about the person she was and shows nothing of her personality. She is in fact a lovely person and has so much to offer someone. She works in the nursing profession and doesn't have that much time to get out and meet people. If there was ever a profile that undersold the person, it was hers. It didn't even have the obligatory "wine and DVD" part.

The opening line is fine as opening lines go, but the lines that follow are very negative. Surely Miss DM knows what she likes and dislikes. "Bit of a romantic?" ... I would have to message just to ask which "bit" was romantic. Surely the words "I am a romantic at heart" would be better and much more positive. "Generally enjoys life" tells me that DM's life is unsettled. This statement screams "problems" and the alarm bells would be ringing on all levels. It really is a negative description. I know for a fact that Miss DM has many good qualities but she has finished her profile with the words "I guess". Are things so bad that she has to guess at her better qualities?

In the name of friendship and the fact that I have to somehow keep the reader happy and interested, I decided to rewrite Miss Dm's profile to see if we could change the input of her message box. For me it was an experiment, but for her it was a future. I sat down and composed this:

Hi and thank you for stopping by to read my profile.

I won't keep you long as I know there are many more profiles on here for you to read, but maybe you will find this one a little more interesting?

Are you looking forward to all the nights ahead on the sofa, with a DVD and a glass of wine ... yes, I have read some other profiles and to be honest I would like more from life than just that :)

Me? As you can see I'm a redhead and have the fiery nature to match. I work hard within the nursing profession and my caring nature balances my fiery side. I do however like to get out and burn off some steam when I can, like all nurses.

I have been on this site for a while now and although I have received many messages I am still awaiting someone who has the character and strength to match mine.

Unlike most, I am not looking for a knight in shining armour or a superhuman Adonis but someone who has a zest for life and likes to feel the blood pump through their veins. If you drive it like you stole it and like to live each day like it's your last, then maybe we would get along.

I will answer all messages regardless of their content lol.

Happy fishing guys x

I wrote this in about ten minutes. Here is an exact copy and paste from the start of our

conversation/experiment:

From: Jay33

Subject: Hi

Hey, Can I please have permission to use your profile and rewrite it for you. I'll mail the new version over and let you decide if you want to use it. It's all in the name of publishing. I won't use your name etc. Just between you and me

From: dm

Subject: RE:Hi

lol hmmmm email it to me

From: Jay33

Subject: RE:RE:Hi

Ok no problem. I believe your profile could be so much better.

When I said between you and me I was under exaggerating. It will go into the book and if you do use it and it brings in messages I would love to know.

Hope everything's ok.

From: Jay33

Subject: Hi

Hey,

I have written you a new "about me" profile.

Do you have the bottle to use it? I would love it if you did and please let me know if you start getting more messages than usual. I'll update and do another profile for you soon with a bit more fine tuning.

Here's the new version.....

<<NEW PROFILE>>

Just cut and paste it into your profile under the "edit profile" page. As easy as that.

If you decide you do not want to then no problem and I'll find someone else.

Hope every thing's ok.

From: dm

Subject: RE:Hi

hi hunnie

done lol

will keep u posted xx

From: Jay33

Subject: RE:RE:Hi

Thanks,

I hope it works but I think it will.

Let's see what happens now.

I didn't hear anything from Miss DM for quite some time and decided that enough was enough. I contacted her to see what was happening with regards to the new profile:

From: Jay33

Subject: RE:RE:Hi

Hey,

Any luck with the new profile?

From: dm

Subject: RE:RE:RE:Hi

lol tooo many messageshelp!!!!!!

From: Jay33

Subject: RE:RE:RE:RE:Hi

Are you really saying that since the new profile you have been getting more messages?

If that's true then that's great.

From: dm

Subject: RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:Hi

Yes honest lol xx

From: Jay

Subject: RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:RE:Hi

I'm so glad it worked. It goes to show that profiles do mean something. Pleased to have been of assistance.

Get out there and start dating.

I must admit that I was pleased with myself, but I was also sure that it would work. I would have been honest and written something even if her new profile didn't bring in any messages and then carried on

trying until we had got it right. After all this was the first profile I had written from a female's point of view. With experience I got it right first time.

I wish Miss DM all the best for the future and I doubt I'll hear much from her from now on.

Why did this new profile work?

I have already written about the original profile and how it was negative and contained nothing of interest. The new profile I had written was a lot more positive. It was written from a conversational point of view as though it spoke to the reader and in doing so drew them in. It was positive and the beginning poked fun at the usual "DVD and a bottle of wine" statement that seems to crop up on many profiles and I am sure men can relate to. This does make boring reading after a time. It had passion for life and incorporated her work (which is long hours) but balanced that with the "letting off steam" remark. The part about "strength to match mine" is almost a come on. It says, "Can you match me?"

There are so many profiles that mention the legendary "knight in shining armour" so I thought I would be more honest and ask for someone real.

The last statement about "drive it like you stole it" is one of my favourite sayings. I wonder if Miss DM is getting many messages from petrol heads. The downside to many profiles is the constant negativity. A "zest for life" is as positive as it gets and shows a brighter future.

I think I was being a little cruel with the "answer all messages" part, but it's a great thing to put on any profile. It gives the reader a definite on whether they will receive a return message. I had this on my profile for a while but had to delete it as I was spending too much time answering my messages.

This revised profile certainly worked and goes to show that a good one will attract more people. Your page needs to have balance, from a good picture to a positive outlook. If it's boring and unsure, then it shows you as the same. It portrays the man/lady that you are and what you want for the future. There are a lot of people on dating sites that have come out of bad or boring relationships/marriages and do not want to end up in the same space, so by offering something new and positive it is bound to attract them to you. I will end this with the words that crop up a lot: "be honest" and never offer something you cannot give. Never be someone you are not.

Profiles that put me off

There were many things in profiles that put me off messaging someone, but I think the one that stands out is as follows (the comments in brackets are mine). I think you will see what I mean:

“I work hard but play harder. I enjoy horse riding every evening and run a stable after work (so far so good).

I sky dive regularly (probably after the stable) and fly my own plane (probably not while sky diving). I am an avid surfer and body boarder (while horse riding?) and always catch the surf when it’s big. I work out at the gym five nights a week (after or before surfing?) and I am a regular at our local club where I love to strut my stuff on the dance floor with friends. I am learning to trampoline (while horse riding or on the dance floor?) and attend (by plane?) a Pilates class three nights a week. I love cooking and can spend hours in the kitchen (is this kitchen at the club or stable?) making food from all countries. I enjoy travelling (probably by horse) and have seen and enjoyed many countries (probably by plane). I have a walking trip around India planned for the New Year (sounds like the horses won’t be getting fed or the clubs takings will be down). I do get a lot of free time and would love to share that with someone.”

I admit that I made this one up, but believe it or not profiles like this do exist. Where do these people find time to fit all this in and still date? It’s not so much the obvious fibs that put me off (I’m sorry, but no-one could do all that), but the fact that they are “Super woman/man” and that is something we as normal people could never match. How on earth could anyone keep up with all those hobbies? Surely they would never have time to date and be in a relationship. The funny thing is that people who have this kind of profile seem to be on the sites more than anyone else. Possibly by mobile phone? I think not. It seems to me that the writers of such profiles are very bored with their lives and are trying (in vain) to make themselves sound more interesting. They probably at one point in their life did all of the above, but surely they can’t do all this every week? Can they?

I started to message Miss F when I read on her profile that she loved body boarding. My opening message was simple and all I had to write was, “Do you fancy swapping some information on good surf spots?” I got an answer straight away and we messaged on a regular basis about our surf experiences. In the end I trusted Miss F enough to give her my home phone number. We would talk on the phone every couple of days and she showed an interest in learning to surf. It just so happened I had a friend who’s a great surfer and I called him about the possibility of teaching Miss F to surf, as due to illness I couldn’t do it myself. She was all for it and we set up a time for a lesson during the early summer. There was always a niggle about the lack of knowledge she had about bodyboarding and the west coast but as I have never bodyboarded I put this down to my inexperience of the sport (we call them shark biscuits). Things rolled along nicely and we became quite attached to each other, although we had yet to meet. Miss F had a great sense of humour and had the usual problems with her growing children, just the same as me, so we had a lot to talk about apart from surfing. I became quite excited about the up-and-coming surf trip as I longed to be back within the surf scene. Due to my treatment for cancer and the operation I’d had I knew I would never be back on a surfboard. The thought of seeing someone learn was something to look forward to, and to do this while dating was

going to be fun. I had obviously seen many pictures of Miss F so I had no worries there.

It was about a week before we were to meet on the west coast that Miss F told the truth. She had bodyboarded (once) and the pictures of her in a wetsuit holding a board *were* of her, but she was holding her friend's gear. She was in fact scared of the sea. In the conversation she added that she hoped this didn't change things. I said they didn't, except possibly for the fact that my friend was waiting and I had planned a trip to Cornwall and Devon. I didn't feel let down about the trip as I had always had a niggle at the back of my mind, but I did feel lied to and that was wrong. Her profile was a sham, as simple as that.

I didn't cut things off then and there and didn't rant and rave. Miss F obviously had her reasons for doing what she did, but for me any trust that was there was broken. I kept in contact but slowly reduced the number of calls until they became non-existent. What else could I do?

This is a wonderful example of how lies on a profile can affect your future and someone else's. It proved to me that bodyboarders deserve their reputation of being called "shark biscuits". Maybe I should not have gone so far and arranged a trip etc., but I thought I had met someone with an interest in the sea to match mine. I was wrong.

Do people actually read profiles?

There is an old and very interesting question that has been brought up many times with my partner Louise while discussing dating sites: Do people actually read profiles or do they go by the picture and nothing else?

The answer is simple: yes and no.

I still believe that most women do in fact read profiles and many men do not. Although, judging by the messages Louise gets, I could be wrong, as many of them do mention something that's in her profile.

The messages I still get do mention parts of my profiles, but then there's the other side. I put an addition at the end of my very long profile when Louise and I started our relationship. I couldn't leave the dating sites as I was still compiling this book, but I didn't want to mislead anyone. I wrote the following and added it to my profile:

Update ... It's easier to write this part on my profile than to keep writing the same answer to my messages. I am now dating someone and in a very happy relationship (at least I'm happy). Yes, we met on here so it goes to show that these sites can work. I now only come on here to chat with friends and to continue the ever-running book about internet dating. If you have a story to tell, then please feel free to message me as I can do with all the info I can get my grubby little writing paws on. The book should be in print by Xmas (one of them anyway). To my friends on here ... please keep in touch as it's been a fun journey.

I still got messages, although some were from ladies who wanted to wish us luck. Some weren't and read as follows:

Hello there, what a really nice profile to read.

So if distance isnt a prob Im just over the water ... Have you visited us?

hi are you up for a meet i have read your profile and i like it...

Hi there

Liked your photo's and as you can see I have a cheeky smile and rarely unhappy!!

If we are not nice enough do we have to pay???lol

would you consider me?lol xx

It proves that not all ladies read profiles, and backs up the importance of the picture, but this is by no means all ladies. There were also many that simply said:

well done you for finding someone and battling with cancer. Wishing you happiness x

Hi there,

Well that really is the longest profile I've read. Yes I read it from top to bottom. It's a very honest and open one to say the least!

It's so nice to hear that you are now dating someone, and I truly hope you continue to be happy!

Though you have had cancer. You haven't said if you're in remission?

I've been on here since February this year and have had some dates, both very weird at it turned out after several dates, I have been mailed by some odd balls, and those that are ignorant. I still have hope that I will meet a friend who will become a lot more over time.

Take care, be happy.

Whether all ladies read profiles or not isn't the point. The point is that if your profile is good, then it will attract many more messages than not. If they don't read profiles, then they are going to message anyway based on your picture. With both, you will be covering every angle.

In the end, I added this at the beginning of my profile, followed by the part about my relationship.

Hello fellow profile trawler and dating site member.....possibly even slightly fed up or unbalanced member as I once was. Too much time on here really does rot the brain cells you know but I'm possibly preaching to the wise on that one. If you are a new member and haven't reached this stage yet then I suggest heavy tranquillisers very soon or copious amounts of alcohol.

I thought it would be a good idea to put this update on the top of my very long profile and hopefully it will clear up any misunderstanding. A quick cut and paste and.....

This did indeed seem to work for a while, but I once again got messages asking for a date so I added.....

I once believed that ladies did in fact read all the profile but obviously not. Thanks for the offers of dates, but I don't think my girlfriend would be overly impressed. It has boosted my ego though.

I now only get messages wishing me "good luck" and from friends. The debate about "reading profiles" continues.

The use of the smiley lol

I would never consider using txt speak within my profile as I know that many ladies do not like it. Some believe it to be childish and lazy. If you have taken the time to write a proper profile, then why alienate certain groups by using smileys or txt speak. However, I do believe that in messaging it can be essential.

Your first message

Without the message, there would be no dating site and no dating. There would be a void that would mean hours of reading other people's profiles without actually getting anywhere at all. It would be a strange place.

I remember vividly sending my first message and getting my first reply. I remember sitting at my laptop and wondering why certain messages would get a reply and others wouldn't. I remember the first message I sent and it being misread. I was sure that there was nothing in it that could offend, but somehow the recipient had read something that I had missed. I sat there scratching my head and wondering what it could have been that was misread.

The message read:

Good evening Miss XXXXXX

I really liked reading your profile and have been to Poland myself. I really loved the country and have travelled through most of the South. I especially liked the beer. It would be great to hear back from you and maybe I could help with your conversational English one evening. I have known many Polish people and understand that the different uses in conversations of the English language can be difficult.

I hope you are having a great day and this site is treating you well,

jay

The answer read.....

What a rude man. Please do not message me again as I have no need to talk to someone that has anger issues. You should not be on here if you are going to be rude to us and angry.

Good bye.

This really left me stumped. I had no idea which part of my message sounded or read as angry. Maybe if I had used a smiley or a lol after the beer comment then it wouldn't have been read as abusive. She had written in her profile that maybe being on a dating site and talking to English men could help with her conversational English, so surely it couldn't have been my offer of help that was offensive. I still have no idea as to what upset her. Maybe her written English was as bad as her conversational English.

The use of the smiley or txt speak within a message can be essential, although I would NEVER use them in an initial message and I would only use them once a lady had used them first. I would still only use smileys, winks or LOL and would never bastardise the English language with txt speak. Words can be read many different ways and sentences can appear to be something they are not.

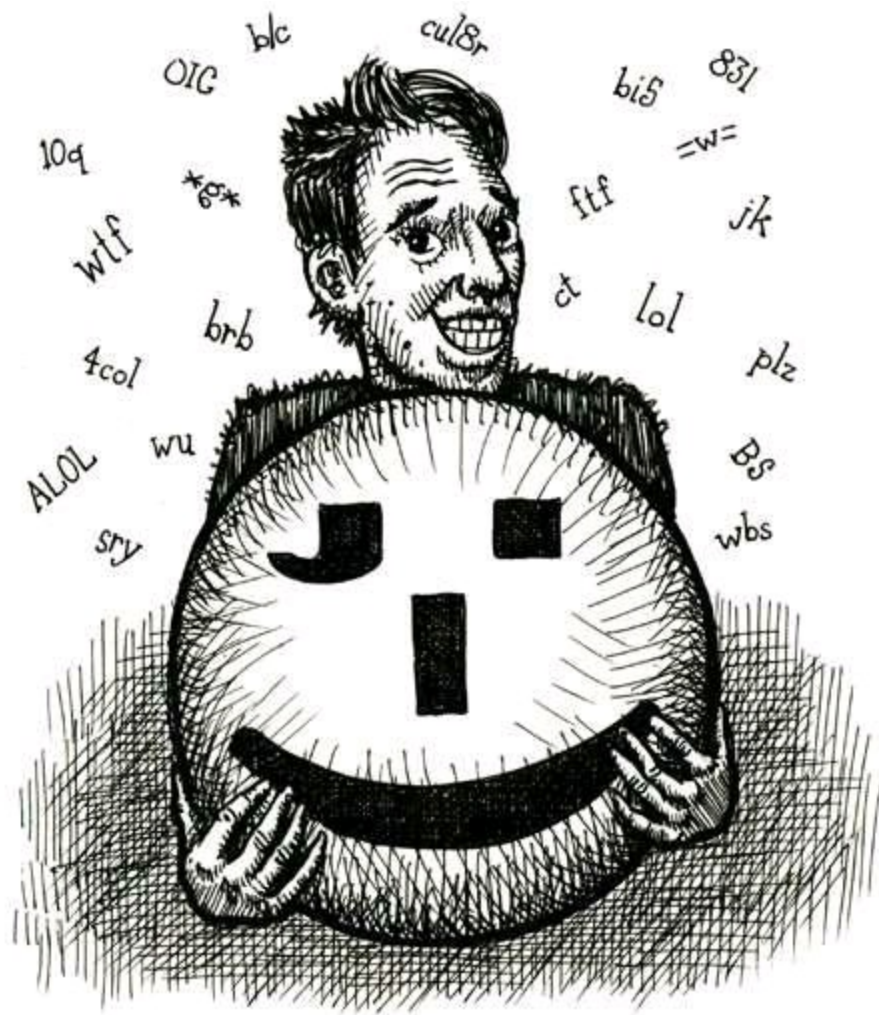
For example:

Had a great day but my daughter is driving me mad

As opposed to.....

Had a great day but my daughter is driving me mad :)

Words are very two dimensional and the first statement could be taken seriously, showing me as a person who has no patience for children. With the addition of a smiley face it shows that, although my daughter probably is driving me mad, it's nothing unusual and I'm taking it lightly.



"HI MY NMS JY. ITS SO LVLY 2 MEET YOU. I UNDRSTND UR STDYNG
ENGLSH AT UNVRSTY. HW ABOUT DNNR AND THN BCK 2 Mh."

The use of txt speak

The use of txt speak does have its place in messages. Sometimes it's a must and I often used the abbreviation "LOL" myself to take away the seriousness of certain sentences. I drew the line at "PMSL" and others that incorporated swearing as I had no need of these. It was on a dating site that I learnt what "FFS" meant (for fucks sake). Call me naive but I have always managed to find a more acceptable use of the English language other than swearing. I even gave up messaging one lady because of the swearing. It became too much and every message I received gave the impression that she was ranting or angry. Maybe she really was :)

I often used the wink ;) when typing a flirty or naughty message or something that could be taken in a sexual way, to ensure that it was taken in exactly the way I intended. After all, there's no point in typing a good sexual innuendo if it's going to be missed. Often very flirtatious conversations were ended with a wink or LOL to try and soften the obvious advances from one party to another. Any

advances that were sent were still obvious, wink or no wink. The wink is a perfect way to end a cheeky sentence.

As I have said already, there is a need for certain types of txt speak. A message that is made up purely of txt speak is another matter, however.

Take your time

I have had many replies from my messages complimenting me on my ability to write something without the need to revert to the tearing apart of the written word. It may seem like a good idea at the time to send a message that looks as though it's been written by a 16 year old, but if a message shows you have taken your time over it, then there is more of a chance of a reply. For the sake of a few extra minutes, why not take the time to do things properly? Be it a profile or a message. Txt speak has its place, but keep it to a minimum.

When I was first faced with messaging, I admit I was lost. A lot of men (so I've been told) will send their phone number and nothing else. Some would send a simple "Hi, how are you?" and that was all. I began to think that all men were mad. It would be easy to cut and paste a hundred phone numbers into various profiles or a hundred "Hi's" and sit back and wait but it doesn't give any control as to who you are messaging. Do these men really believe that the ladies don't know they are cutting and pasting? It also means you run the risk of messaging the same person over and over without getting a reply. In my mind it seemed much better to send out fewer messages, but by making them personal, it ensured I got a higher percentage of replies. This may sound horrible, but it's the difference between bulk sending and high-end selling. I spent hours reading profile after profile and soon learnt a simple trick. The answer to getting a reply to a message was to write about something that the lady was interested in. The trick to finding out what they were interested in was written in their profile.

To me this wasn't exactly rocket science. I couldn't say whether the cut and paste approach works as I never did it, but I wasn't looking for hundreds of incoming messages from people I wasn't interested in. I was looking for return messages from ladies I felt I could happily date. For me it wasn't about bragging to my friends about the amount of messages I received every day, it was about meeting and dating someone I could go on to have a relationship with. I wasn't being fussy, but I never saw the point of leading ladies on only to drop them when someone else came along.

I believe it's easy to send message after message to lady after lady. If you carry on for long enough, then someone has to send something back, but think about this: every site I ever used has the facility for you to keep all your messages for up to a month, sometimes longer. That's all incoming and outgoing mail. It's simple to go back and see who's messaged you and who hasn't, and many ladies do this. I read on many profiles the words: "If I don't get back to you, then it's nothing personal, but you are not my type and please do not keep messaging me." This means that if you do not make an impression the first time, you will not get a second chance. Some sites have a choice for the user where a second message will not be allowed to be sent if the first isn't answered. With those that use this you only get one chance. If you are sending out bulk messages then you are quickly cutting down the number of ladies you can message in the future. In the end, if you don't get replies from anyone, you will only be able to message new users. The initial message is very important and can mean the difference between dating and sitting at home bored.

What do other men write?

I have sat back and been lucky enough to go over some of the messages that Louise used to get from men on dating sites. Some were unbelievable. She could almost tell what each user was going to send before she had even opened the message. I remember her words – “He looks like a ‘Hi, how are you?’ type” – and believe it or not she was right. This is where I repeat the words, “Are all men mad?”

Our fake female profiles

As I sit here writing away like a man obsessed, I believe there is something missing from this part of the book, and that’s a few real messages from real men. Louise has left her profile on one of the dating sites, so I think it’s time to put away my jealousy and ask her to resurrect her old profile. It’s time for my partner to go live online again in the name of “readers’ interest”. I think it’s also time to put a fake female profile onto one of the lesser-known sites and see what happens. I will not use a picture and will type something basic for her interests etc. Let’s call her “Miss Y”.

While we’re doing this, let’s also put up another fake profile. This time I will make the lady flirty and fun. Let’s call her “Lady in Bed”.

I will create both ladies with the same statistics, jobs, and interests and will not use a picture on either profile.

So, we now have three profiles on one site. One belongs to my partner, who is real (at least I hope she is or there’s some serious medication coming my way), one belongs to a normal, quite boring cyberlady called Miss Y, and the third “Lady in bed” I am going to spice up and hopefully make a little more sexually fun and flirty. Let’s see what other men actually write by way of messages and introductions.

Isn’t this fun?

The outcome

As I said, I kept both ladies the same in their statistics etc.

Both “Lady in Bed” and “Miss Y” worked in Media. They were both 5ft 6 and had black hair and green eyes. Both smoked, drank and had children. I think you get the idea.

The difference of course was their profiles.

Lady in Bed’s profile read as follows:

Hi Lads,
I’m a rather hot headed, red blooded lady who is here to put some excitement into her life again. I’m getting a bit bored of being on my own now the cold nights are setting in. I would love to get out and start dating and who knows maybe we could keep each other warm at night (or mornings). I really do neeeeeeeeeed to put some fun back into my life. I really neeeeeeeeeed to

try a few new things and learn what life's all about.

I've missed so much and I'm ready to meet someone who can teach me a few new and wonderful things.

Could you be the one?

And Miss Y's profile:

I suppose I'm a little boring. Been in a relationship for most of my life and now don't really know what to do. I haven't really done much with my life so far. Love the library and my reading club. Spend most evenings on the sofa with a glass of wine watching the TV or reading a book.

I like puzzles and crosswords.

I would like someone to share this with.

I wrote both these profiles in a matter of minutes and posted them on one of the lesser-known sites. The response to what are essentially two contrasting profiles was in a way surprising at times but also what I expected. What I didn't expect was the number of messages they would receive, one obviously more than the other. These profiles also made me realise that the amount of competition on dating sites is tremendous. It is literally mind-boggling.

After an hour of watching first-hand what happens from a ladies point of view, I was pleased that my approach to messages was different. I had taken the time to learn what worked and what didn't and I was obviously ahead in the dating game. I knew that my messages worked, but I never knew that I was vying for the attention of ladies with so many other men.

I left both profiles running for a day and only answered one message as he intrigued me. I didn't believe it would be fair to start message conversations with anyone as neither lady existed. The amount of chat offers I got was amazing considering there wasn't a picture on either profile. I have always been dubious of messaging ladies without pictures, but obviously not everyone feels the same.

The replies

So, were there any "cut and pastes"? Did the messages back up everything I have written so far? Was it as bad as I expected? In one simple word: yes.

With the exception of one message, the rest were awful, although there was one that was interesting to say the least. I will not put up the "Hi, how are you?" messages as they would fill a book.

The first message Lady in Bed (LB) got was, quite simply:

Hey you,

How are you today u alrite?!!

So, tell me more about yourself please?!!

What about hobbies/interesting/job etc. etc?!!

Anything you wanna know about me just ask me ok!!!!

Hope to hear from you soon.

My first thoughts on this were it was pretty much OK, until I was to open Miss Y's profile and found the same message. A cut and paste on the first message! This was the message I *had* to answer, and I did so with a simple sentence:

“Miss Y” wrote:

Never thought I'd get a message. what attracted you to me?

“LB” wrote:

Tell me what you liked about my profile.

The answer was a wonderful “**well you come a cross nice x**” cut and pasted for both questions and sent to both cyberladies.

Another message that was cut and pasted into both was:

Hi, how are you? what you upto? you had a good weekend? x

The use of English is amazing. The men that sent them couldn't write a sentence using correct grammar even when they were bulk sending. I think this really does answer the cut and paste debate.

Both profiles got the same message over and over from guy after guy and at one point from a lady who was looking for a girlfriend. I wish her luck.

One guy cut and pasted a message and then sent it to both ladies and then later on sent the same message again. That was the “control over who you message” debate cleared up.

These are some of the other messages that LB received. Some are worse than others:

You sound ideal. I hope you say hi. Maybe ill be the one to entice you out of bed. Oh hang on... Surely I ha e hot that wrong ha ha.

Hiya, i like the sound of your profile & feel the same ;)Stop by & say hello sometime if you fancy a chat x

Hi there like the sound of your intent similar to mine:) soo if you like the look off love to hear from you, and would like to see a pic?

Hi there hows u? U sound like a woman whos up for fun. Im a very fun guy and love to show u all the fun u need xx

hey how's u.u.ok u aving fun on here are ya ?iv just joined myself x

and a simple:

Got any pics.

Miss Y on the other hand got some different messages, apart from the cut and pastes:

how are you sound nice love to chat some time

hi ya how is ur day gone so far

how long you been on the shelf? X

Great about me Miss Y, fancy a chat with a nice, genuine guy ? xx

Both profiles received a lot of messages and so many “chat requests” that I was constantly hitting the “no” button. Not one of the above messages said anything in particular, although “the shelf” message at least proved that one guy had read Miss Y’s profile. The ladies from cyberspace proved to be popular even though neither had a picture up and neither had a very interesting profile. I do admit that LB did indeed have a flirty one, but I did that so I could get as many messages in as short a time as possible. It’s interesting that LB received a lot more messages than Miss Y. It could say that there’s a lot of men on dating sites who are only after sex or an intimate encounter... surely not ;)

There were two messages that stood out for me. The first was from a guy and sent to Miss Y. As I sat reading it, I realised I had received something from a guy who was obviously genuine. The message he sent to Miss Y was not exactly upbeat and positive, but then Miss Y’s profile wasn’t either. The message read as follows ...

Hello Miss Y.

I’m XXXX.

I feel sorry for you been on the shelf for a long time. Snap me too. Lol. I go out to try and find someone but its always too loud. I’ve been on my own now for over 2 years and getting pretty bored of my own company.

Been on this site for ages but seldom find the time to look around.

Well how do you sell yourself on here without sounding big headed lol.

Im 6” tall single and have no children.I love adventure, watch TV and like reality shows like the X factor, I’m a celebrity etc and crime documentaries. I’ve got a sense of humour so I’m told and I am genuine. So if you would like to talk that would be good.

P.S I do smile

I thought this was a lovely message and so perfect for the lady I had invented. His use of empathy was good and the message itself was well-thought out and presented. Somehow he had even presented himself well while sounding genuine and in no way big-headed. For me this was a perfect message and I even wanted to tell him so, but I wasn’t sure how to approach the subject that he had in fact sent his message to a man. He had read the profile and had used what was said within it to write something to Miss Y. I went on to read his profile, and although his pictures were not very good, the rest was. I really do wish this guy well and I know he will be in a happy relationship long before any of the others who had sent messages.

On a lighter note, LB did receive a message that was very interesting. As I have said before, there are some strange people out there.

My name’s XXXX, I’m XX but can’t figure out how to change it on here, currently living in

Plymouth and working at an unbelievably boring XXXXXX firm! This is going to sound odd, but I believe in female superiority over men, would you be at all interested in having me as your personal slave? Weird, I know, but totally true, I would do anything you commanded without question and would never forget my place or want anything at all in return. Housework, chores, cleaning, shopping, butlering, even just following orders to amuse you and your mates too if you wished.

I know it's out the blue, but as you seem confident and open minded, and said you want to try new and exciting things, I thought I would be completely upfront and at least offer!

It's cool if it's just not for you, but would be great to chat more if you're at all interested?

I considered sending a message back as since I've started writing this book I have got behind on the housework, and I'm getting a bit sick of microwave meals. I decided against it as the constant polishing and washing up would break my concentration. I also didn't think that I could fool him with a dress and a wig.

The amount of competition on dating sites is huge, but as the preceding pages prove, the amount of competition when writing messages is very small indeed. I now know why I would constantly receive return messages saying it was so nice to see something that was written and spelt correctly.

I am now going to go back and remove both the lonely Miss Y and the flirty LB from the site that they have been a part of for the past 24 hours. I will now delete them completely. Their jobs are done.

The message will always be subjective to the recipient. You only have the profile to go on and sometimes an array of hobbies, but this is enough to present a good first message. If I had come across our cyberladies' profiles and decided to message them, I would have sent this to Miss Y. Something simple:

Hi Miss Y,

I have just read your profile and felt that we have something in common. I am an avid reader and love books. I spend many a cold evening with my head between the pages of a good read. You have said that you enjoy crosswords, something I enjoy as well. My favourite is the Telegraph, although it's been a while since I tackled it. I admit to using a thesaurus and dictionary as that's the only way I can finish one.

If you would like to swap favourite books or find yourself stuck on 15 across and need some help, then please feel free to contact me as it would be lovely to talk to someone who has the same passions as myself.

I hope this site is treating you well, and if I do not hear back then I wish you all the luck in the world,

Jay

For LB I would have written something obviously a little different, but I would not have resorted to the obvious "sex" intent (if that was the intention). I would have twisted things slightly and sent this:

Hi Lady in Bed,

It's a wonderful feeling to be where you are at this moment in time. You have your whole life ahead of you now and it must be a great feeling. Like you I was in a long relationship and know the feeling of being free to do whatever you feel you want to do. There's so much out there to do and so much to see. Out of curiosity what is it you would like to do? Walk on the moon, fly your own plane, own a herd of racehorses or just learn to feel alive again? I would love to know.

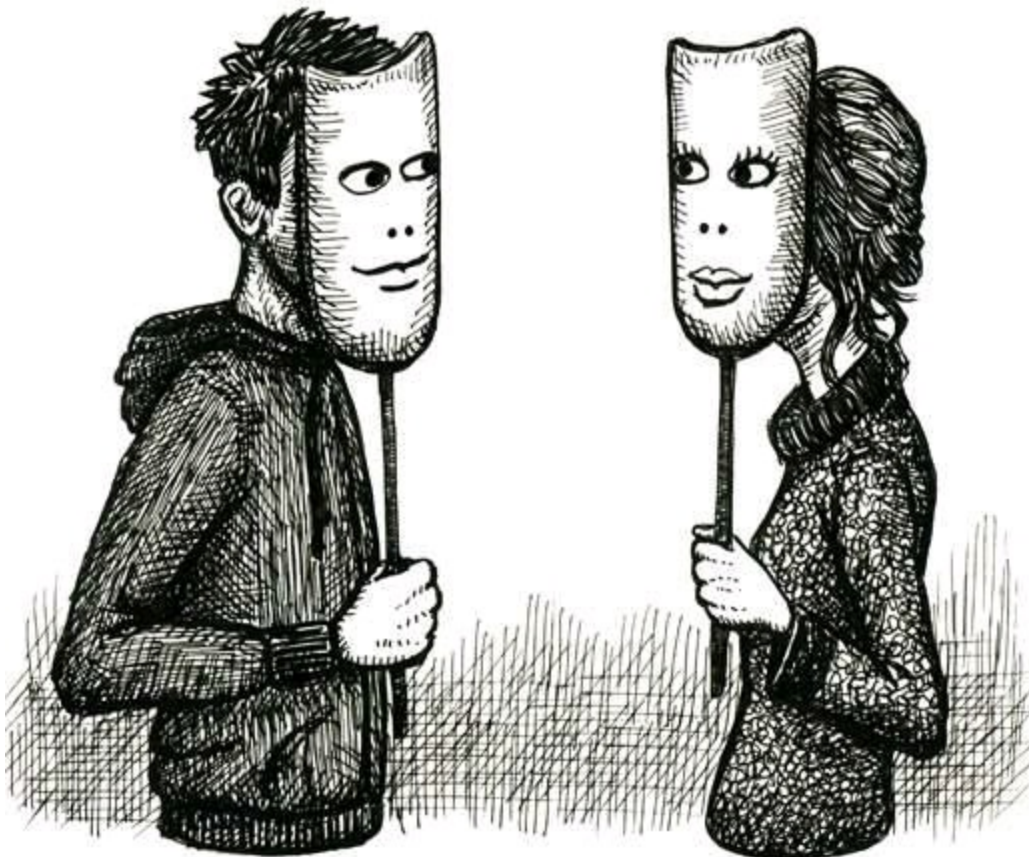
I'm sure you do get a lot of mail and I would feel more than privileged if you would answer this as I feel we could share a journey together or failing that share a smile or two.

I hope this site is treating you well and living up to your expectations (whatever they may be). Keep smiling and enjoy whatever comes your way, and if I don't hear back then I wish you all the luck for the future,

Jay

Tip: the full stop

I would be surprised if I didn't get a reply from either of these messages, but stranger things have happened and nothing is ever cut and dried when it comes to mail. I have written what I feel to be a very good message in the past and not received a reply, but that happened rarely. There was one thing I would never do and that was put a full stop at the end of my name. For some reason I found that it was too final and I did in fact get more mail back when I left the message open and didn't finalise it with a full stop. That's one for the psychologists and not us. Both messages are written grammatically correctly and I ended neither with a kiss as I have never felt that a first message warrants this. It's almost too forward, but that's the choice of the writer and a personal thing.



"Please, please, please, anyone but my ex."

Lady with no picture?

I personally would never message a lady who doesn't have a picture and I have good reason for this. When I was new to the sites I received many messages from ladies who had no picture for whatever reason. They would usually say that it was being approved, which was fine as it can take a couple of days sometimes to get a picture onto a profile. The messages were often nice and I would always feel obliged to answer as is my nature, and before I knew it I would find myself in a message conversation or talking on chat. There really isn't anything wrong with this, but the inevitable has to happen eventually and the subject of what the person in question actually looks like has to come up. It's an odd situation talking to someone and not knowing what they look like.

I talked to one such lady for weeks and we became quite close. Her reason for not having a picture up was both simple and complicated. She had been in an abusive relationship and she was scared her ex-husband might find her online and discover her whereabouts. Her reason turned out to be 100% true and not once did she deceive me in anything we talked about. As the weeks went by, I became increasingly attached to this lady and would look forward to our evening chats about our respective days. We would meet online and quite often talk late into the night. From the small hints I would get about her appearance I began to imagine what she looked like. I ended up with a cyber-appearance all of my very own, I made her out to be someone she wasn't. When the day came that she was to send me pictures of herself (let's face it, it had to come), I remember being very excited. I was to finally see the lady that had shared my evenings, my nights and my ramblings. I think that we both know where this is going, but at the time and probably because I am the eternal optimist I didn't see it. After all, why would I? I KNEW what she looked like as she lived perfectly happily inside my head. I will never forget the disappointment of seeing her pictures as she wasn't the person I expected her to be. She was in no way ugly or unattractive, but she wasn't the lady in my mind that I had been talking to for so long. The disappointment that there was no spark took me back and made me realise that I had been misleading both her and myself. I was left with the unfortunate task of explaining that I didn't find her attractive, and I hated every second of that. She understood, but our chats became less enthusiastic and eventually stopped. We are still friends and she is on my Facebook page every day, and from what I can see from her pictures, she is in a very happy relationship with a man who she deserves. I wish her all the luck in the world and if there's one person who deserves happiness it's her. I hope the new boyfriend gets to meet the ex-husband. The new boyfriend is a tank of a man :)

I learnt the hard way with anonymous messages and chat. Not once do I remember feeling happy about the picture I eventually received. I think I continued to answer messages hoping that I could break the cycle and find someone who would meet my personal expectations, but I never did. It always led to a "sorry, there is no spark" type of message leaving me feeling that I had almost wasted my time. This feeling would pass and I admit to making some great friends this way, but I never once dated a lady I had met online who had no picture, and that is essentially why I was there. After all, they are dating sites.

In the end, I added a part to my profile that quite simply said, "no picture, no reply". I didn't feel comfortable with this, but felt it was necessary to avoid any confusion in the future. On some sites there is the capability to only search for people with a profile picture. I ensured that this was always switched on unless I was searching the "new members" section. At least these ladies were genuinely awaiting picture approval and nothing more.

New members

New members are a wonderful way of ensuring reply mail. Being new means they are more likely to answer, giving the sender more of a chance to strike up a conversation. I would check the new members section daily and often send a few messages of welcome to certain ladies. I believe older members become quite cynical, but newer ones always seem to answer. A typical first message to a new member would read as follows:

Hi XXXXXX (always use their screen name as it makes the message more personal)

I would like to welcome you to the wonderful world of internet dating. Please fasten your seatbelt as you are about to take a ride on possibly the strangest journey of your life. If you look to the left, you will find the more obvious “players”, and to your right you will find the “stalkers”. I am neither, but only time can prove this.

I would like (if I may) to be your tour guide over the next part of your journey. If at any point you feel you need to ask a question, then please feel free to contact me and I will answer honestly and precisely as is the point of your own personal online guide.

If I don’t hear back from you, then I wish you all the luck in the world and I hope you find whatever it is you are looking for.

Keep smiling,

Jay

The obvious thing that is missing from this message is any mention of the ladies profile, but as this is just an example it will suffice. Always make your message personal or it will just look like another cut and paste. Something we now know ladies get very used to and men constantly do.

When deciding who to message, don’t be totally put off by a person’s looks or what is written in their profile. If you feel there is an attraction, then go ahead and message. Sometimes a gut feeling is a good thing. What have you got to lose?

Earlier I mentioned Miss BelleDeSade and the wonderful but slightly scary profile she had written. I thought about what to write as an opening message for quite a while. I really wanted a reply mail as she had already intrigued me, and I knew that if I could get a message back somehow I would feel very proud of myself. After all this was not going to be easy. She did have a lot of information to go on, and sometimes the hardest messages are the ones where the profile is short and says very little. I decided on the truthful and upfront approach and sent this:

Miss Belle De Sade,

What a lovely profile. By far the best I have read for a while. This isn’t me crawling and catering to you but just an honest opinion.

I am currently writing a book on dating sites and have been compiling information and studying these sites for a while now. I would like your permission to use your profile within my book. You have my word I will not ridicule anything you say and will only use it as a benchmark.

Thank you for your consideration, and thank you for making me smile,

Jay

To which I received:

It may surprise you Mr Jay that I too scratch my quill against parchment whilst dragging my imaginary persona through the gutters of this, and other sites. Maybe we shall compare books near the end of the tour. Who knows? And yes my darling, you have my permission,

Belle De Sade

I realise that using the book approach wasn't the bravest, but it did get a return message. If you feel that something will work, then use it. I could have happily continued to chat with Miss Belle, but we lost contact. Another and possibly more fun approach to her profile could have been her screen name. I looked it up on Wiki under "Marquesa De Sade" and came up with a large and interesting piece on Sadism and Masochism. Now that would have been a fun first message.

I used the internet many times to look up screen names or something within a profile that I didn't understand. It was surprising how many ladies use screen names of real people. A quick glance at the net and I had the perfect opening message that shows knowledge (possibly not mine) and that I have taken the time to send something different.

Finding something within a profile that you find interesting isn't always as hard as you may think. While I was trawling through the sites one evening, I found a profile that was quite amazing given my recent circumstances. It read as follows:

I'm just a really nice person, down to earth looking to meet and find friendship first and foremost. Who knows maybe that someone special?

Have to add – I'm having chemo at the mo! So yes I will lose my hair but not my sense of humour.

I do believe that no matter what your circumstances are, there will be someone who can empathise with you. I admit I was amazed that she was brave enough to put up pictures of herself without hair and in mid-treatment. I was very proud of Miss L and had to message. My first message wasn't difficult, and as I expected, I got a reply. We went on to chat occasionally when she could get online. I know how hard it is when you are having chemo and radiotherapy, so I was always surprised when Miss L found the time to message back. I do not need to put up my first message as it's not of interest. What is interesting though is the fact that there was someone on a dating site who was in the same situation that I had been through. No matter where you are, I do believe that you can find someone who is in the same position as you. Miss L is now well and has new pictures of herself on her profile. The treatment was a success and her hair is growing back. Miss L is now back on the dating sites and actively dating. Look out for her – she's a lovely lady and so very, very brave.

Rules on who you should message

We do not always have control over who we can and cannot message. Many sites offer the facility to block communication from certain users. I believe the distance restriction to be a useful tool as many

ladies do not want to be in a long-distance relationship. This means that only members within a certain radius can message. I suggest you check restrictions as I have spent ages writing a message only to discover I couldn't send it. You should never cut down on the amount of incoming mail you receive. Below is a list of rules that had to be complied with in order to message a particular lady:

Male

Age between 35 and 49

Live in United Kingdom

Live within 75 miles

Must not have messaged users looking for intimate encounters or sex

You must have a picture to contact this user

Must not be looking for Hang Out

Must not be looking for Talk/E-mail

Must not be looking for Other Relationship

Must not be looking for Intimate Encounter

Must not be looking for Activity Partner

Must not do drugs

Must not be married

Must not smoke

Do any of us fall into all these categories? I know I don't. It is good that a lady knows what she wants, but surely this is going a bit too far. As for the drugs, another couple of months on dating sites and she'll possibly need them herself.

There are no rules on who you should message and who you shouldn't. If you feel you like someone or they interest you, then quite simply send them a message. When I first joined, I tended to stay away from the ladies I thought were out of my league. I sat down and thought about this one day and decided that there should never be a benchmark on who I should message and who I should not. After all, why should someone be out of my league? Why was I putting restrictions on myself and my future happiness?

With this in mind I started to send out messages to any lady I had an attraction to.

Miss D was, in my opinion, one of the prettiest ladies on the dating sites. She was in her mid-30s and had a good job. I was sure the pictures she had up were genuine, but there was one problem – her profile said so little that I couldn't for the life of me think of what would work as an opening message. For the first time, I was stumped. I even considered writing something about the lack of profile information, but this didn't seem right and could have been misconstrued as rude. The task was a difficult one and I really wanted to get a reply. It was while looking at her pictures that I noticed one had a photo of herself and who I presumed to be her son. There was my opening message staring me in the face. I wrote this:

Hi Miss D,

Although I do think you're a lovely looking lady, it was my daughter that asked me to contact you hoping she could get your son's mobile number.

On a more serious note:

I'm just a guy who's not a million miles from you that would like to share a few smiles with someone.

I don't cut and paste messages into every profile on here and I'm certainly not a trophy or number hunter.

As I said, just a guy who likes to enjoy life but would like to share some of it with someone special.

If I don't hear back from you, then that's ok. I would like to wish you all the luck in the world and I hope you find your dream whatever that may be.

Keep smiling, pretty lady,

Jay

The first part of the message was in my opinion a brainwave and I received an immediate reply. Miss D wrote:

Wow what a lovely message, thank you. I think your daughter is probably a little young for my eldest son lol! I agree internet dating is tedious; after all we are all looking for the same contentment and happiness.

What dream are you living?

D x

Not only did I get return mail, Miss D also finished her message with a question. She obviously wanted to carry on with the correspondence. I am sure that Miss D received a huge amount of mail (after all, look at how much the cyberladies got) but had decided not only to answer mine but also felt happy enough to continue messaging. This was a great example of a simple message that worked. I went on to message Miss D every now and then, but I was soon to finish my journey on the dating sites as I was now in contact with Louise.

Am I being ignored? How pushy should I be?

It is at this point that we should go over something that happens a lot with messages. Never, ever presume you are being ignored and resend a message or even a new one. That would come across as impatient or pushy, and no-one wants to give that impression. Some ladies only check their messages once a week, and I have known a reply to come back two weeks after I had sent the initial message. It can be frustrating sometimes, but patience will prevail. I have even got return mail saying that they didn't know what to write back and didn't want to mess things up with a trite answer and had to think on it.

If while on live chat the lady you are talking to cuts you off or goes offline, then don't worry and think you have said something wrong as you'll drive yourself crazy. Remember, you do not live in their world and don't know what is happening at the other end. It could be something as simple as a lost internet signal. I have seen repeat messages that Louise has received that are rude in their content because she has not answered the first one. Is this the impression you want to give – a desperate and

impatient person? That's what you will come across as, and trust me, no-one will ever answer. Pushy is not good, and never presume that you know what has happened. Sometimes a lady that I have been talking to for a while has stopped messaging and I have heard no more from her. I simply believe that they have found someone and do not wish to have further contact with me. This happens and it's not a problem. Just move on and never inundate them with questions. Remember that ladies will message and chat to other men on the sites unless there has been an agreement on this between you; for example, you are dating and using the site to contact each other or use the video chat facility. They are *dating* sites and it has to be expected that most people on them will be messaging and talking to more than one person. Don't let it be a surprise when someone you have been chatting to for a while mentions other men or messages. When I was first in contact with Louise, she mentioned many other men that she was chatting to and messaging. It was early days for us, and I was doing the same. I did have one problem, and that was as time went on I realised I was becoming jealous. What was happening? We hadn't even met. I put a cap on my emotions and carried on as usual with our nightly chats. I hoped that with time my jealousy would abate, but it never did. In the end, I had to mention it. Amazingly, Louise didn't run a mile, and we went on to date and then into a relationship. I do believe that if I had mentioned my feelings over the other men earlier, she would have thought me mad and things would have ground to a halt.

Although dating sites are pretty much an open world, some of the time they can still leave you in the dark with what's happening at the other end. Just keep an open and optimistic view and things will work out for you. If you start to play mind games with yourself over messaging and the reasons why someone hasn't got back to you for a while, then it will remove the fun part from your journey and, let's face it, this needs to be fun.

Honesty and how to say "Sorry, but I'm not interested"

After a while, answering my messages became a full-time job, and I was still getting new ones. I needed to cut down on the number of messages I was replying to. I came to the conclusion that unless there was some sort of spark or attraction, then I would have to tell them I wasn't interested. I didn't enjoy writing messages that were downbeat and negative, but there was only so much I could do. I had friends on every site and I was actively dating, so I had to draw the line somewhere. I have never believed in being rude and would answer every message I ever got, even if it was to say, "Sorry, but I'm not interested." The brush-off isn't a nice thing to do, but it is honest. I was always polite and always kept the message personal.

I received this from a Miss B:

Hello "Jay33"

I must be honest have only recently joined this site.

There are many things in your profile that are so like me it's uncanny! I too love the sea although I am usually on it. I was in the Navy for three years and loved every moment of the lifestyle. I have just returned from a cruise around the Med and had a wonderful time. The weather was fantastic and all I can say is bring on the summer and lots of sunshine.

As for photography, I really struggled to find a picture of me as I am always the one taking the

photos!!

On the cruise I took over a 1000 photos and am in a grand total of 4!!!! Typical! Does your daughter live in XXXXXX? I know what you mean about her growing up and having more time on your hands. All of a sudden my boys seem to have grown before my eyes, so hence the baby steps towards joining the real world!

If you do fancy a chat I would love to hear from you

Hope you have had a great day

Take care

B x

What a lovely message. It's personal, it's concise, and she has obviously taken the time to read my profile. The problem? There was no spark. I was in no way attracted to Miss B and would never string anyone along. I sent this message back which was honest and concise. Honesty works, and if for some reason I changed my mind about Miss B, I could always have gone back and said I was single again as my date didn't work out:

Hi Miss B,

Welcome to the ego-boosting and soul-destroying world of internet dating. The one place that has more players than the Olympics and the world cup put together.

In the last couple of days I have actually met someone and we are dating. I am honest and always will be and won't date or meet more than one lady at once. It's just not me and it's unfair.

Thank you for your lovely message and I really do wish you luck on here. If you need advice, then please ask but I may not be able to get straight back to you.

No matter what happens keep smiling and follow your gut feeling. The heart can be wrong but the gut will never lie.

Good luck pretty lady,

Jay

I didn't enjoy writing this mail and I could quite happily have carried on talking to Miss B as she sounded interesting. The problem was I did not need any more friends as I was having trouble answering the ones I had, and I had started dating on a regular basis. I would never lie or lead someone on with a message as I didn't think that would be fair. It was probably my honesty that brought back so many messages, dates and friends. I even got a reply from Miss B:

Hi Jay

Many thanks for your reply and honesty. Still not 100% certain that this is for me, but my gut is usually correct.

I wish you well in your quest for love

Miss B x

With honesty, you can always go back. If my date hadn't worked out, then I could have gone back and contacted Miss B and sent her a message. A simple "things didn't work out and was wondering if you were free for a chat one evening so as we can catch up" would suffice. Remember, if you tell the truth, then you will never have to think of an answer again. In others words, your lies will tie you down and you will never be able to remember what you have said and to whom.

Opening message

I could keep cutting and pasting different opening messages here all day to show examples of how I would ensure return mail, but I will now move on to something different. In almost every profile I could find something that I would use in my opening message. There was always something that could be used, or a mention of a job or hobby I knew something about. I would take my time and read the profile and then work out what to send. Does this sound calculating? It should do, as it was! Given below are some typical examples from ladies' profiles, showing the possible parts that I would have used to ensure my message got their attention. I didn't pick profiles that would be easy to answer and I was random in my choice. It's so simple to be different, and when reading the messages that came in for our two cyberladies, I got bored very quickly. Imagine how they must feel. It's no wonder that a great deal of my mail was answered.

In the following examples, the bold type is the cut and paste from the profile, and the plain type below is exactly what I would have written. Taking a simple part from the profile and working on it shows not only that you have read their profile but also that you are able to hold a conversation. And that's something that many men on the sites don't seem to be able to do or simply can't be bothered with.

Just looking to make friends at the moment,

...Friends would be good as you can never have too many friends. I believe that a friendship can be built on and if nothing comes from it then at least you still have a friend. I would love to chat one evening:

have had the pee taken a few times ,but i get up brush myself down and start again ..so here I am again ...trying to find the one can anyone relate with me on this ?

...I have been messed around and thrown from pillar to post so many times on here that I'm becoming pretty much bulletproof. I would love to swap a few stories and maybe share a couple of smiles one evening. I can certainly relate to your statement ...

I love horror films, nothing to realistic!

... Loving horror films has probably given you a good insight into online dating although I guess it can get a little too realistic. I have always had a passion for horrors and can remember *Candyman* like it was yesterday. Do you have any preference as to which films?...

I have a built in window licker radar, so if you've escaped from your carer... don't message me :-)

...Does laptop-screen licking mean the same thing? I promise I haven't escaped from my carer. He escaped from me. Not really, he's here with me holding the cattle prod and making sure my restraints are fastened. Bet you don't message back ...

IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR SEX, ARE MARRIED, SEPARATED OR YOUNGER THAN 30 WITH NO PIC - JOG ON!

Hi XXXXX,

I thought I'd drop you a quick line. I won't beat about the bush and wondered if you were up for sex. I'm 43 but really 19 but I hope you don't notice. I have ... sorry, I have to go as the wife wants the laptop. I can't wait until we are separated. I do have a picture up but it isn't me ...

I love reading especially Stephen king books,

Hi XXXX,

I love Stephen King and have read every book he has ever written. There are so many people who know so little about Mr King. For example that he wrote *Shawshank* and *The Green Mile*. I also read James Herbert and wondered if you have as well?...

Spending time near the sea is always special.

I enjoy all aspects of creativity.

...I have always loved the ocean as well and have spent a lot of time driving from one coast to the next. I have been lucky enough in my life to work in media and now spend a lot of my free time taking photographs of big waves (when I can find them in this country). Being near to the sea has always been special to me as well. I love the sea ...

It is that simple. Keep it personal and show you have read the profile. Take your time and work out what you believe would make the recipient want to answer. Remember, if you were receiving the kind of rubbish that our cyberladies were receiving all day long, then something different will be seen as a breath of fresh air.

The lady

After a while my messages became self-styled. I developed a format of my very own. At first this wasn't intentional but I found that by using certain words and phrases I received more return mail. I would use the words "my lady" in a message often and would be complimented on this a great deal. As I got to know someone, I would change it to "my pretty lady" or "my sexy lady", depending on the person and the subject. Many of my messages would contain the words "my lovely lady" or "my beautiful lady". A compliment from the start is never a bad thing, but don't overdo it. I would improvise according to what I believed the recipient would like.

Another word I would always try to put into an opening message was "love". "I love the sea" or "I would love to hear back" would seem to work. The use of "love" in a profile or message seems to be well received, whether on a conscious or subconscious level. At the end of the day, it's what most people join dating sites for. The use of the word "love" at least shows you are capable of this.

Messages can be quite daunting at first, but without them there would be no dating or contact. They are easy once you know how, and I really enjoyed going through profiles to see what I could use as a contact line. It became simple to write messages, and if you follow a basic rule or two, it will become easy for you as well. As more messages are answered, it's obvious that your confidence is boosted, and it's a wonderful feeling to open your message box to find it's full.

Messaging is easy, but keeping up with the answers can be time-consuming. I would only send out around five every few nights and no more, because if they were all answered (and sometimes they were) then I had to reply. What a hard life.

Jenny: Hi Baby, so glad I can txt u now.
 Jenny: How is ur day going?
 Jenny: U know what im doing now?
 Jenny: Why dont u txt me more?
 Jenny: I miss u.
 Jenny: Don't u miss me 2?
 Jenny: Hello?
 Jenny: Where ru Baby?
 Jenny: I need u right now.
 Jenny: I said I NEED u right now.
 Jenny: Why wont u talk 2 me?
 Jenny: U never pay any attention 2 me.
 Jenny: U jerk.
 Jenny: A relationship is a 2 way street.
 Jenny: Call me.
 Jenny: NOW.
 Jenny: Why ru always ignoring me?
 Jenny: What did I do?
 Jenny: I love u.
 Jenny: No answer to that?
 Jenny: I said I love u.
 Jenny: Ahh!!! RESPOND!
 Jenny: I am so mad at u.
 Jenny: ru cheating on me?
 Jenny: Who else ru txting?!?
 Jenny: How could u?
 Jenny: Did u know im crying?



Jenny held the record for being able to send more texts than anyone else during a single advert break. She also needed to get out more.

Text messages and the mobile number

As to when you give out your mobile number – it's up to you. I don't believe that there is a time when it's either "cool" or "too late". It's pretty straight-forward and it's easy enough to do, but I would never give out anything personal at first. I learnt the hard way, giving out my number too soon, and I so I would hold back until I got to know the person better. One lady I had been talking to sent me over 200 texts on the first day of getting my mobile number. I couldn't switch off my phone as I was expecting a call, and it drove me mad. If I hadn't been out with my daughter and had instead been tucked up in bed, then maybe I would have enjoyed the experience more. Given the circumstances, it drove me crazy.

There were times when I couldn't work out who was actually texting, as I had messages coming in from several women at once. I *can* actually multi-task, contrary to popular belief, but it was a logistical nightmare.

I know of one guy who sent my partner a message (before we met) saying he couldn't make Friday's date. This probably would have been fine if he had actually planned one with her. They had been dating for a while and he hadn't mentioned that he was dating other women. She sent back a simple text saying "BUSTED". That was the end of that, luckily for me.

Texts are fun, they're a great way of keeping in touch and keeping a smile on your face during the day, but although my mobile is now quiet, I don't miss them. It did become a full-time job.

There is also the fun, messy and very popular "txt sex". I will cover that later.

Home numbers

Why do it? Mobiles are cheap enough, and to be honest, they are all you should need. Of course, if you have met someone and they would like your home number, then that is your choice, but I made many mistakes by giving out my home number and ladies would call day and night. I never got much time to myself. If you start talking to someone online, then please don't give out your home number until you have met them face to face. It's just not worth it.

If things don't work out between you, then it's easy enough to change your mobile or block them, but it's not that easy to change your landline number. At one point I considered buying a mobile to use for dating only. I recommended this to a few ladies and I know they did it to keep their personal life separate. It's a wonderful feeling when your mobile never stops and your email is always full, but do try and keep some things back.

One word of warning: I found many ladies would believe I was keeping something back if I didn't give out my home number. They believed I had a wife or girlfriend at home and I was scared she would pick up the phone. I suppose that's understandable as many ladies have come out of an untrusting relationship, but if they are that insecure, then for me the alarm bells would start their ominous tolling. It's up to you, but consider every angle and work out what's best.

Home address

What do you think? Never, ever give out your home address until you have met and dated someone. Otherwise you might just have a house call from a disgruntled husband or boyfriend. Not every person is honest.

Personal information

I learnt all of the things in the preceding pages the hard way. I realised my mistake after the fact every time. While you sit at your laptop or PC, it's easy to feel close to someone and feel you can trust them, and that's the way it should be. But it's not always the case. Just be careful and try to minimise the amount of potential trouble that could come your way. There is of course the potential to be scammed, although scammers are usually easy to spot. There's also the potential for acquiring a personal stalker, and this can and does happen. By cutting down on the amount of personal information you disclose, you will at least keep yourself safe in the future should things not work out. At one point I was looking out the window every ten minutes thinking that a certain lady was going to turn up at my door and start raving. Not only did she have my address but she also had all my

numbers, my car registration, my full name, my parents address, and even where and when I was having my follow-up appointments at hospital. I hadn't even met her yet.

The stalker

Wikipedia:

Stalking is a term commonly used to refer to unwanted and obsessive [attention](#) by an individual or group to another person. Stalking behaviours are related to [harassment](#) and [intimidation](#) and may include following the victim in person and/or monitoring them.

The Urban Dictionary:

A person obsessed with another to the point of insanity. I.E. following one everywhere, calling constantly, not following restraining orders, collecting their hair in shower drains.

The Urban Dictionary Once Again:

I did not know what a STALKER was until I became one. A stalker can sit in a car nearby a person's house for hours straight. A STALKER follows a person always and sneaks into their Facebook account and takes notes about the person's friends and comments. A STALKER observes who visits the person and feels enormous jealousy towards them. A stalker would make a good private detective. My kind of job. I am a lot better now.

Most notorious STALKERS build a shrine for their victim and plaster the victim's photographs on the wall around the shrine. They are the REAL PSYCOPATHS. More mild cases just write definitions into the Urban Dictionary.

I LOVE YOU JENNY XXX

The term "stalker" isn't the prettiest description in the world, but I can't think of another. Maybe "infatuation" or "dependence" would do, but both of these are just as scary. It is easy to become close to someone and even reliant to some degree, even if you have yet to meet them. Let's face it, if you haven't had anyone in your life for a while or at least anyone nice, and someone comes along who gives you compliments and is chatting to you every night, then an attachment could and probably will develop. To which degree is up to the person, but some take it further than others.

I found that although on the surface everything appears to be normal and moving at a steady and sane pace, behind the scenes this may not always be the case. It's not always easy to tell when something is wrong and the person you are talking to (be it on the phone, text or chat) can have ideas that are very different to your own.

Some might consider it a compliment to find out that a lady is infatuated with them and is willing to do whatever it takes to form a relationship, but I did not. I found it scary and was left with a feeling of being watched to such a degree that I was looking over my shoulder at every corner. Knowing someone is following your movements, even if it is only online, is scary. To know they are logging the time when you sign in and out of certain sites is crazy. I thought that these ladies were just friends or possible dates, but they certainly had other ideas for my future and where I was going to be spending the rest of my life. With Miss L it certainly came as a shock ...

I received a message from Miss L when I had only been on the sites a very short while. She was bright, had a very high-paid job, was a lot of fun, and like me, was lonely. She also had children and that subject was to be the start of our online conversations and late-night chats. At this stage of my dating journey I wasn't too sure of what I was doing, but things seemed to progress at a rate that was comfortable and before long we became good friends. As to whether we were just friends or more, I wasn't quite sure. There was the usual flirting and discussions about when and where we would meet, but things never seemed to develop into anything more. Also Miss L was actively dating and meeting other men. At the time I wasn't meeting anyone, and I was still finding my feet within the dating world. As Miss L was dating, I guessed that all she wanted was friendship and a bit of online fun. I was wrong. One thing that stopped us meeting was the old chestnut of distance – Miss L lived a long way from where I was laid up and she also lived east. Now this may sound silly or strange, but for me the thought of travelling east was not as appealing as travelling west. Believe it or not, my car would travel better west than east. It seemed to purr when heading west and stall when going east. I think deep down that the car and I both knew that eventually I would meet and settle down with someone from the sites, and the thought of doing so in the east of the UK seemed to put up a barrier. I suppose it's my love of surfing and the West Country that determined where I wanted to be, and also the fact that I love the attitude and outlook of West Country ladies. They do have a slightly funky accent though.

Things with Miss L went along a happy little path and we would sign in every evening to chat about our day. Eventually Miss L got my mobile number and we would text through the day when her workload allowed it and sometimes call in the evenings. With a mobile signal that was erratic to say the least, Miss L also got both my home phone numbers. On my birthday, Miss L asked if she could send me a present, and as I wasn't sure where I'd be she also got both my addresses. Eventually there wasn't much else to know, except possibly my National Insurance number, inside leg measurement, and in the immortal words of "The Jam", the size of my cock. What I believed to be just friendship grew and one evening Miss L asked if she could come with me to a cancer check I had at Bart's. The answer was an easy one, and I think it came as a bit of a shock to her. It was simply "no". My answer had nothing to do with Miss L, but my tests were personal and I would have problems sometimes with my own mother being there. The reason was simple: if the news was bad, then I would have some time to myself to come to terms with things before anyone else knew. I explained this to Miss L, but she never stopped asking and would sometimes get quite annoyed, because when I was at the hospital I was nearer her home. There was also the time I spent with my daughter in London, when we could have met, but that too was personal. I never gave in to her, but we often discussed the possibility of me continuing my journey east and staying with her for a weekend. Unfortunately, as soon as I was cleared by my doctor, I would jump in my car and put as much distance between Bart's and myself as possible. Also, when my daughter went back to her mother's, I would do the same, but this time putting as much distance between my ex and myself as possible. I also found that my car would automatically head west, and there was very little I could do about it, no matter how hard I tried to turn the wheel.

One evening while we were talking on the phone, Miss L mentioned something that made me wonder what exactly was going on. She said she had been on a date with a guy from the South. She had met him at her local airport and they had booked a hotel room. Sounds interesting, thought I. The hotel was to be for him and she hadn't gone to the room with him, but he had kissed her in the car. Cool, thought I. He had tried to go further and she had to push him away, because the whole time all she

could think of was how it should have been me there with her. How we could have made use of the hotel room and our time together. Oh, thought I.

Now I was really confused. Why go on dates if she felt nothing for anyone else except me? My confusion was short-lived. She had been dating other men with the intention of making me jealous. Shit, thought I. Miss L was a nice-looking lady and I would happily have dated her, but because I didn't know where I stood, I kept her as a friend. And although I did devote a lot of time to her, I had also been busy on the sites. I also had a date. In fact it was quite a big date. It was a holiday in Wales with another woman.

I have many times referred to honesty and I had no other choice but to tell her about my up-and-coming date/holiday. I suppose it wasn't fair, as we had mentioned before the possibility of us going away together. I bit the bullet and mentioned my date. The tirade of abuse I was to receive was almost laughable, but the shock came in the form of Miss L's plans for me. She went on to say that her children had been briefed as to when their new father was moving in. That father figure, in case you missed something, was me. She had redecorated the house and converted one of the rooms as a study for me. The bedroom was also redecorated and ready for the both of us ;) She had bought me a car as she knew mine was playing up and had even gone as far as to open a bank account for me (she worked in banking) and had allotted a considerable sum of money to be transferred weekly as my allowance! I never did ask what I was being paid for, but I would love to have known exactly how much. Given the fact that she was a very rich lady, it wouldn't have been a small sum. I suppose there was to be a job waiting for me as a financial adviser in the City of London and many luncheons with many City bankers. I was in a state of shock, and my immediate reaction was to move house very quickly.

What would you have done? There are those I have spoken to that would have jumped at the chance, and they called me worse than Miss L had done that night on the phone. Would you have gone into a loveless relationship knowing that financially you would be a kept man for the rest of your life? Never worrying about another direct debit would have been nice, but to be with someone purely for the money would have been soul-destroying for me. I have never been and never will be a man that cares for possessions, or the material things that most people crave. I am happy with a rucksack and enough money to feed myself and the people I care for. The car would have been nice though, and I was tempted to ask for the allowance anyway.

All this aside, there was a major reason why at that moment I wanted Miss L out of my life and to never contact me again. During the whole conversation and everything she had planned for me, not once was my daughter mentioned. There was absolutely no room in her plans for the most important person in my life. The future she had devised for me was that I give up my home and go and live with her. At the end of the day, she wanted me to walk away from my daughter. Maybe I would have been allowed to pop back to London for the odd walk around the park or trip to the cinema, but there was obviously no room for anyone else except the new family she had envisaged. One of her children was in his teens, so what he thought about the scenario I will never know. Maybe just like in the Christmas edition of "The Good Life" when Margo found that Xmas hadn't been delivered, her boys found that their new daddy had been lost in the post.

This whole scenario now seems like a dream and a very long time ago. At the end of the phone call I said "goodbye" to Miss L and never took another call from her again. I was to get endless emails and

texts, and although I did try to stay in touch, I was too scared to let things continue and they tapered off. I honestly thought that she would turn up at my parents' believing that we were a couple and demanding I come home, but fortunately this never happened. I know she visited the same village where my parents live for a holiday, but I never did see her. Luckily I was in Wales at the time. My check-ups at Bart's were every couple of weeks, and I found myself using one of the side doors over the following few months just in case she was there. It's not difficult to find out when the head and neck clinic is. I was still a member of a few dating sites, and every time I signed in a message from her would pop up after I'd been online for ten minutes. She must have been online constantly. I got a message that said she had been crying for two weeks non-stop and had taken time off work. It was at this point that I really did feel sorry for her children, but it wasn't me that had deceived them. I found out that she had visited my flat in London hoping to find me there, and at this point I was getting worried for her mental health. No-one visits my estate unless they want to buy a gun or drugs, and she was way out of her depth even going there. She must have stood out a mile, and I think it's possibly the fact that she looked like the police that saved her or at least her car. Maybe she met a gang member and is now happily laundering money for a living. Who knows?

One of the many things that I will never be able to work out, is that no matter what her reasons were for dating other men, why wasn't I allowed to date? It was, after all, a dating site. Surely she must have seen this flaw in her plan and that eventually I would also have a date with someone. We did meet on a dating site, but I do believe that she thought I talked only to her.

I was to leave all the sites soon after my time in Wales as I developed a relationship of sorts with the lady I met there, but the story doesn't end at this juncture – it gets slightly stranger.

The reasons why my relationship with the lady I met and holidayed with went wrong are explained in detail further on in the book, but in the end it did go wrong. After a long time away from dating sites I found myself single again and with the ominous task of having to rejoin. Luckily I had cut and pasted all my profiles etc. and stored them on my laptop so nothing had to be rewritten, and it was just a case of enrolling again. The strange part was to come when I first signed into the same dating site I had met Miss L on. Within ten minutes of logging on, I was to receive my first message – and I believe you may have guessed who it was from? It was a simple message and all it said was:

“You have come back to me.”

I felt a tremor of horror as I read those six words and I logged out immediately. What to do? I wanted to use the site and I wanted to be left in peace while I did. There was no other option than to tell the truth. I sent a message back explaining that my relationship had gone happily sailing up the proverbial river and I was back to see if my luck could change. That luck and me coming back to the sites did not, however, include her, unless it was as a distant friend (more than arm's length and possibly as distant as Australia). I would answer her messages as long as they were about normal everyday stuff (unless she wanted me to pop over and collect my car), and I made it clear things would never go further than friends. Miss L promptly left the dating site and I have never heard from her again, proving that honesty is in fact the best policy.

I do not wish Miss L any bad feelings. I do not believe in hate, as I know it can consume and slowly destroy you. But I believe that Miss L does indeed hate me. I never made her any promises; and to plan a person's future when you haven't even met them is ridiculous. I don't feel sorry for Miss L either, as her downfall was her own making. To have left out the fact that I have a daughter who I love

very much and is very precious to me, is, in my mind, crazy and unforgivable. Would she have walked away from her children if I had made plans for her? Maybe she would have, but I wasn't going to. Shame about the car though :)

To fall in love with someone and then never tell them is a waste of wonderful energy, but to place a fear within them is wrong. I was scared of Miss L, and with her money, she was capable of anything. All I could have done was fill my tank with petrol and hope the car got me as far away as possible before it broke down. I actually realised one day that she had access to my bank account and anything else she wanted, as my account was with the bank she worked for. How scary is that?

I have heard many horror stories about stalkers from ladies I have talked to on dating sites. From the funny – “I kept seeing him in every pub I went to and he forgot I have five brothers” – to the downright scary – “I saw him in my garden after dark, but he had gone by the time the police got there.” Although Miss L never went this far, I believe it was only distance that saved me. Remember, she did go to my London flat.

I was to encounter stalker behaviour from the ladies I least expected it from. One lady said that when I went on a weekend away with someone, she had cried for two nights. She also admitted to keeping a log of when I was online and using the messages I sent her to work out where in the country I was. She had spent time printing out my emails and putting them in a folder. The emails I got off her were so detailed and well laid out that they must have taken days to write. She would write what had been happening in her life using smileys, which was a sight to behold and quite clever. She admitted all of this to me when one fine sunny morning she realised that her behaviour was becoming “slightly odd”. Not the exact words I would have used, but they sufficed I suppose. All she wanted oddly enough was forgiveness from me so she could move on. I felt like I needed to give her 20 “Hail Mary’s” or something along those lines, but I said it was cool and I hoped she would be happy with her newfound freedom of heart and head. I really do pick them. Or do they choose me?

If you want to drive someone away and never hear from, or see them again, then I suggest you try everything in this chapter. Possibly throw a few cards in the post and send flowers every day. On a serious note, there is nothing worse than being pestered or stalked by someone. It leaves them feeling vulnerable, and given that a lot of ladies on the sites are already just that, then it's not fair. I have read many times on dating site forums that any indication of someone becoming a pest or showing stalker-like behaviour is immediately investigated, and then blocked or reported. I wish I had known earlier.

On the upside, if you are planning on becoming a stalker or have been one in the past and wish to return, then I'm sure that there must be:

www.stalkerdating.com

You never know.



"Ok, we have 12 minutes for pizza, 8 to chat, 21.5 for a drink, 11 for a film.
8.5 for a romantic walk, 3 for foreplay, approximately 15 seconds
for sex and then I have to drive back. Wow, it's going to be a great night."

Long-distance relationships (LDRs): The ups and downs (mainly motorways)

The letters "LDR" strike fear into some people's hearts and make others run a mile (as opposed to driving them). With dating sites essentially allowing you to search any area in the world (we'll probably have moon dating soon), it's very easy to find yourself talking to ladies from all areas. I kept my search solely to the UK mainland, but I now know that even that was asking a bit too much.

I have always believed that the UK is a small country; no place is too far away, and everywhere is within a day's drive. With this in mind I would answer and chat to anybody, no matter where they were. I really did believe that a relationship could work even if the people involved only got to see each other occasionally. Many couples are in LDRs and believe they are in a better position than so-called regular or normal relationships. They argue that things always stay fresh and new, and that their time apart makes them realise how much they miss each other. They believe that whenever they actually do spend time together, they cherish and savour every moment and things never stagnate. They say their sex life is simply amazing, as they haven't been together every minute of every day. I suppose if you had been away from your partner and faithful for six months, then your sex life would be explosive. I agree with all of this, but there is a flip side to every coin.

LDRs are not the easiest relationships, and they can leave a person feeling down and disheartened. They can leave you feeling even lonelier than if you were single. I know of one lady who woke one morning to find her world falling apart. Everything was going wrong, and when she looked around – where was her partner? He was on the other side of the country, where he lived and worked. His commitments there meant he couldn't just jump in his car and be with her, so even though she was in a

relationship, she had to face the trauma on her own. He couldn't be there to offer support and didn't turn up until three days later when his other life allowed him to. By then it was too late. This is the reality of LDRs. There is no popping over for a cup of tea and no last-minute plans for an evening out, etc.

When I look back at my two attempts at LDRs, I do so with both regret and wonder. Regret that I could unintentionally hurt someone so much, and wonder that an LDR can be so good.

Rather than sit here writing about what makes long distance relationships good or bad, I would rather tell part of both stories, as I believe it gives a better insight into the pros and cons of being so far from your partner. It will also show how and why things can work, or not as is often the case. I'm an optimist and I do not want to be the one to say that LDRs are doomed from the start, although this is the belief of many. The best relationship I have ever been in is the one I am in now, and it is an LDR.

That we will get to later, but for now I will tell you about Miss J.

The LDR and the pain I caused

I sent a message to Miss J after reading that she loved Stephen King books. It turned out she had only read one, but that was fine and we messaged often over a couple of weeks. I was still pretty new to dating sites, but there was something about Miss J that I liked. She was only 34, which I admit not being overly happy about as I wanted to date someone closer to my own age, but we seemed to hit it off and could message about anything. Eventually we started chatting and it wasn't long before I came to trust Miss J and I sent her my mobile number. From that moment on we were texting and chatting online every day. Not once did I sense a problem, and my gut instinct was right. Miss J was a genuine and honest lady who was really serious about meeting someone. I could see no problems and really enjoyed our messages and texts. Miss J lived exactly 320 miles from me, but that wasn't a problem as according to my profile, "Australia is only a day away".

Looking back now, we really did take our time as we moved from one stage to another, from message to text to mobile to phone call. It was over two months before we had our first real talk on a phone, and although it was nerve-wracking, it did feel as though I was talking to an old friend. From that evening onwards, we would talk into the night, every night. We would text each other through the day, even though Miss J wasn't allowed personal phones at work. With me newly out of hospital and with Miss J finally letting go of a bad relationship, we supported each other perfectly. We could see nothing wrong and decided to meet for a week away that summer. I suppose this is where the fluffy picture of the LDR starts to become reality, although our time away was fun. Loading my car wasn't a problem. I have always been a traveller and another few miles only added to the adventure.

The journey was long, even for me, and by the time I got to where we were meeting I was fit for nothing. Luckily I had left a day early and had time to recover before our first meeting. The meeting itself is not important here, but what is important is the realisation that I had to drive back. Not a problem to the mile king, until I hit severe flooding and had to put myself into a hotel for the night. I got back home so tired that it took me two days to recover and that is only from the journey. The meeting itself was great, and we planned to meet a couple of weeks later at her home.

During the time in between we continued our daily conversations, and soon enough I was loading my car again for my next trip to see Miss J. I vividly remember walking through her door, and as she was

out for the evening I collapsed on her sofa. The trip had been bad and I was shattered. I slept for six hours until she got home. Once again we had fun, and I made my trip back down one motorway and then another. I got home and it was at this point that the people around me began to worry about what I was doing.

It wasn't so much my health, but the fact that they seemed to know I was heading for a fall. My closest friends aired their concerns, but to no avail. I have always had to learn the hard way, and as far as I was concerned things were fine. We had arranged to meet again in a couple of weeks and we were having fun – where was the problem?

I suppose our next meet was more of a reality check. We both became ill, and I now believe that it was the pressure of knowing we were heading for a fall that had brought this on. We spent most of our time together in bed, for all the wrong reasons. We were too ill to get up (pardon the pun). I didn't see it, but Miss J was worried about the future, and at the end of the day if we were to be together, then someone was going to have to move. As we both had children, then obviously the move was important. She knew I couldn't keep driving back and forth as it was much too far and my health would never allow it. I can't say now whether deep down I knew of the problems that were slowly surfacing or if I was too selfish and wrapped up in the moment to care. I still believed that things could work, but that was me being the ultimate optimist. I remember getting home that last time and falling out of my car before sleeping, and then carrying on to London in the morning to see my daughter. I also remember the next few days well.

In the time it had taken me to drive back, Miss J's life had slowly fallen apart. Her sister had become ill, and it looked like she would have to move her home and three children to another part of the country so she could look after her. The council had decided in their ultimate wisdom to replace every window in her house, and her work had decided to relocate her to another part of the country that was miles from her sister. Have you ever had one of those mornings? Miss J did. And where was I? I think in her eyes I was off to another part of the country to live my very happy life. She did tell me all her problems, but I missed the point. Her so-called partner wasn't there to help. He wasn't even there to offer a cuddle. He was where he always was – on the road and listening to music. I think to some extent she wasn't far off, but if she believes I didn't want to be there, then she is wrong. I offered to drive straight over, but we both knew that this wasn't possible. Children always have to come first, and my time with my daughter was very important. I was essentially helpless and quite simply a waste of space.

Things continued as normal, but soon I was to get a message that was to show me that my optimism wasn't always right. A simple “things aren't right” was all it took. We talked and talked after that message, and it was then that I realised that J could not go on with the relationship under any circumstances. She had thought and thought but just couldn't see a way for us to be together. She had thought on the subject so much that even her work had decided she needed time off. She had become ill with worry. The distance between us and the dedication we both had to our children meant we could never be a couple unless one of us moved – and neither of us could.

We never had a last meet and I have never spoken to Miss J since. Her decision to end things then and there was very brave, and she has never once tried to contact me. She saw that our LDR could never work long before I ever could. I hold no regrets, but I wish I could have seen things clearer and a lot earlier so I could have saved us both some hurt. I did hurt Miss J with my optimism that things could

work and that we could somehow overcome the distance, but in the end it took a realist to bring us both back down to earth.

That was my introduction to LDRs, but given everything that had happened I still left the “distance isn’t a problem” on my profile. I was way too stubborn to give up.

It doesn’t take a host of scientists and psychologists to work out where things went wrong, as they were wrong from the beginning. I don’t believe our time together in the real world or in cyberspace was wasted, as we seemed to be great company for each other, albeit for a short while.

During this time I had left the dating sites and it was difficult for me to go back. But what choice did I have? I was still stuck on the edge of an island and had more chance of meeting an orca than I did a single lady. It was on my return that I began to notice a lot of profiles mentioned an aversion to LDRs and the fact that they never work. I decided then and there to restrict my search to within the area I was in. 100 miles should do it. I never did learn the easy way, and I’m glad I didn’t as sometimes stupidity pays off.

LDRs are in no way without their problems, but an LDR can work if the couple that decides to step into it is as stubborn and as giving as Louise and I are.



At almost 7:30am Jenny realised that any chance of going out for the night was quickly slipping away.

The upside

Given the fact that LDRs now scared the willies out of me, I was to become very cautious. I was still to talk with ladies all around the UK, but I became slightly more realistic as to what would work and

what wouldn't. I realised that no matter how pretty a lady was, or how compatible we were, there had to be a restriction. My idea that 100 miles was an OK distance was fine in my mind, but once again I never thought about the fact that it mightn't be all right with someone else. I was still receiving messages from every part of our great nation, but I would never arrange a meet unless I thought things could work out. I had already hurt someone and was not about to do it again with another LDR.

It was soon after this that I was to contact Louise with a simple message about Tarantino. He has a lot to answer for and not all of it bad.

The initial message to Louise was about films, as you may have guessed, and pretty soon we were swapping messages every evening. Soon we were chatting live on IM about everything and anything. Louise had been laid up through illness just like me, so we had quite a bit in common. It was to transpire that we were very much alike, and I was to become very comfortable chatting with Louise. Things continued at a slow but steady pace, but there was to be a downside. Louise had also been in an LDR before and did not under any circumstances want to find herself in another. We were exactly 87 miles from each other, which to me was a short drive, but with my commitments to my daughter, it would mean I was on the road a great deal. Louise's experience of LDRs hadn't been good, and one day when she found things going wrong she also found herself alone, as her partner was a long way away. Ring any bells?

I was having problems with our time online together as I really did believe things could work. But it had already been said that there was little chance of a relationship. I wasn't prepared to put Louise in a place she didn't want to be in and run the risk of hurting her. I had become very close to her even though we had yet to meet, and with this in mind I decided I couldn't hurt her by pushing her into a relationship that she believed would hurt her in the long run (no pun).

We continued to chat, and Louise continued to date, as did I. This wasn't easy for me as I would get jealous. But I valued Louise's friendship so I never said a thing (at first). After some time we decided that enough was enough and we would have to meet. We had a great couple of days away, although believe me it wasn't all plain sailing. It was this meeting that confirmed things for me. I knew things could work between us and believed it would be a waste if we didn't try. I don't know if it was my sheer tenacity, but soon after our first meet I was invited into Louise's world and spent a few days at her house. It was again a great couple of days. Things after that seemed to move along at their own pace, and soon we were meeting on a regular basis and stopped all other dates. I can't say when we became a couple, but somewhere along the line we did.

I was a very happy man, but it took a lot from Louise to make things work, and a lot of driving from me. For a start, I had to have somewhere to stay when we were together. The summer was fine as there was a caravan for me, but as the winter moved in I had to stay at the house. Louise has children, so there were the introductions and the gradual move into their lives so they would trust me enough to have me around. Children are so important in any relationship, and the transition from friend to boyfriend should take as long as it takes to maintain comfort, and should never be rushed. Anything less is not fair on the children.

What Louise gave was more or less everything she had, and that's the reason our LDR works. I stay in her house, and although we now have separate things to do, we are still together in her world much of the time. I have essentially moved house and share a life with Louise. It must have taken a great deal of trust from her to do all this.

Our relationship isn't perfect and can be very hard at times. Our time apart is the most difficult, but it's only for a short time every couple of weeks. I believe that this is important as it reinforces our feelings. If we miss each other, then we both know we still want to be with each other. It still isn't easy though.

Our relationship also depends on petrol for me to drive the distances I have to. If the price goes up any more then we're stuffed!

I always knew in my heart and my head that our LDR could work, and so far it has. It takes more commitment and trust than most relationships and sometimes takes a lot of understanding as to why there has to be time apart, but if things are talked about and worked through, then it can work.

We recently worked out that we actually see each other more than most couples that live together full time. I consider us to be very lucky and hold no regrets for sending that first message.

Our relationship continues to go from strength to strength and is living proof that LDRs can work in the right circumstances and with two people that are willing to try. Recently we even used a dating site to talk while we were apart. Old habits die hard.

The make-or-break decision?

It's something that all couples who are in LDRs have to face eventually. If you want to be together, then who makes the move? That's easy for us to answer, but for those that have many commitments elsewhere it's not so easy. There is always the possibility of transferring your job to another place, but what if you have commitments to your child as I do?

I've given just two examples of LDRs: one that worked (and I'm so glad it did) and one that was doomed from the start. Keep things real, and if there's doubt in your head, then it's probably there for a good reason. If 90% of your commitments are miles from the lady you are in a relationship with, then it stands to reason that you are not going to see each other as much as you would both like to, unless either you can up and move your life or she can. With some juggling, I have done just that, and I am now in a place that I am very happy with. I am now with a lady who I am very proud of.

If you choose to message ladies who live far from you, then be prepared to quite literally go that extra mile. An LDR is a gamble and doesn't always work, but then what gamble does? The old saying, "If two people are meant to be together, then they will be", was coined by a man who lived next door to the lady he loved. We have total control over who we message, but we do not have control over who messages us. We do, however, have control over whether we answer positively or not. Distance is never going to be easy, and I fully understand ladies who will only receive local messages. They have obviously been hurt in the past and are far more sensible than most.

As I write this, I realise that my persistence in getting Louise into an LDR could look as though I had something to prove. My first LDR was a disaster, and maybe this can be read as needing to prove something to myself and others around me. This is very far from the truth. I fell for Louise very quickly, even before we had met, which is something I really do not advise. I wasn't trying to prove anything to anyone except Louise. I wanted to prove to her that "we" could work. I know her decision to let me try wasn't an easy one, but I thank her for that chance, and I thank her for all the smiles she has brought into my life since.

Sense and sensitivity

“I am sensitive ... therefore I should never ever have joined a dating site.”

A statement that is not a million miles from the truth.

Having talked to many people online over the years, I realised that I was not the only one having the same problem. It's not a great problem, but it's one that was to drive me crazy some nights:

If you are sensitive, then you are probably going to have a pretty rough time unless you can change your thinking. If you are jealous and hot-headed, then maybe you should forget joining at all unless you can learn to curb your little green-eyed monster.

When I first joined a dating site and was still very wet behind the ears, I thought everyone was going to be as polite and nice as I intended to be. I have always been polite and courteous and still am to this day, but “wow” was I wrong when I thought everyone else was going to be.

I can't say whether I wear my heart on my sleeve as the saying goes, but I do get attached to people easily, be it only on a friendship front. I would spend days, sometimes weeks, talking to ladies, only to find one day that they had left the site because they were bored or had met someone. Not a word of explanation. I now find this funny as why should they give me an explanation? I remember being quite upset sometimes at having to start all over again with someone else. I have seen profiles that were obvious digs at men from past dates, so I wasn't the only one who felt let down sometimes. I would avoid messaging profiles with harsh words for past dates as I didn't want to become one myself. I never did see someone named and shamed.

I remember typing the words “soul-destroying or ego-boosting” when describing dating sites to someone, and although this may seem over the top, a lot of people agreed with me. Some people were born to use dating sites and treated everything with a pinch of salt, but I wasn't one of them, even though I wished I was.

You should never, ever take something to heart when you're a member of any site. It's just not worth it. Things alter daily, and although I sometimes missed chatting with a certain person, I soon found someone to take their place. And now for the warning ...

Over the months I found myself changing. I wouldn't care as much if a person met someone else and left the site. If a lady left because she felt that a certain site wasn't for her, then it wouldn't bother me as much. I found myself getting tougher and caring less. I was becoming someone I never thought I could become. I was beginning to treat people as if they were disposable, and in my eyes that was unacceptable. Maybe it was to do with the sheer number of ladies I was in contact with and I was finding it hard to keep up, but I don't think so. I believe it was quite simply that it's easy to move from one lady to another. It was after my initial meeting with Louise that I got to talk about this and compare notes with her. She had found the same thing, although she was treating the sites the way they were supposed to be treated – and that's with an open mind. I, on the other hand, was quickly becoming someone I wasn't keen on being. We discussed this for hours over coffee, and I came away knowing who I wanted to be – the kind and caring guy who had first joined.

There is an obvious difference between newly joined and old members. Old members can become cynical and often sarcastic. I have been told many times that it's to do with receiving so many boring

messages. It begins to eat away at any hope of meeting someone real. Fortunately my messages were always real.

I believe to this day that the mood you are in and the outlook you have towards dating sites helps you construct a message that is positive. If, however, you become down or uncaring, then I also believe this will reflect in your words, whether you mean it to or not. Do not let the sites get you down, and do not let them change you from the way you were before. If you let people become disposable and treat them rudely, then you should expect to be treated in kind.

It's so easy to dismiss certain people when you are faced with so many, but it's best to give everyone a chance and get to know as many people as you can. I was to meet some great ladies, and although we were not compatible on the relationship-front, we did become friends. Don't be like a child in a sweetshop and run from one place to another grabbing what you can. I guarantee you will have an eventual sugar crash. Just because there are such a large number of members to choose from, this doesn't mean you should discard someone, move to another and ignore the first like many people do. The old saying, "Never shit on someone on your way up or you may meet them on your way down", comes into play here.

The more I got talking to people, the more I could tell almost exactly how long they had been active on a certain site. It was almost measured in sarcasm points or on a "go ahead and impress me" meter. It should never get that way with you and should always be fun. Don't let people become disposable and never forget why you joined in the first place. If you joined to "have a laugh", then keep this in mind and ensure you have fun. If you joined looking for a long-term relationship, then never forget that. It's so easy to do.

If you were already an uncaring bastard and intend to continue to be so, then please ignore all of the last chapter :)

The ever fading art of conversation

With the art of messaging under your belt and at least a few ladies messaging you on a regular basis, the time will come when you find yourself chatting live or on IM. I found this quite daunting at first, but it can be really good fun and is a way of getting to know someone quickly. It can also get very flirty and adult at times.

Every person in this world is different. They do things differently and according to their nature. I wouldn't even begin to try and tell you how to hold a conversation, but I do know what I did and how it worked for me. And it kept ladies coming back to talk to me again and again. It was simple – I did something that I was told was different: I listened. I would not go into a chat situation with all guns blazing and brag about myself. I would start with the usual pleasantries and see where things led. I would ask questions at first rather than take the lead, although in some respects this is taking the lead. I would let the conversation flow from the lady rather than me, and I would expand on what she had to say. This kept things flowing, and if I ever felt things were getting boring, I would ask how she felt about the site we had met on. This is always a topic of conversation that can never be exhausted. If you do go down these lines though, be prepared to learn that the lady you have been messaging for however long has probably been out on other dates and messaging other men. If you have been doing the same, then this shouldn't be a problem. Even if you haven't, then simply remind yourself that it is a dating site and people do date.

As I have said before, words on a screen are two-dimensional. They can be read in many ways. I always read everything as “nice”, not “nasty”, out of fear of reading something into a sentence that wasn't really intended. I would even say at the beginning of a chat, “If you read something that I have written and believe it to be nasty, then please don't think it is. If it can be read in a nice way, then please take it that way as that's how it was written. I write everything with a smile on my face.” The smiley is often invaluable at the end of a sentence. I found that when something was written and could possibly be a sexual innuendo, then nine times out of ten it was; although that one time out of ten when it wasn't used to scare me witless. The thought of answering back with a sexy comment and a wink ;) when the sentence was actually innocent gave me the shakes. I would sometimes just ignore the comment and play innocent and watch as the remarks got increasingly flirty, until it was blatantly obvious what was being said.

By no means are all chats flirty, but all are fun. I enjoyed swapping stories and being able to cut out the endless messages back and forth. It was nice to have a time when someone would meet me online and we could go over the day, even though it was only words on a screen. Let's face facts, it's better than no words on a screen and a game of Solitaire.

It's not easy finding yourself in a chat situation when all you have done before is message. All of a sudden it gets slightly more real and can go pear-shaped very quickly. Just remember, if the chat doesn't go well, then you have possibly saved yourself from a very awkward date.

Chatting online is easy and shouldn't be a task of any sort. It should be fun and as natural as talking face to face. The conversation should flow if you are talking to the right person, and if it doesn't, then don't worry. I have talked to ladies who were in fact working and I had to wait for ages for any kind

of answer. As I have said before, do not be upset if you are cut off or the lady wishes to go. You don't know what is happening in their world, and it could be something as simple as a dinner break. Do not think you have said something wrong or you will drive yourself mad, unless of course you really have. Begging might be a good idea at this point.

By keeping the conversations simple you can learn a lot about a person in very little time; for example, their sense of humour (if they have one?), their likes and dislikes, and if they really do skydive for a hobby. Try and keep the conversation within your comfort zone, but if it strays, then don't try and be a know it all. The use of BRB or "be right back" is a great little bit of txt speak and it's a polite way to take some time out. I remember using this and then checking out a subject on Google so I could at least sound competent.

Chatting is very simple and very easy, especially if you have been messaging someone for a while. If on the other hand you wish to dive in at the deep end like many men and send a chat request to random ladies, then go ahead and give it a try. Personally it never really worked for me and I followed the message approach first. I read in many profiles the words, "Please don't try and chat to me without at least sending a message first." With this in mind, I would always message first and try and build from there. At least I had some idea of what to expect, although I never had that luxury with the first phone call.



"Well done, you have passed the first part of the test. Now if my assistant would just pass the probe, we will move onto the physical."

The first call

If you think you know what the lady you have been chatting to online for awhile is going to sound like on the phone, then you really are crazy. Not once did a lady sound anything like I imagined. It varied from the “nice surprise” to the “bizarre”. I would forget that a certain lady was from Liverpool and would jump a mile when I first heard her accent, or I would forget a lady was from the West Country, giving the same result. Being originally from the East End, I don’t have any accent at all, so at least they had no surprise. Yes, I am joking. The excitement of a first call was simply amazing, and I was always nervous (although I always wondered why afterwards). I used to love those calls, and they would eventually lead to a date without fail. If you have got to the phone call stage with someone, then the only thing left is the date and hopefully more.

I have already mentioned the choice of phone number you decide to give out, but do not forget that a mobile is always a lot more controllable. The place where I was staying at the time had no signal, so I had no choice in the matter but to give out my landline number. That’s not always a good idea if things go wrong later along the line.

I know of one guy who gave out his home number online to a lady he was about to meet. He had told her he wasn’t dating anyone else and she was to be his first date from the site. He wasn’t exactly being honest and was actively dating – he had even been out with the lady’s best friend some nights before. They of course swapped notes and he was found out. Not exactly the crime of the century, but it was a lie that he was to pay for. Over the next few weeks the circle of ladies who were all on the same site and genuinely single set out to make his life a little more interesting. They spent most of every working day typing his telephone number into as many online forms as possible. They signed him up for everything they could imagine. Some of the forms were more adult than others. I have no idea how many they did in the end and I have no idea what happened to the guy in question, but it certainly put me off giving out my landline number. I also hoped that I would never encounter this circle of formidable ladies or at least never cross one of them.

Talking live is something we do every day. We are constantly talking while we work and play. It’s nothing new, and if you have been messaging and chatting to someone already, there should be no surprises except for the funky accent. You should already know enough about them to be able to hold a good conversation.

There are of course certain ladies who are not prepared to wait and who want to talk on the phone straight away. They insist on this from the beginning. I came across a lot of these, but was never 100% comfortable with the arrangement. It is worth going along with the request though, as you never know where it could lead.

I clearly remember one lady asking for my mobile number straight away, and through intrigue I gave it to her. She then said she would like to call and chat, but with me being in a no-signal area I had to drive to find a receptive spot. I didn’t mind the drive as I didn’t want to hand out my home number to someone I knew nothing about. Once I was comfy in my little car, she called. The lady sounded nice and we were laughing together within minutes of me calling. Everything was going well until she asked if I was willing to take a test on the phone to see if we were compatible. I have lived by the

expression “unless you go you’ll never know”, so I said, “Of course.” What followed was three quarters of an hour of hard-core questioning. I was considering getting out of my car and shining the headlights into my eyes to complete the picture of being interrogated. I was asked moral and scenario questions ranging from “And what would you do in this situation?” to “Where do you see yourself in two years ... five years ... ten years?” etc. I found it quite amazing and wondered how other men had handled this. I refused to give up though, even though the battery on my phone was screaming. At the end of the job interview/interrogation I waited for my rating or point score, but none was forthcoming so I had to ask how I did. “You passed with flying colours,” I was told and I had apparently done better than anyone else. I admit to being quite proud of myself, and we said goodbye until a later date when we would talk again. I guessed she had other applicants to quiz before making her decision. I did hear from this lady again by text and by phone, but I was already scared of her, so I told her one evening that I didn’t believe it would work out between us and we called it quits. She worked as a counsellor, which didn’t surprise me in the slightest.

I still believe that a mobile purely for dating is a good idea, and I still believe that giving out your home number is a mistake. You just never know whether someone is a light sleeper and likes calling at three in the morning for a quick chat. At least with a mobile you can switch it off, but if you have commitments like me then the landline has to stay on. I went on to regret giving out my number many times – I never did learn.

The art of conversation is as dead as you wish to make it. Talking on the phone is no great hardship and can be a lot of fun. I found it the perfect way to ensure that a lady and I got on. It really was the final test before the date, although I now seem to have a fear of the word “test”. I don’t want to think about what would have happened if I hadn’t had that call with the counsellor lady. Can you imagine having a test over dinner about your moral views and personal details with someone who was taking notes and probably checking a polygraph? I think I would have loved every minute ...

Date safety (that's your safety, not theirs)

Did I vet ladies when I was dating? I suppose to some degree I did. After all, I would never have dated someone I hadn't talked to first. If we got to the phone-call stage, then a date was inevitable, but there was a lot more first with messages and chat. I hardly ever messaged someone unless there was an attraction to their picture and/or their profile, and I would never lead someone along if there was no spark, or I thought it wouldn't work. Yes, the answer is I *did* vet ladies. My vetting system was good, but it wasn't that good.

Before I go onto explaining about safety when dating, I will give you an example of where things got so scary for me that I was worried about what was going to happen next. I have changed this story slightly, and obviously there is no connection between the name I have chosen for the lady and the name of the real lady this is about. I hope this serves as a warning and makes you realise just what could happen, but also that it reassures you that by following a few simple rules, dating can be safe and fun. Believe it or not, it's not only the ladies who need protecting, and I would never have seen this coming if I lived to be a million. I still feel for Miss Z and her situation, but ...

To cut a long story short, I had been messaging Miss Z for some time. We got on well and she would regularly send me pictures of herself. Things were going well and we were getting on. I suppose the first warning bells were heard when she asked me to leave the Plenty of Fish site. We hadn't been talking for that long, but I suppose she wanted some sort of security and proof that I was genuinely interested in her. If I had been slightly cannier, I would have run a mile at that point, but I have never learnt the easy way so I decided to do as she asked. Apparently I didn't leave quickly enough and my name still showed up later that day, so I received a text saying she didn't think I would leave and I was obviously a liar. Maybe by now you would have run a mile, but I had left the dating site so decided to see where things would go. Not having a mobile that worked, I gave Miss Z both my landline numbers and my mobile just in case. For one reason or another she also got my address. Aren't I the greatest? We carried on talking for a couple of weeks and things moved on. I still heard warning bells every now and then, and like I have always said, "Listen to those bells as they are there for a reason." My first taste of Miss Z's temper came when she hung up on me one evening after I had mentioned that as the battery was running down on the phone she was using, maybe it would be a good idea to get the other one downstairs. I thought the battery had given out as the phone had cut off. I called back to be told she had hung up because I was ordering her about and telling her to go and get the phone. I was bullying her? Oh boy, I should have run away, but in for a penny as they say. Miss Z became more and more demanding and would get upset at the drop of a hat. We would spend hours talking happily and then she would get upset for no apparent reason. In the end I just had to meet this lady and see who she really was. We arranged to meet a couple of weeks later and I was actually looking forward to it. It was a week before that, that she dropped a bombshell on me. Miss Z had been raped a few years before and was still haunted by this memory and understandably so. I really did feel for her and didn't believe that internet dating was the best thing to do in her situation. I was still willing to go ahead with the meet and was looking forward to doing so. No-one should be judged by their past, and Miss Z seemed ok, although she did have a few problems. I was to get a call that made me think twice and really did scare me. Miss Z phoned one evening to say that it was my fault she had been raped. It was ALL my fault and that was that. What she was going to do with this new

revelation scared the willies out of me. What if she went to the police and told them what she had just told me? I tried to talk some sense into Miss Z, but she was having none of it and kept blaming me for the rape. I had only ever tried to be a friend to her and had never once been nasty. I had even talked to her late into the night when she couldn't sleep. I did the only thing I could think of and I cut all contact with Miss Z then and there. I was scared as she had my home address, phone numbers, etc. I was to get calls day and night but never picked up – thanks BT for caller ID. It was this that taught me a lesson in safety when dating. All I could think of for days to come was: what would have happened if I had actually met Miss Z? She could have accused me of anything and I would have had to answer. It doesn't bear thinking about. There was no way that I could ever have guessed what was going to happen, but I had given out so much personal information that I left myself in a very dangerous situation. I consider myself lucky to have at least found out before the meet. Nothing was to come of Miss Z's revelation, but it didn't stop me worrying.

I was to get a text from Miss Z a few months later, just before I was to go into child court to fight for my daughter. It said that she needed me and no-one had ever been as kind as I had been. I sent a text back explaining the situation and how important my day was. I was after all in court. She sent one back saying quite simply, “FFS, it's all about you, isn't it? You can't even spare me ten minutes when I'm feeling down and need a friend.” The fact is, it wasn't about me in the slightest. It was about my daughter's future, and as for the friend part?

I haven't heard anything from Miss Z since, and I hope I never do. What happened to her in the past is both horrible and unfair. I really do feel for her, and I hope that time can heal the wounds that are obviously there.

It was this experience that led me to make up my own set of rules. I was to stick with these all the way through my time on dating sites. It was to cover me, and only me, although I never did work out the logistics as to whether my rules could help. Before meeting someone, I would send them an email. This would contain my home number, the registration of my car and my home address. The email would ask the lady in question to then forward this to a trusted friend. This would then allow them to feel a little safer (at least it seemed to) and would hopefully prove that my only intention was a date. My reasoning was that if I had anything untoward in mind, then why would I send all my real details. I stuck with this and never did manage to get myself in trouble. Well, I did, but in a funny way.

Another trick I devised and gave out as advice to many a worried lady, was the mobile scam. I had this one lined up a couple of times, just in case, but never had the need for it. It was used by a multitude of ladies, and I'm sorry if this was ever used on you. When going off to a date they would ensure that a trusted (very trusted and not prone to pranks) friend would have a pre-written text on their phone. It simply said, “Your daughter isn't well, you need to come home.” If the date was not going well then a text was sent to the friend and the pre-written “daughter” text was sent back ten minutes later. No man could argue with the lady's reason for leaving. It was a way of making a quick exit from a date without making a scene. It was used by a lady friend of mine when the date she was with started to blame all women for the breakdown of his marriage. He really did deserve the truth, but the text scam worked just as well and the guy was cut off in mid-rant. The lady left with both eardrums intact and most of her sanity.

There's a lot more to dating safety, and you can read the rest anywhere. One of the most obvious is: *meet in a public place*. I was to recommend taking this one step further and advised that some ladies

actually have a couple of friends in the bar/restaurant where the meet was taking place so they could be called upon should the need arise. Just use common sense and make things as safe for your date as they are for you. Asking to meet in the woods or a forest probably isn't going to get you anywhere unless you're dating a member of the SAS or a tree-hugger. If they bring a shovel, then it might be a good idea to drive away quickly.

A car isn't essential, but I think it's a good idea. Being able to leave, and leave quickly and quietly, is never a bad thing. I took chances when staying in hotels as anything could have happened, but because many of my dates were a long way off and I would never ever stay within their property until I got to know them, I had very little choice. Any problems and I would at least have had reception to run to. I believe the world is unpredictable and safety is paramount.

In my experience, online dating is as safe a place to be as any, but there is no psychological exam on entry for members and you don't have to prove you are single. Keep it safe and make your date feel as safe as possible. Stick to a set of rules and be careful – not everyone tells the truth. Fortunately I never did get a call from a disgruntled boyfriend or husband, although I do believe it was only a matter of time. It did come close once, but that's another story.

Not every person who joins an online dating site is ready to be there. Some have come out of very unhappy relationships and are still not ready to be dating, while others are still holding a torch for their ex. It's the latter that can be a problem, and they should not be on the sites until they have managed to leave their past behind or at least laid it to rest. Every person deserves a fresh start and everyone should get a chance to have one. We all have a past, and with children and commitments, we can't all leave things behind and start afresh. It's nice to join a dating site with an optimistic view to a brighter and happier future and to have left all past relationships at the sign-on screen of whichever site you have decided to join. The term is "baggage", and the more baggage you carry, the harder and heavier your steps will be while dating. I was lucky as I never did like my ex-wife, even when I was married to her, so I had very little to carry.

The date

Do you really need a chapter on how to wine and dine someone? I know I could have done with some advice on more than one occasion.

This should really be a long chapter as the date is the part that everything else has been about. It is not going to be though. Every date is different, it's as simple as that, and to cover every aspect would take a lifetime.

I do remember the things that worried me before a date though. The main one was: what on earth do I wear? The answer is easy: it's dependent on where you are both going. I still wore jeans though.

The decision on where the date should take place can be discussed beforehand and is easy. Be it a walk along the beach, or bowling, it should be decided upon first. There's nothing worse than standing on a street corner wondering what to do. I have heard of some great first dates, ranging from ice creams by the sea to funfairs. I loved the idea of an arcade and just plying two-penny pieces into a drop machine. Even saving the world on a shoot 'em up or air hockey is fun. I do believe that fun is the key. If you are busy trying to get 100 basketballs into a hoop in under a minute, then there has to be a few laughs. At least there's not the fear of the conversation drying up.

Of course, this is dependent on the woman you are going to date and maybe the world of slot machines is not for her, that she would prefer something more adult. By that I mean a meal or a bar.

I personally would prefer bowling and a burger, even if it's a veggie one, but a meal for two need not be a task. Doing your homework on which restaurant to eat at is always a good start. Find one that isn't too flash or shabby. Do not under any circumstances try and be flash and go to a place where they know you by name. This will leave your date wondering how many others you have been on to this particular restaurant. I always tried to keep things as informal as possible; otherwise I found that it could leave some women feeling out of their depth and awkward. Do not under any circumstances make your first date together an awkward one. A simple online or telephone conversation about the date and where to go should alleviate any tension and pave the way to a trouble-free time.

The choice is essentially between you and the lady in question, but I would always avoid cinemas as I found them difficult to hold a conversation in, and it's getting to know each other that is important. If, like me, you have already talked online and on the phone for a while, then there should be a lot to talk about. Dating sites in general is always a good topic, but to avoid awkward situations avoid past relationships. This is not as easy as it sounds, and I have been on many dates where I have been quizzed over my ex-girlfriends/wife and have had to endure hours of listening about a date's ex-husband. I admit this does pass the time, but it can get very boring. There is nothing worse than a conversation about failed relationships and how "the ex never understood me".

A date is about a new start and hopefully will lead to someone new in your life. In my eyes, a date is not about past failings but about fresh starts. Of course, the subject of the ex will eventually come up, but try and keep the conversation fun on a first date and away from things that are negative. I have heard horror stories about lady friends, and how they have met someone only to endure listening to a guy talk constantly about his failed marriage and past relationships. Do not be this guy, as it is a sure-

fire way to never get a repeat date, no matter how much she likes you.

It's very simple to have fun on a first date, and that is the way things should be. It is exciting meeting someone for the first time, and that excitement should be enjoyed. If you have not been out for a while, then dating sites are a great way to rekindle your social life.

Not all dates will go exactly to plan, and one that I went on was to be a real eye-opener for me and taught me a very valuable lesson.

My reason for not wanting to meet someone local was a simple one. Having come out of a disastrous marriage and still receiving flack, the last thing I wanted was to have another relationship go wrong and be within firing distance of that person. Not very positive I know, but that was my reasoning at the time. I was, however, to go on a date that changed my outlook.

I received a message from Miss H when I was still quite new to the sites. The message certainly caught my attention as she only lived a couple of miles from me. The message was funny, as it was about how we might meet by accident while shopping one day, and would I do her the favour of not pointing out to whoever I was with that she was a dating-site member. We got messaging on and off for a while and quickly became friends. I really liked our daily chats, but there was a problem. The pictures that Miss H had on her profile left me quite cold. I was not attracted to her at all, but I really did like her personality.

It was about a month later that Miss H asked to meet me for lunch. I was OK with this, but as she was so close to me, I stupidly wrote her a message saying that lunch would be great, but as I wasn't looking for a partner so close in proximity could we meet as just friends? The answer was "of course", and we arranged to meet the following day for lunch at a local coffee house. I vividly remember waiting outside and I also vividly remember seeing my "friendship date" walking across the field towards me. She was quite simply stunning and nothing like her pictures. We hit it off from the start and the lunch flew by. We talked about everything and even managed to avoid the "ex" conversation. Both being local we could swap stories about local life and it turned out we knew many of the same people. We really did have fun, and we somehow clicked, maybe even on a relationship front, but I will never know. What an idiot I was. I felt it was too late to mention that maybe it had been wrong to put a friendship-only mark on things, and it was soon after that, that Miss H met someone and started a relationship. It was of no surprise to me. I remember her parting words as though it was yesterday: "I feel like I have just had lunch with an old friend." Not the words I wanted to hear. Even though we vowed to meet again, we never did. And with Miss H in a new relationship, I stopped messaging her after a while. I did, however, wish her luck for the future, and I hope that she is happy in whatever she is doing.

And the moral to this story? Simple. Don't be an idiot like I was, and never make presumptions. Of course, there was also the opposite situation, and I met many ladies who were nothing like their pictures and their pictures looked far better than the actual person. As a photographer I was always aware of this, but it still came as a shock sometimes. I think Miss H was the only lady who was nothing like her pictures in a good way. I remember asking one lady for a new picture the night before we met and was shocked to see she was nothing like the pictures she had up on the dating site. Yes, you guessed it, they were old pictures. I still went on the date and had a great time, and I suppose I was at least saved from getting the shock on the date itself.

I was lucky enough to never have a bad date, and I believe that was because of planning and getting to know the person first. With careful planning and sticking to my small set of rules, I was saved the unfortunate discomfort of meeting someone who wasn't fun and who couldn't hold a conversation.

Just before I met Louise and withdrew from the dating game, I had lined up a date with a lady who I had been talking to for a while. She was nice, and we got along fine. I remember being forced to phone her to tell her I had met someone and didn't think it was possible for us to meet. Her reply was both shocking and at the same time scary. Her words were, "That's OK as my boyfriend has just changed shifts and it would have been hard to get away anyway." It just goes to show that, no matter how thorough you are, there is still a margin for error. I still believe I got away very lightly and would have been horrified if she had broken this news to me over dinner. I would have run a mile as quickly as I could, which being ill wouldn't have been that fast.

I have heard stories of ladies leaving by the back door or sneaking off when their date is in the toilet. Do not let this happen to you. It shouldn't happen if your date is compatible, and all that takes is staying realistic. If online chat goes well, then it's pretty obvious that the date should be fine as well. If you have talked on the phone, then apart from the picture gamble everything should be fine. There should be no reason to have a bad date, unless the date in question hasn't been telling the truth and turns up with her husband.

As I have said before, many of my dates were in different places around the country and many involved staying overnight in various hotels. I found this a great way to get away for a couple of days and incorporating a date into this was a lot of fun. Many of my dates took place in hotel restaurants, and this gave me the chance to wine and dine as I didn't have to drive back home. If the date went well, then we would often go into town after a meal and carry on into the night. This may have come across as a bit flash, but it did show I was serious. My friends and family were amazed when I would up and leave to go off on another of my jaunts. I loved the versatility that hotels gave me and the fact that it was easy to have drinks back in the room after a night out.

With my sometimes strange ways and my openness about myself, I could build trust easily. My concerns about a safe date were always taken by my date as concern for them solely. This, of course, wasn't true as it was also my safety that I was concerned with. I'm good at getting out of situations, but after surgery I couldn't beat my daughter in an arm wrestle, let alone stand up to anyone. Trust is a wonderful thing and I never once abused it. I was true to my word at all times and never had a hidden agenda. That was how I managed a first date to be a whole ten days in a caravan in Wales. Doesn't sound too flashy, but it goes to show exactly the kind of trust you can build up when you are honest. Luckily we got on well; otherwise it would have been a strange date.

Don't be a fool and go from one date to another without some form of protection (that as well) for yourself, especially if you're dating at a distance. Be aware and be careful, but don't go mob-handed and armed to the teeth as that's never a good look. Go on dates and have fun, as that's what they are meant to be. But also be aware that things can go wrong, and even though you may have a true agenda, not everyone does.

The Beauty and the Beast

I know for a fact that the chances of meeting someone like Louise in the real world would have been

very slim indeed. Some call it chance and others fate, but personally I call it bloody impossible. Many times I have mulled over the chances of us meeting or the chance of meeting someone like her, and I can honestly say they are unbelievable odds and they are not in my favour. Let's face it, living in the middle of nowhere and only getting out to the shop every now and then doesn't leave me with the greatest chance of bumping into someone and striking up a conversation – unless I find myself attracted to one of the checkout girls at the supermarket.

The transition from being single and very lonely in the real world to joining a dating site is an amazing step. You suddenly find yourself faced with thousands upon thousands of potential dates, and one of these could be your soulmate. If only you knew which one! Now, there's a question. I believe we all know what we want in a perfect partner and how we would like that person to look, but how do we go about this? Trial and error? Extreme vetting? I believe it's neither and both. When faced with so many ladies online, I found myself being attracted to ladies I wouldn't normally be attracted to. I have already said that my ego was low and I wasn't feeling too good about myself, but one morning I came to the conclusion that these things were holding me back, and why should I put a limit on who I should message just because I wasn't feeling great? In a nutshell, just because I didn't think I was attractive, it didn't mean others would feel the same. I decided that no matter how pretty the lady was, it didn't mean I would be unattractive to her. And that is the beauty of online dating.

Imagine yourself to be in a packed bar with a load of friends. At the bar is a beautiful lady standing alone. You know in your heart of hearts that she is way out of your league and if you were to approach her you would get the brush off, probably very loudly and at the exact moment when everyone in the bar has stopped talking so it echoes off the walls. There is then the long walk back to the table and the slide back into your seat. I almost forgot, there's also the knowing smiles from the people you are with. Of course, this doesn't have to happen and she may say "yes", but in my experience the chances are slim.

I say again, that is the beauty of online dating. There are no restrictions and there is no public brush-off. There's only a message sent and the possibility of not getting one back. A quick sigh, and it's on to another profile.

With Louise, I sent a message knowing in my heart of hearts she was out of my league. I thought she looked beautiful in her pictures, her profile was good, and she looked beautiful in her pictures (did I say that already?). I took a chance, hoping she would get back to me, and spent ages composing a message to her. My gamble paid off and the rest is history as someone once said. The return message wasn't a shock, but the fact that we would go on to become friends and then partners, was. I never thought in my wildest dreams (OK, I did, but they were pretty wild dreams) that things would progress to where we are today. Why? Because I believed I wasn't good enough for her. I believed she was too good for me. Maybe a crazy notion, but maybe not.

I know I would never have approached Louise in a bar or club. I certainly would have felt attracted to her and probably kept glancing over and wondering, but I would never have actually approached her. The fear of rejection would have been too great, and my mind would have been screaming, "You are going to look like a real idiot very, very soon." I also believe that if we had been introduced by some very slim and distant chance, I never would have imagined being her partner no matter how much she hinted or was attracted to me. Remember the signal thing? In the real world I have always put limitations on myself and that is possibly the reason why I had never really been with someone I truly

love. Don't worry, it's not time for the hankies yet.

DO NOT underestimate yourself

If, like me, you put these crazy beliefs in your own head or your friends have a habit of doing it for you, then do not carry these over into the world of online dating. There is absolutely no reason why there should be restrictions on who you message, and if your message stands out, then why not believe that you will get a message back. It's very easy to think that because you have always been with the same type of partner that you have to do so again. But it is exactly this type of thinking that has been the problem in the past. If it was the correct type of thinking, then you would probably not be single now. It obviously doesn't work.

In the early days I found myself moving on from a profile and not even reading it because the lady in the picture was what I believed to be too pretty for "someone like me". What stupid and negative thinking that was. Imagine yourself in a very large room with thousands of ladies ranging from "plain Jane" to "wow". It's just you and them, and you can talk to anyone you wish. There is no comeback, and you are not going to have to stand on a chair with everyone pointing at you and laughing if a few of them are not attracted to you and reject you. It's not going to be aired on television at prime time on a Saturday night, so with this in mind why put a restriction on yourself? Every single lady in that room with you is there to date, and they all want to be with someone they care about. Why can't that person be you? I am not saying that you should only message who you believe to be the prettiest ladies or the ones that fell off an Italian catwalk, but don't underestimate yourself. If you feel an attraction, then get messaging, as you never know where it will lead.

Be positive and feel secure in the knowledge that there is a good chance you will receive return mail. The beauty of internet dating is that it takes away that fear, and gives you free rein to talk to ladies who you might not usually talk to. It gives you the freedom to sit in your own home or at work and approach anyone you wish without that nagging negativity in the back of your mind. Of course, it does take away the excitement of being face to face, but that's only at first. And, let's face it, none of us are ever going to be lucky enough to be in a room with 34,000 single women unless we are being married by the Unification Church, and then that's only until after the ceremony.

I remember a friend from school, and I would love to name him but I wouldn't give his ego a boost as I doubt very much it needs it. Quite frankly, he was a pig to look at and seemed to have very little going for him. This was obvious to all us boys, but it was something that the girls didn't seem to notice. Mr "I don't know how I do it" had a fan club of the prettiest girls that would follow him anywhere. They would have trampled over their best friend for a date, and even though he was my friend, I hated going places with him. He ruined my trip to Germany when he got off with a German girl I had a crush on – I was tempted to push him overboard on the ferry back. He ruined the end of school party when he once again got off with a girl I had a crush on. And in the end I was happy when he moved. Mr "I don't know how I do it" had one thing that many of us other boys didn't have, and that was self-belief. Or maybe he just didn't care. Either way it was this devil-may-care attitude and the fact that he never underestimated himself that gave him the chance to constantly date and run off with every girl I fancied. I was to meet him years later in a pub in London. He hadn't changed, and after a few drinks and a pleasant afternoon he left with the chairman of the company I worked for. For

the first time he went off with someone I didn't have a crush on, and I still smile at this today. I hope their walk on Hampstead Heath went well.

DO NOT underestimate yourself and DO NOT restrict yourself as it is a pointless and fruitless exercise. The only restriction that will hold you back on the sites is yourself. If you follow what has been written so far, then there is no reason why you shouldn't be getting messages back from whoever you send them to. I am by no means saying that every message will be replied to, but your percentage-chance is far greater than those of the "Hi Sexy, wot ya up 2?" brigade.

I never grew up. All you have to do is ask my parents and they will back me up on this one. If you were to ask my friends, they'd probably tut, throw their hands in the air and walk away. If you asked my partner, she would smile and say that I'm perfect (one can only wish). I have tried to be an adult and have tried to take on the responsibilities that life throws at me, but it never seems to work unless it's to do with my child. That's when the adult comes out in me and that's the time I act my age. If, of course, drawing, playing with toys, skateboarding and going over the swings is classed as "acting my age"?

The age group of site members you search through will determine the chances of whether they have children, have grandchildren or possibly want children in the future. The latter my friend is up to you, but the first two instances are something that I as a parent take very seriously indeed. As I have said before, there are many single parents on dating sites, and if you find yourself dating or going to date a single parent, then there needs to be a lot of understanding. I would never in my wildest dreams expect to meet anyone's child or children straight away, and I would be worried if I was put into this situation when we had first started dating or on a first date. If there was mention of a first date where we could introduce our children to each other, then I would politely cut all contact. I am sure that there are people out in the world that find this acceptable, but not me. Why would I put myself and my child into a situation where a string of different ladies were passing through her life?

My daughter has known of only two ladies that I was seeing, and she has only met one, Louise. This was after we had been seeing each other for about six months, and it took a great deal of planning and a lot of talking to ensure things went well. Before I met Louise's children, I would leave before they came home and come back when they had gone. Of course, they heard my name mentioned so they were not oblivious to who I was. After we had gone over things and talked for a long time, I met them one evening and things seemed OK. But it was more nerve-racking than my first date with Louise. After dinner, I left and stayed in a caravan overnight, and then met them again away from the home the next day. We took things very slowly, and once they seemed to have accepted me, I was allowed onto the couch overnight (the caravan was actually much more comfortable). It was a very long time before Louise and I shared a bed overnight, and even then we had to be sure that everything was all right, that the children were comfortable and that our relationship itself was secure. Eventually my daughter came to stay for a few nights and the children were introduced to each other. Things worked well, but it was a very long process and not always easy for us.

As I have said, "not everyone is the same", but I feel this subject does need to be addressed. If you are single and do not have any children, then you will need to be understanding if you date someone who does have children. It's not always easy to find a babysitter, and children do take up a lot of a person's time. We are lucky as our children spend time with their respective mother and father, but this is not always the case. Do not under any circumstances be pushy when it comes to children, as you will push any prospective partner away. That's if they are worth their salt as a parent. Children play a massive part in online dating and should be treated with kid gloves all the way. The term "baggage", when it comes to children, still makes my blood boil, and I would never even answer a message from someone who had this on their profile. Actually, I tell a lie; I did this once just to let the

person know what I thought on the subject (maybe twice).

I received a message from a lady once and we eventually went on to chat live online. When the subject of children came up, she mentioned that she only saw her children every second Sunday for a couple of hours, and that they lived with their father. I finished the conversation politely and then slowly cut all contact with this lady. Maybe there was a good reason as to why she saw her children so little, but for me I knew she could never be a part of my daughter's life or mine. There was doubt, and when it comes to children any doubt is enough.

The need to be understanding when a date cancels because her child has measles is paramount, even if you feel let down. Luckily some women still have good relationships with their ex-partners, but unfortunately I do not with mine. Louise's ex is a good dad and has become a friend to me over time, and that makes life easy for all of us. I, on the other hand, have received some very nasty emails from my ex in the past regarding my dating habits, which I just forwarded to my solicitor, who I happened to be dating at the time (that is a joke).

If you are willing to date someone who has young children or children still living at home, then prepare to be second best. I know I am to Louise's children and Louise is to mine. I would expect no less and neither would Louise. Every couple of weeks we spend four to five nights apart while I'm with my daughter. This would probably be different if my daughter didn't live and go to school a long way from where Louise lives, but it's the way things are. Although we find this time hard, it's something we both know is very important.

Every child and person is different, and the amount of time Louise and I gave ourselves to introduce each other to the children was what felt comfortable for us. This is by no means set in stone, and each situation is variable, but prepare yourself for a wait if you have met someone with children. Bringing a new person into children's lives after their parents have separated has to be a careful decision, and it is not always an easy one. Most marriage breakdowns and splits are emotionally draining on both the parents and the children, so take things slow, and if the person you are dating is being careful, then accept their decision as I am sure it will be worth the wait.

Any dating site that is any good will have a part in the profile that says whether a person has children and/or wants children in the future and if the children are still living at home. If you feel you couldn't date someone with children, then refine your search, but you will be cutting down on a great number of wonderful ladies that you could be dating. You should also remember that if a lady's child no longer lives at home and is away at university, or has his/her own place, then at some point you may be faced with a lot of questions from a 7ft rugby-playing biker with "I love Mum" tattoos. Good luck.

Be understanding, be patient, and if your date receives a text halfway through the evening saying her child is ill, then don't believe it, but stay quiet and leave with your dignity.

The use of children within profile pictures still leaves me cold, unless the child is old enough to collect their pension. There are no restrictions on who can join dating sites and this includes predators, so please bear this in mind. I have seen profiles that only contain a picture of a child and not one of the adult who is the member. This in my mind is beyond belief. Maybe it's only naivety and they believe the world to be a happy, fluffy place, but much to my annoyance it isn't. I'm not going to write about a subject that I feel has no place here and I'm not going to spell out the obvious, but please bear this in mind when placing pictures. If I thought it wouldn't offend, I would send each

person who has used their child as a profile picture a long and detailed message. If I had my way, the use of any picture containing a child would be banned from dating-site profiles, full stop.

There was always the temptation to put a picture of Mickey Mouse on my profile and then go on a date wearing the mask, but that would have been silly ... or would it?

“The more baggage we carry through life, the harder and heavier our steps will become.”

I think I can honestly say that there has only been one period in my short-lived life when I have been completely free of “baggage”. It was when I had absolutely nothing and I lived in a cave, on a beach, in Cornwall. You might even remember me? I did start out on my travels in a car, but that blew up on me and I had to swap it for another one which then did the same. The first car was my mum’s, so I think an apology is long overdue. Sorry Mum.

This period in my life wasn’t to last long and eventually I had to return to some sort of normality, if that’s what responsibility is? To be completely free of burden and free from our past is a very rare and wonderful thing. I am in no way free from my past today and I carry and reap what I have sown. I am not talking here about my child, but about my past relationships, and in particular, my now wonderfully void marriage and my ex-wife.

We all have a past and we all have to carry a certain amount of baggage, but we shouldn’t spend our time online moaning about it to someone we have just met. What we do with that baggage is up to us, but do not throw it all at someone else.

When I joined the dating sites, I would never talk about my past relationships or marriage unless asked, and I kept that rule throughout. I would very rarely elaborate on the subject, but I would openly talk about my daughter, my favourite subject. If I did have to talk about my past relationships, then I would make light of the subject, showing that I was entirely free and not still carrying a torch for anyone, which was the truth. I did however get to listen to many ladies’ accounts of past relationships and ex-husbands, and sometimes it could actually be interesting – but not often. An ex is an ex and should be left at the logging-on screen.

During the time I was active on the sites, I was having a lot of problems with my ex and fighting for the right to see my daughter, but I never, ever went onto the sites looking for sympathy from a stranger. I never needed or wanted a counsellor or a therapist, and I’m sure that the ladies I talked to didn’t want to hear of my problems. It’s understandable that, once you’re in a relationship, problems need to be shared and both people need to support each other. Life will always present us with fresh problems, and, of course, the ex-wife or -husband as well.

Like attracts like and if you wish to find yourself with someone who you can spend hours bitching about the past and the dreaded ex, then please ignore everything in this chapter. Good luck with holding onto your past and ignoring the chance of a new future.

Not everyone who is a member of a dating site carries baggage and/or has an ex who refuses to let go, but I found that a large percentage do. Maybe I just seemed to attract those that do, but I doubt it. Louise is lucky enough to have a very good relationship with her ex-husband and in this I envy her. The fact that a great deal of relationships that go wrong and involve children get messy is not a topic for discussion here, but I fully intend to cover this subject in a future book, as I know it does not have to be like this.

After all, we are parents and adults, aren't we?

From a lady's point of view

As I sat writing one fine morning, I felt that there was something missing, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. After a lot of thinking and a lot of re-reading I realised that there was not enough input from the opposite sex. What exactly did ex-members think of their time on the dating sites? What did they learn and what drove them crazy? Why did they join and where did they end up? I decided that ex-members who are now in relationships would give a slightly more honest and concise answer to my question as they have been through the whole process from start to finish. Current members, I believed, would still be slightly too green for an answer that would be of any interest to us. I decided to go for the cynical veteran as opposed to the naive learner, but who to choose?

The first was easy as she was sitting next to me on the sofa. Louise was obviously a member before she met me and her account is still active. She is astute and, like me, ended up analysing the sites, profiles and messages, as well as looking for a partner. She got and still gets a multitude of messages, even though, as I have said before, her profile says she is now in a relationship. She was the perfect person to give an opinion and the perfect person to hopefully say how she hated everyone on the sites until she met perfect me :)

The second lady I decided to ask was a member of my family. Miss P is in her early forties and has two young(ish) children. She is very young at heart, could drink me under the table any day and has a wonderful sense of humour (a must for dating sites). We had met by chance one day and somehow got talking about dating sites and dating. We blocked the door to our local shop for the following hour and I was amazed at how much she knew. We then parted and I forgot about our meeting until now. A quick email and I got back a wonderfully put-together piece about online dating. The problem I had was she wasn't sure she wanted it used in the book. After some editing we came to an agreement on a final draft. I couldn't let the piece she had written go, as it justifies everything I have written so far. I am going to comment on each piece as we go through her mail, as I believe that will make easier reading and give us both the opportunity to see where men go wrong.

The lady in question has asked to stay anonymous, and I'm having trouble with this as I believe she should get credit for her writing, and I do have a really strange sense of humour. With this in mind, thank you Cousin P and I'll see you at Auntie Sue's birthday.

Thought I'd get straight on and email you and not put things off....

Well, where to begin? I went straight on a date site after me and my boyfriend split, although I was actually quite scared of the sites. Being on your own in the evening with the children in bed feels lonely sometimes and the dating sites brought some life and company, I thought. Nervously I put a very conservative picture on. Of course I had to take one especially :). Shortly after registering I was excited when someone popped up on live chat, only to read: "Are you on here for sex?", which shocked me. It got a little better than that, but not much. After a while, what was meant for a bit of company actually seemed very seedy and intrusive at times, so I came off.

I know that Miss P is a very strong lady, and her joining the sites straight after a relationship wouldn't

have been a problem. I know she can move on quickly. She is by no means a typical person but certainly a typical member. She has young children, is alone in the evenings and just wanted some company.

The rest is nothing short of amazing. If Miss P had received a normal and nice message in the style we have discussed earlier, then she would surely have answered. I have no doubt that a relationship of whatever description could have been built upon from one simple, polite opening message. What Miss P got was the usual trite and intrusive mail that put her off so much that she left. This backs up everything I have said about the importance of a good opening message, and the need to message new members before the idiots scare them off the site completely. If you can build a messaging relationship with someone, then if they do wish to leave you can at least swap email addresses and continue to chat away from the site. I have done this often.

I went back on when I felt strong enough to ignore the idiots. Including any guy who called me babe, hun, couldn't spell, put kisses on the end of messages when we had never spoken or was more than 15 years older or younger than myself. I was shocked how many young people try. I guess they think they are onto a sure thing with an aging mother. I'm not sure what makes the criteria that some people are OK to talk too? At this time I didn't want to actually meet anyone in person, just some evening live chat company. This didn't go down very well. When I said I wasn't ready to meet anyone yet, they would reply, "Well, what are you doing on here?" A fair point, I suppose.

This paragraph speaks volumes. It can become very frustrating when all you are receiving is the same message over and over, and "the idiots" on the sites seem to send just that. For Miss P to ignore every person who called her "babe" or "hun", etc. must have meant that the amount of mail she actually answered was quite small. She backs up what I have said about txt speak, and it's no wonder that ladies found my opening messages different and would reply. Many younger men seem to message older ladies. It must be the age of the Cougar (older sexy lady).

The "mother I'd like to fuck", or "milf" as it is more commonly known, will always be a fascination for younger men, as will the older man messaging younger ladies. There seems to be a misconception that women in their forties or fifties want to bed a younger man, and many young men will never tire of trying. This in some cases can be true, but I found it's not very often. I have heard many ladies say, "I would eat him alive" or "He's just a boy. What on earth could he offer me that a man couldn't?" Yet still they try.

I have said before that not everyone joins to meet. Some people just want to chat their lonely evening away online. It is by no means uncommon, but doesn't necessarily lead to a dead-end. There is nothing wrong with ladies who only want to chat at first, but I guarantee that curiosity will eventually get the better of them and a meet will be made. That is if they are telling the truth of course. The comment "Well, what are you doing here?" is ridiculous and not a fair point. A simple "That's cool" would have been the start of something rather than nothing. A relationship has to start somewhere and people should always be given the chance to find their feet. It's not really a "fair point" as Miss P said. Some sites provide the opportunity to state what a person is looking for, be it marriage, long term or correspondence, email, etc. Respect a person's wishes, and if you are looking for dating only, then politely make this clear and don't be rude. I personally do not see anything wrong with online chat. As I have said, everything has to start somewhere, and from a simple chat, trust can be built.

I spoke to a couple of men who seemed safe. For some reason they thought they had a sense of ownership over me because we had messaged a few times. One guy was a psychiatrist – interesting, I thought. He lived a long way away – even better, I thought. When he persistently wanted to meet, I didn’t reply to his messages as quickly as before. He then began sending me messages asking why I hadn’t replied straight away when he could see I had been online, and did I realise that he had a way of checking whether I had read his message? We had only spoken for a couple of days! The bloke needed a shrink :)

With so many clueless men and players joining dating sites, it can be difficult to build trust. Miss P has said that she spoke to a couple of men who seemed “safe”. There lies a problem that can be turned into an advantage. It cuts down on competition (hate that word) and gives the normal guy a chance to build trust and then a date. The thought that she found a lot of men “unsafe” is worrying.

The thought of ownership happens a lot, and I even found myself believing it at times. There are so many men and ladies on dating sites that it would be ridiculous to think that a lady you are messaging is only replying to your messages alone. Hopefully you will be messaging and talking to many ladies over time, and it is unfair to believe that they sit there all night waiting for you alone to come online. If you are pushy and domineering online, then this will lead the lady to believe you are like this in real life, even if you are not. It’s not a good look and will scare most people away. Do not do it.

I spoke a while (well, about a week) with a civil servant who turned out to have a photo ten years out of date. Anyway, nice guy to chat to, but again I seemed to think he could get pushy if I didn’t reply quickly enough. Again I was frightened off.

Do I need to comment? I think not.

Third try of the sites. This guy came on. No kisses, no huns or babes, no spelling mistakes, no cheese. And I was kind of ready to meet someone. Only for a drink mind you, nothing more. Turned out my sister had briefly met him and she said he was very reserved. Maybe a little quiet for me, she said. Perfect, I thought. Very polite, she said. I like the sound of this, I thought. Very nice looking and good job – it’s getting better. I arranged to meet him for a coffee a few days later. His computer went down, so I didn’t hear from him for a few days, but he got back in touch and asked where to meet. It had been a hot day so I thought stuff the coffee and asked if he fancied meeting for a glass of wine. My phone didn’t stop getting texts from him then. Suddenly he was really eager to meet as soon as possible. Well, I took the children round xxxxx and waited at the bottom of the road for this shy, reserved man to pick me up. This great big vehicle drove up onto the green and to my feet where I was sitting. Ummmm, quiet guy? Well, I got in the car and he was about as confident as they come, but hilariously funny too. We went and sat in his garden and had a glass of wine and here is how the conversation went. He told me that he saw a girl in shorts walking down the road the other day and you could see everything. I nearly fell off my garden chair! I wasn’t sure whether to laugh or run. Then he quizzed me about some very personal things and told me about previous women he had met on the site and how crazy some of them were and how some of them just wanted sex. He told me other sites to go on. Weird, I thought. I thought the idea was to meet and build a relationship if you liked each other. He told me not to worry – he wasn’t going to try to have sex with me tonight – although he was sure he would sometime in the future and if I felt more comfortable he would order me a

cab for later, then I could relax. He kept plying me with wine and insisting I drink up. He did see me back to mine and brought me back to my mum who thought he was really charming, ha! After the date he did get in touch a few times and try to meet back up, but I said I was busy. Moral of the story: don't listen to a word anyone says.

Moral of the story? Have a text ready that says, "You need to come back as the children want you", and run as fast as you can. I hope in reading the last paragraph you can see what is wrong, because if you can't I am wasting my time here. The unedited version of the above is a lot more frightening than the edited.

The fact that this guy's opening message didn't contain any of the usual rubbish and was noticed above all the others is encouraging. He went on to have a date with Miss P, which is proof in itself that this approach works, but as for the rest? I still believe he was lucky to leave with his balls still hanging between his legs. This whole scenario screams "player", but all it got him was a couple of glasses of wine and a lot of gossip about himself. He was known by friends of Miss P, but that doesn't always mean it's a safe environment to put yourself into as a lady on your own. I personally would lose in a fist fight to Miss P, but that doesn't mean she was safe. His lack of charm and decorum can only leave me thinking one thing: the man was an idiot. I am not saying that every lady is a saint and first-date sex doesn't happen, but he got nowhere and didn't even secure a second date, let alone anything else. If it's sex he wanted, then he should have made this clear from the start (there are many people on dating sites looking for just this) and not put Miss P into a situation that left her feeling uncomfortable. He knew very little about her, and although Miss P isn't like this, it would be easy for a lady to call her older brothers and say she needs rescuing. Would you like to put yourself in that position? I wouldn't.

I did meet another guy because he insisted, under the total understanding that I only wanted to meet up as friends. I became his counsellor over the forthcoming weeks – fun!

I also met an amazingly interesting guy who was an ex-headmaster. Problem was it took me about three hours to reply to his messages because it took me that long to compose something that sounded like I was on his level.

Well, that's about all. Like I say, you would have to change some details if you used my story if there's anything of interest. Can't wait to read your book. It's so great to hear you sounding so happy.

Lots of love to you guys x

I can only smile at the rest of Miss P's words. The thought of being somewhere with a date and having to listen to their problems makes me cringe.

Can men not see that this is a great way to show how insecure they are? It's no wonder Miss P stopped the dates. We are all capable of being insecure, and I know I can be at times, but there is nothing more attractive than someone with a positive outlook and self-assurance. This doesn't mean cocky though.

I wish Cousin P the best of luck in her relationship with her new man and all the best for the future. (p.s. Dinner would be cool.)

The second opinion is that of my partner Louise. I admit to being scared at what she was going to write and thought I was about to learn things that I didn't necessarily want to know. For me, it's not an easy thing to write about dating sites when in a relationship, as it means discussing each other's experiences in detail. I write live, which means there is very little pre-planning, and I research and write about some information as I go. This then means that however I feel about a subject it comes straight from the heart and not some crazy worked-out plan. Not everything needs research though, and I manage somehow to keep most of it wrapped up nicely in my funky little mind.

When we first met, Louise was in her late thirties and, in my opinion, the prettiest lady I had ever conversed with. We had talked for a long time before we met. The day we met I realised my attraction to her had gone past the "friends" stage and was happily out of control. It's easy to understand why.

She is, in my mind, a beautiful woman and has a great personality. She is tall and slim, although she swears she isn't that tall. She has two young children and a wonderful lifestyle that I have become accustomed to and love. Like many ladies, her time on the dating sites wasn't easy, but she has a strong character and had an approach that was better than mine. She took the sites with a pinch of salt. This is what she wrote about her dating experience ...

I went on a dating site because I was injured, laid up and very bored .I was complaining to a friend about being single and saying things like "How am I going to meet someone while lying on the sofa?" Said friend suggested I go on a dating site, as even when not injured, I am a single mum who doesn't get out much and have very little social life.

Like so many people out there, Louise didn't have the time or capability to get out and meet someone. Her injury had left her unable to move very far and she was housebound. This is identical to my reason for joining. It's a shame we didn't use the same hospital as meeting there could have saved us both a lot of time and effort. There would have been no book though.

I got over the stigma in my head and signed up on a site.

When I say stigma, I mean my pre-conception that dating sites were for sad, lonely folk who couldn't meet anyone in a typical social environment, or sex pests, stalkers and other scary stuff. This of course is rubbish (although there is an element of the above as there would be in any social environment) as I discovered there is a wide-ranging community out there.

The stigma, which I believe we all face when first joining, is diminishing. With dating sites being advertised increasingly on television, the fear is slowly being replaced by intrigue. Plenty of Fish now has an advert on mainstream TV, which was a shock to both me and Louise.

She is right when she says there are all kinds of people on the sites, but that goes for the high street as well.

When I first went on a dating site I expected to see someone I liked, meet them and skip off into the sunset with Mr Right. This was very far from the truth indeed, and nothing could have prepared me for what I was going to find, and find out about myself.

I was inundated with messages, which at first was quite flattering. I would spend many nights chatting about all sorts of things and ended up making a lot of friends, but I wasn't looking for a

friend and nor were they.

I also believed that after joining a site it wouldn't be long before I had found Miss Right and would be settling easily into a relationship. If I had had the knowledge that I have now, then my journey through the sites would have been a quicker one, but I didn't possess the knowledge then, and it was a long time before I did.

It's no wonder that Louise was inundated with messages. Her pictures were good, and I mean very good. They showed the real person and showed her for the pretty lady she is. Even now when she pops online to check something, her message box begins to fill up. (Message to jealous self: ask Louise to close her account.) Her profile was good as well, even if men don't always read them.

I got chatting to someone I felt there was a spark with and we decided to meet, but this was a disaster. In the name of safety, nerves, lack of trust, first date, etc. we decided to meet in a busy pub while I was out with some other friends. It would seem like we had just met by chance to them and be a bit of fun – we thought. As I said, it was a disaster on so many levels.

My friends got so hammered they could barely stand, not a good look to my date. It took me some time to herd them to said pub and we arrived about an hour late. After all that, we didn't click at all. I think he preferred one of my friends, which was funny as by that time I was past caring. He gave me a lift home, blasted out the music so loud we could not speak and shook my hand goodbye. Not good in my eyes. I never heard a word from him again and he left the dating site! Now that was just rude.

What a great idea and one that I never thought of. If you have messaged and chatted to someone online, then why not just bump into each other while one of you is out with friends? To me this sounds fun and exciting. It's almost a "cloak and dagger" date and far from the norm. It's a shame it didn't go according to plan, but not everything always does. What am I saying? This is my partner we are talking about. I'm glad it went pear-shaped. In fact, I like the guy's idea of saying goodbye. Top bloke :)

Having had my illusion of skipping into the sunset with said perfect date obliterated, I got down to the business of toughening up – a must if you are going to get what you want out of a dating site.

Louise's words here are very important. There is a need to toughen up, and that goes for both males and females. The sites can be cut-throat at times, and if you are sensitive or get angry easily, then they can be very hard to deal with. Keep an open mind, and do not believe that everything is going well until you have actually met in person. I have built my hopes up on a lady only to log in and find she has left. If you are not prepared for the unexpected, then this can hurt. This once again shows the need to message new members.

I got more choosy and soon realised it was like being in a sweet-shop where you could almost pick and choose what you wanted, and if you didn't like what you had you could put it back and pick another. This was so scary to me, as you could become someone or something totally different to who you were when you first signed up. I found this concept utterly surreal. It was like these were cyberpeople, and boundaries that exist in a physical social environment didn't count here.

I've discussed the first part of this paragraph with Louise many times, and it was actually the subject of some of our first date. When chatting or messaging you are given the ability to move from one person to another without a single thought for their feelings. You can quite simply drop the first for the next and move on. When online you cannot see the real person and cannot see the hurt you can cause. It is so easy to become a different person to the one that joined. The "child in a sweet-shop" is perfect. The need to remind yourself constantly of why you joined is important. Unless, of course, you joined to get your own back at the female race. In which case, please ignore the last bit.

It would have been very easy to embark on the occasional sexual encounter with "no strings attached" with someone and have the companionship and feeling like there was someone there in your dating-site friends. This would mean you hardly needed a boyfriend at all. You could just take all the good bits and not have any of the problems that go with getting into a relationship. This to me was the dating site trap, and there are so many people online like this. They have forgotten why they were there. It also says a lot about someone who is capable of this. Could I turn into someone who behaved in a totally different way on a dating site? I would never have behaved like this in a physical social environment. Luckily this was not to happen, but it could have.

Dating sites give the ability to have "no strings attached" sex or NSA, and I will write more about this later. To be able to take all the good bits from a relationship, like companionship, support, etc. and then separate them and use others for sex is an easy thing to do. To use certain people for the former and then use others for the latter is more than possible, although not always safe – from both the sexual health and general safety angles. Louise has called it the "dating-site trap" and it is an easy trap to fall into. With so many people online there is the capability to separate and use people for different things. Not all ladies join for sex, but some do. And others slowly get pulled away from their initial reason for joining, which was to find a partner. I will elaborate on this later on, but the comment about how you act in a physical social environment versus when online is a very interesting one.

I very rarely messaged anyone, and I answered all incoming messages as that was just polite.

It's a fair point that Louise rarely messaged anyone as she had no need to. Many ladies never need to message, and if you do get a message from a lady without first messaging them, then it is testament to a good profile and good pictures.

I would look at their picture and see if there was an instant "no". If there was a picture with a guy and another woman that would put me off a bit; even if it is a friend or sister, this first impression isn't great. If someone is going to put up a picture of themselves topless, then they better have a good body, as there's nothing worse than if they don't. Guys putting up pictures of their bikes or cars was not good for me – they were worse than having a woman in shot. As I am not materialistic, I have no interest in someone's car and it's yourself you need to sell, not the car or bike, unless the person looking is a car or bike lover. If the person was on the bike, that was nice, but not just a picture of the bike. I liked outdoor shots, natural shots and not posing shots. The holiday snap leaning up against a palm tree in Bermuda was a no-no for me.

I believe this backs up most of what I said earlier about the use of certain pictures. Of course everyone is different and everyone likes different things, but as I have said if you keep things pretty

much neutral then you are onto a good start. If you're thinking of putting up a picture of your car, then do so when you're selling it. You never know, you might end up dating the buyer!

If I wasn't interested, I would say, "You are not my type but good luck anyway." And I would always read profiles, unless they were too long, in which case I would read the first part. It was important for me to go by the profile as well as the picture, as not everyone has a good picture floating about.

Like Louise, I believed in answering every message, even if it was with a: "No, thank you." I would rather get a message back saying what Louise said than none at all. The need to read profiles has been discussed already, as it can show who a person really is and what he/she really wants. A well-balanced profile is so very important.

The first thing I would look for was age (not so important), distance from me (very important as I didn't want a long-distance relationship) and the longest relationship (very important). If a guy was 35 and the longest relationship he had been in was two years, that would totally put me off. Not for me. It would suggest a lack of commitment and staying power.

This is a good example of what certain women find important in their search criteria. Age, distance and longest relationship are what were important to Louise. I provided two out of three, which wasn't too bad. It's important that what a lady wants is respected, and don't be surprised if some ladies stick to their own set of rules. This is possibly based on past experience.

If a chap had no children that would also put me off, as dating a single mum with young children could be an enormous shock and strain to any man, let alone one with no children or one who never wants children. Hobbies and interests were important too. If a guy put up he wanted to travel, again, a big no-no. I have kids remember. Thinking about it, this is why it is so important to be honest in a profile. We are all so different, and there are non-childbearing, car-loving travellers out there. That just wasn't me. I guess witty profiles drew me in, and the totally honest ones. These are two things I admire and like in reality, so with this in the profile that was good for me. As long as the person seemed genuine and had similar interests to me, I wouldn't send back the "you are not my type" message.

We do intend to travel one day, once the children leave home or are kicked out. But like Louise, I was not attracted to people without children and for the same reasons. There is someone for everyone and there is no need to say you love children on your profile if you do not. Imagine finding yourself in a house full of children and changing nappies of an evening with your new partner. Keep to the truth and what you really want. What you write in your profile will determine who will want to message you or chat with you. It can be a minefield, but with careful planning when writing a profile it is possible to interest almost everyone. A mixture of witty and honest is a good start.

I have to just say some screen names totally put me off too. Names like "here again", "keep trying" or "Mr Cuddles" would see me run a mile, as would "easy lover", "just looking" or "BigBoy" ... need I say more?

I went on a few more dates and met someone who I did really get on with. Our date was still a bit of a disaster though, but in a funny way, and we are still going strong after nearly a year. I

do believe that dating sites work and have a place in our society, the age of communication and all that. It's very important to keep your head though, and remember why you joined in the first place as it is easy to forget.

The infamous screen name rears its head once again. It is easy to see why some names will put ladies off and all for something so simple as a neutral screen name. "BigBoy" has a lot to live up to if he gets further than a first date and "here again" has obviously been dumped at least once. "Mr Cuddles" sounds like a presenter from CBBC and "just looking" is more of a statement than a screen name. I have been told these are all real people, although I do wonder.

The "few more dates" I can't comment on, but the last one I can (at least I hope it was the last) as it was me. The disaster part I will only comment on in my memoirs, but I can promise you that not everything always goes to plan. Since meeting Louise I have done very little except work on our relationship and this book. We are a real couple and living proof that dating sites work.

Louise's closing statement is very true and should be remembered.

The needle and the haystack

A couple of evenings ago my partner and I went back onto the sites to help re-write a profile for a friend. Dating sites can be strange places when you are in a relationship and the memories came flooding back for both of us. The sheer number of people online who were looking for dates and/or relationships was simply scary. Looking at the diverse selection of ladies who could potentially be messaged was mind-blowing. Louise looked over at me and said, "It's like a needle in a haystack. We were very lucky to have found each other." Be it luck, fate or some other divine intervention, we will never know, but I believe she was right. We were lucky to find each other, but I decided to dig a little deeper and try to find what others thought on the subject. After typing in "real-life dating stories" and reading for an hour, I gave up. I could have gone on all night as the net is full of stories, some good and some bad.

I did come across this which I thought was very interesting though ...

Survey results 2011

Recent studies of more than 11,000 people revealed that one in six marriages are now between people who met through an online dating site – more than twice the number of people meeting at bars, at clubs and other social events combined. Additionally, the studies show that one in five new committed relationships, including marriages, are between people who met on an online dating site.

Was this then the needle in the haystack we first imagined? Maybe it wasn't, but it is daunting when faced with so many potential partners. We consider ourselves to be very lucky, but then so many other couples that met online do as well. There are a lot more couples out there that met on dating sites than I first imagined. One in six is a huge statistic and so is this.....

Survey 2010

Research Study Overview & Objectives

In 2009 and 2010, Match.com engaged research firm Chadwick Martin Bailey to conduct three studies to provide insights into America's dating behaviour: a survey of recently married people

Key Findings

Marriage Survey

17% of couples married in the last 3 years, or 1 in 6, met each other on an online dating site.

In the last year, more than twice as many marriages occurred between people who met on an online dating site than met in bars, at clubs and other social events combined.

Approximately twice as many recently married couples met on Match.com than the site that ranked second.

Online Dating Survey

Match.com has led to more than twice as many dates and twice as many relationships as the site that ranked second.

General Survey

1 out of 5 single people have dated someone they met on an online dating site.

1 out of 5 people in a new committed relationship (including marriage) met their significant other on an online dating site.

I have never used Match.com, so I cannot comment on their site facilities or members. They are a pay-site, which is something I avoided all the way through my journey on the sites, although I was tempted at times. Their statistics were once again astounding and go to show that dating sites are very popular. The survey was done in 2010, so the percentage could well be higher by now (or lower, but I doubt that).

I still believe the “needle in a haystack” comment to be true, but I know that if you’re genuinely looking for someone, then you will find them. It could be as quick as the first hour, you never know.



It had been a while since Baz's mum had heard anything from him.
It was so nice to see him looking well.

What a wonderfully strange and diverse world we live in. In the past, the equivalent to txt sex would have been “telegram sex” or even “Pony Express sex”, although that sounds slightly dubious and possibly illegal. Telegram sex could have been fun, and the thought of a guy running in and shouting, “Telegram for Mr X” makes me smile, especially if he then read it out loud. A latter-day version would have been postal sex, and as I ponder this I suppose that did actually happen, although things could go off the boil with the state of the postal system. It’s a slightly different world today, and if you have yet to experience txt sex, then I will explain although not in detail. It’s simply the use of a mobile to send texts back and forth to another person explaining what you would like to be doing to them sexually, what you are doing now or what you both could be doing in the near future. It’s a very basic way of either swapping fantasies or getting to know what pushes someone’s buttons. It can be fun, but as I have said “basic”.

It can also be very frustrating if the lady in question is a long way away. To get a text saying “Wow, I’m horny” doesn’t help much if you’re a thousand miles away or at work and in a meeting. The use of txt sex has its limitations, unless you are actually going to be with that person later that day or the next. Many couples use txt sex when they are apart to relieve sexual frustrations, but let’s face it there is also the webcam, although this isn’t always an option. Txt sex isn’t solely restricted to mobiles, and IM or a dating site chat facility will do just as well. Just try to ensure you are the only one in view of the screen as it could be awkward, and the use of a laptop is a must for men when in company. The emphasis is on the “lap” in case you are slow on the uptake.

Txt sex is nothing new and has been around for years, although being a dating site member certainly increases the chance of this happening. I was once a believer that most women were of the angelic sort, but I was soon to have my naive bubble burst. The question “What are you wearing?” would pop up every now and then, and the temptation to send back “dressing gown and slippers” was almost overpowering sometimes. Txt sex can be fun and the ante can be upped considerably with the use of pictures sent from a mobile in between texts. There is always the fear that you will send the picture to the wrong person, so please keep your head about you and use the “reply” option on your phone if possible. A shaky hand can easily hit the wrong name. I tremble at the thought.

A poor signal can be very frustrating, and be careful if the only signal you can get is next to the window. I also recommend the use of abbreviations as a long, full description can take time and get you an “Are you still there?” or “Have you finished?” text.

I’m sure the reader needs no more information than I have given already and your imagination is capable of the rest.

An example of how txt sex should NEVER be follows:

Wellhung: Hello, Sweetheart. What do you look like?

Sweetheart: I am wearing a red silk blouse, a miniskirt and high heels. I work out every day, I’m toned and perfect. My measurements are 36-24-36. What do you look like?

Wellhung: I’m 6’3” and about 250 pounds. I wear glasses and I have on a pair of blue sweat pants I just bought from Primark. I’m also wearing a T-shirt with a few spots of barbecue sauce on it from

dinner ... it smells funny.

Sweetheart: I want you. Would you like to screw me?

Wellhung: OK.

Sweetheart: We're in my bedroom. There's soft music playing on the stereo and candles on my dresser and night table. I'm looking up into your eyes, smiling. My hand works its way down to your crotch and begins to fondle your huge, swelling bulge.

Wellhung: I'm gulping, I'm beginning to sweat.

Sweetheart: I'm pulling up your shirt and kissing your chest.

Wellhung: Now I'm unbuttoning your blouse. My hands are trembling.

Sweetheart: I'm moaning softly.

Wellhung: I'm taking hold of your blouse and sliding it off slowly.

Sweetheart: I'm throwing my head back in pleasure. The cool silk slides off my warm skin. I'm rubbing your bulge faster, pulling and rubbing.

Wellhung: My hand suddenly jerks spastically and accidentally rips a hole in your blouse. I'm sorry.

Sweetheart: That's OK, it wasn't really too expensive.

Wellhung: I'll pay for it.

Sweetheart: Don't worry about it. I'm wearing a lacy black bra. My soft breasts are rising and falling as I breathe harder and harder.

Wellhung: I'm fumbling with the clasp on your bra. I think it's stuck. Do you have any scissors?

Sweetheart: I take your hand and kiss it softly. I'm reaching back undoing the clasp. The bra slides off my body. The air caresses my breasts. My nipples are erect for you.

Wellhung: How did you do that? I'm picking up the bra and inspecting the clasp.

Sweetheart: I'm arching my back. Oh, baby. I just want to feel your tongue all over me.

Wellhung: I'm dropping the bra. Now I'm licking your, you know, breasts. They're neat!

Sweetheart: I'm running my fingers through your hair. Now I'm nibbling your ear.

Wellhung: I suddenly sneeze. Your breasts are covered with spit and phlegm.

Sweetheart: What?

Wellhung: I'm so sorry. Really.

Sweetheart: I'm wiping your phlegm off my breasts with the remains of my blouse.

Wellhung: I'm taking the sopping wet blouse from you. I drop it with a plop.

Sweetheart: OK. I'm pulling your sweat pants down and rubbing your hard tool.

Wellhung: I'm screaming like a woman. Your hands are cold! Yeeee!

Sweetheart: I'm pulling up my miniskirt. Take off my panties.

Wellhung: I'm pulling off your panties. My tongue is going all over, in and out nibbling on you ... umm ... wait a minute.

Sweetheart: What's the matter?

Wellhung: I've got a pubic hair caught in my throat. I'm choking.

Sweetheart: Are you OK?

Wellhung: I'm having a coughing fit. I'm turning all red.

Sweetheart: Can I help?

Wellhung: I'm running to the kitchen, choking wildly. I'm fumbling through the cabinets, looking for a cup. Where do you keep your cups?

Sweetheart: In the cabinet to the right of the sink.

Wellhung: I'm drinking a cup of water. There, that's better.

Sweetheart: Come back to me, lover.

Wellhung: I'm washing the cup now.

Sweetheart: I'm on the bed arching for you.

Wellhung: I'm drying the cup. Now I'm putting it back in the cabinet. And now I'm walking back to the bedroom. Wait, it's dark, I'm lost. Where's the bedroom?

Sweetheart: Last door on the left at the end of the hall.

Wellhung: I found it.

Sweetheart: I'm tuggin' off your pants. I'm moaning. I want you so badly.

Wellhung: Me too.

Sweetheart: Your pants are off. I kiss you passionately – our naked bodies pressing against each other.

Wellhung: Your face is pushing my glasses into my face. It hurts.

Sweetheart: Why don't you take off your glasses?

Wellhung: OK, but I can't see very well without them. I place the glasses on the night table.

Sweetheart: I'm bending over the bed. Give it to me, baby!

Wellhung: I have to pee. I'm fumbling my way blindly across the room and towards the bathroom.

Sweetheart: Hurry back, lover.

Wellhung: I find the bathroom and it's dark. I'm feeling around for the toilet. I lift the lid.

Sweetheart: I'm waiting eagerly for your return.

Wellhung: I'm done going. I'm feeling around for the flush handle, but I can't find it. Uh-oh!

Sweetheart: What's the matter now?

Wellhung: I've realised that I've peed into your laundry hamper. Sorry again. I'm walking back to the bedroom now, blindly feeling my way.

Sweetheart: Mmm, yes. Come on.

Wellhung: OK, now I'm going to put my ... you know ... thing ... in your ... you know ... woman's thing.

Sweetheart: Yes! Do it, baby! Do it!

Wellhung: I'm touching your smooth butt. It feels so nice. I kiss your neck. Umm, I'm having a little trouble here.

Sweetheart: I'm moving my ass back and forth, moaning. I can't stand it another second! Slide in! Screw me now!

Wellhung: I'm flaccid.

Sweetheart: What?

Wellhung: I'm limp. I can't sustain an erection.

Sweetheart: I'm standing up and turning around; an incredulous look on my face.

Wellhung: I'm shrugging with a sad look on my face, my weiner all floppy. I'm going to get my glasses and see what's wrong.

Sweetheart: No, never mind. I'm getting dressed. I'm putting on my underwear. Now I'm putting on my wet, nasty blouse.

Wellhung: No wait! Now I'm squinting, trying to find the night table. I'm feeling along the dresser, knocking over cans of hairspray, picture frames and your candles.

Sweetheart: I'm buttoning my blouse. Now I'm putting on my shoes.

Wellhung: I've found my glasses. I'm putting them on. My God! One of our candles fell on the curtain. The curtain is on fire! I'm pointing at it, a shocked look on my face.

Sweetheart: Go to hell. I'm logging off, you loser!

Wellhung: Now the carpet is on fire! Oh noooo!

Sweetheart: <logged off>

If your laptop or PC doesn't have a webcam built in, then I suggest you get yourself one. The same goes for a microphone and speakers, although some people use headphones. This still makes me smile as seeing someone wearing cans and a microphone left me feeling that I was talking to a cold-calling sales-woman.

I have used webcam to talk to many people, although it did scare me at first. I'm still scared of telephones, so this is understandable. I now use webcam on a regular basis when I am away from Louise, so I must be over my fear.

Sex on webcam still sounds strange to me, but it is more than possible and fun. Don't think that all ladies immediately want cam sex when a request is sent to talk live, so don't sit there naked – it could be quite a shock to the caller. I have been told that some men do actually wait naked online, but surely this is a gamble. After all, I found out my cousin was a member of the same dating site as me, and so was my neighbour. I tremble at the thought. Some men get turned on by playing with themselves while a lady watches and will soon get round to asking once a conversation has started. I know of one lady who asked, when the man had finished, "Was that it, then?" I'm sure that remark deflated his ego and more.

Whatever your kink and whatever pushes your buttons, sex on cam is as close as you can get without actually touching, unless you are sitting at the opposite ends of a room for whatever reason, but here we are back to kinks and button pushing.

It is a safe way to have fun with someone who is like-minded and possibly the best way to relieve sexual tension when apart. Web sex isn't only reserved for couples, and many, many adults use this medium for simple sexual fun. It hurts no-one and couldn't be safer from a STD point of view – unless you forget to clean your laptop on a regular basis.

A recent programme looked into the subject and found that web sex is becoming more and more popular. There are even sites that are dedicated to this, although they probably didn't start out like that and probably had social networking in mind rather than sexual.

In a recent survey (2011):

“53% of those asked admitted to cam sex. 1 in 3 with strangers.”

This is a surprisingly high percentage and proves that things are changing with the times. There is certainly nothing wrong with two adults having online sexual fun. I have been told by ladies that dating sites have a high number of men who are only there for cam sex. That is fine, as it makes people who are genuine about a relationship stand out all the more – in a good way. Of course there is nothing wrong with a bit of fun along the way with like-minded ladies. Living on your own helps of course, as web sex usually involves complete nudity. I would at least invest in a lock for your door if you don't live on your own.

Electronic sex is a sign of our times and is common on dating sites. In my opinion there is nothing wrong with it, although it will obviously never replicate the closeness of two people together. How

can it?

I decided to go online and see what other people were saying. I came across a forum on the subject, where they stated everything from “fallen women” to “lost morals” to “disgusting”. There was no mention of men, and this wasn’t a religious site. It is very difficult to hurt anyone when on cam and you would have to be amazingly unlucky to get an STD. It’s a safe and fun way of having a sexual experience with someone without the need to leave home.

Don’t go rushing into a dating site and run around offering any kind of sex as you will get yourself kicked off pretty quick, but don’t be surprised if while talking live it gets mentioned.

Once again I will leave the rest to your capable self and your own imagination. If you need a guide for the rest, then email me and I will write you a personal one, free of charge :) I hope this never happens.

Sex and the sights

I'm sorry, but if you thought this part of the book was going to read like "confessions of a dating-site addict" then I am going to have to disappoint you. Maybe that could be the follow-up book, but for now I'm going to keep my cards close to my chest. I like using examples and drop them in when I think they help, but there will not be many here. What's the point? I met so and so, we went to so and so, and we spent all night doing...? It would get boring or read like a tacky novel. The using of real stories when things didn't go according to plan is far more instructive and acts as a good example. The real story about how I met Miss K, we had dinner, kissed and went home is hardly going to keep you turning pages. The meets I had and where things led will stay with me and the ladies involved for now, but be sure to look out for a follow-up book. It will probably be the most sued offering of the year. Now that would be a claim to fame.

In my experience, flirting always started when using IM or a site's chat facility. I have said before that things would be written that could be construed as sexual or flirting and at first I would be too worried to immediately believe it was the latter. As I started to compile the book I took more chances and found that if something was written and could be read two ways, then it was usually on purpose. A simple "Are you flirting with me?" or "Are you sure you wanted to say that? lol" would usually clear things up. The use of lol here would keep things light, and if the answer was "No, I'm not", then a simple "lol, just checking" was enough to get the chat back to where it started. If the flirt is intentional, then things can progress very quickly or slowly depending on the person. Both are fine. If flirting then continues day after day and if txt sex has started, then things really are moving towards the possibility of a meet for casual sex or a sexual relationship if both parties are willing.

Below is a typical chat/txt sex conversation. It starts off as any normal everyday chat and eventually turns itself around into something different. It becomes quite full-on, but it is typical in my experience of the use of a chat facility for sex of a sort. It always varies and can consist of whatever you or the lady wishes. I think it's a good example and shows how quickly a normal chat can take a turn into something more serious but fun. The flirting throughout is obvious and the outcome, inevitable. It is a long piece, but I left it unedited to show the decline in grammar and spelling and the questions and answers that can come up. I have found it is always best if you can answer quickly and keep things light. If an answer takes time then you can always blame your internet connection or computer. Using a chat facility is far better than txt sex as it is instantaneous and somehow closer, although it's not as good as webcam, but you have to start somewhere. To have moved from shopping to flu to flirting to sex is simply amazing, but it often happens whatever the subject. Not always to this degree at first, as this is an example of two people who have been chatting a few times already:

Miss O says: *evening*

Mr says: *How are you this fine sunny sunday evening?*

Miss O says: *yeah ok just done the housework*

Mr says: *yuk, Ive just done the shopping.*

Miss O says: *oh i have mine delivered i hate shopping unless its for clothes lol*

Mr says: *I usually like all shopping (i really need to get a life lol) but i love clothes shopping. I have man flu which is very dangerous so it wasnt much fun today lol*

Miss O says: *NOT THE DREADED MAN FLU*

Mr says: *lol. yes, the worst kind. the kind where i moan loudly every now and then. Now theres nothing wrong with moaning but not this kind. Thank you I will take it easy. I need someone to plump my pillows or i need to plump.....better not lol.*

Miss O says: *pmsl you need parrotseatmall (say it fast)*

Mr says: *lol. I need a nurse lol*

Miss O says: *i know a good one*

Mr says: *is she really good?*

Miss O says: *yep*

Mr says: *will she make me feel a lot better?*

Miss O says: *oh im sure she would try*

Mr says: *would she take my mind off the flu and wear the uniform?*

Miss O says: *aww she only wears scrubs but she's sure she could find a uniform*

Mr says: *lol, thats cool. I dont mind scrubs though although might remind me of theatre.... never know though could be fun lol*

Miss O says: *pmsl she thinks she is there to nurse not for dirty old men to drool over*

Mr says: *lol. Oi, less of the old. the rest is true and i cant argue lol*

Miss O says: *but then again they dont know what she wears underneath the scrubs*

Mr says: *im drooling. i would love to find out*

Miss O says: *pmsl perv lol*

Mr says: *yep. cant argue with that one either. taken years of practise lol. I even have my perv medal. lol*

Miss O says: *do you now. Sounds good*

Mr says: *and wear it with pride on national perv day (indoors of course lol)*

Miss O says: *oh what day is that?*

Mr says: *every day lol*

Miss O says: *i knew you where gonna say that*

Mr says: *it was the only answer. see i must be ill, im becoming predictable nooooooooooooo!*

Miss O says: *pmsl well sign of old age*

Mr says: *with all these ailments i feel it. soooo old. poor me.*

Miss O says: *well thats it no hope for you now man flu and old age lol. oh yeah and a perv pmsl forgot that for a min*

Mr says: *well thats it I have to end it all. now wheres that lemsip?*

Miss O says: *pmsl, that dont do anything*

Mr says: *It might but im not well enough to boil the kettle more than once lol*

Miss O says: *awwww poor baby*

Mr says: *thats more like it lol. now im feeling like im being looked after lol*

Miss O says: *nurses have no sympathy for man flu sorry*

Mr says: *but but but but you said ... oh well I'll have to speak to my mummy lol. just spilt lemsip into my lap. does that count in getting sympathy?*

Miss O says: *pmsl now thats diff. thats a burn*

Mr says: *hurray. whats the treatment? lol*

Miss O says: *ok take you trousers off*

Mr says: *already done lol. im naked already lol*

Miss O says: *and put whatever got burned under tepid water*

Mr says: *i have a water bottle here could i put whatever got burned into that?*

Miss O says: *and if really bad put clingfilm around it*

Mr says: *would a condom do or does it have to be clingfilm?*

Miss O says: *then get to your local a&e lol*

Mr says: *so i need to put my cock into a water bottle with a condom on it and walk to a&e. Ok, in for a penny lol*

Miss O says: *well sort of yeah pmsl*

Mr says: *I'll tell them i got online help*

Miss O says: *condom isnt the same as clingfilm pmsl*

Mr says: *i'll use both lol. just in case*

Miss O says: *no just the clingfilm*

Mr says: *a bit late now*

Miss O says: *or you could get an infection. oh well its gonna rot soon and drop off lol*

Mr says: *already have loads of them. might get them checked out while im there but the scalding*

water seems to have helped lol and the water bottle actually feels quite nice mmmmm

Miss O says: lol believe me ive seen infections there and you really dont want it

Mr says: no i do not. as you say yuk. Just need to have a few moments with this water bottle. lol

Miss O says: pmsl what you gonna do the the water bottle

Mr says: never knew tepid water could feel so good

Miss O says: perv

Mr says: lol thats me and thats better. so where were we lol

Miss O says: ummm you where saying how lovely i am pmsl

Mr says: you are and you do have wonderful hair. nice tat as well x

Miss O says: got 3

Mr says: one on you back, one on your breast and one on you leg.

Miss O says: no

Mr says: the three B's

Miss O says: lol

Mr says: whats on your bum lol

Miss O says: scorpion

Mr says: not interseted in your back lol lol

Miss O says: pmsl

Mr says: only joking. whats on your back

Miss O says: butterfly

Miss O says: same as my boob

Mr says: now thats a nice boob. tat isnt bad either.

Miss O says: pmsl do i look big? and I'm not talking about my boobs. well them as well

Mr says: sorry brb telephone

Miss O says: no your not. fancy calling me a telephone lol

Mr says: lol sorry bout that. now where were we.

Miss O says: dont ive lost the plot now

Mr says: no you dont look big but you do look tall. I believe you have a very nice shape. and i beleive you have great tits lol and could suck the chrome off a tail pipe.

Miss O says: *tall? do i? I'm only 4ft and one of the rolly pollys*

Mr says: *lol. now i know you're fibbing.*

Miss O says: *pmsl*

Mr says: *why only the one pic?*

Miss O says: *well because its me that normally takes the photos lol ive really not got many of me*

Mr says: *I know the feeling. I could pop over and take some for you but you might not be able to put them on here lol*

Miss O says: *pmsl*

Mr says: *but they would make me feel a lot better.*

Miss O says: *when you say feel what do you mean pmsl*

Mr says: *lol, i think thats a bit obvious lol very very good lol*

Miss O says: *lol*

Mr says: *its a bit hard to follow that and dont you dare say "what do you mean by hard" lol*

Miss O says: *ok i wont but what do you mean by dare. pmsl*

Mr says: *lol. How can i answer that. I do like dare though and hard lol*

Miss O says: *Pmsl so do I*

Mr says: *I'm just off to make a cuppa and to calm myself down a bit. would you like one? i can hear you thinking lol*

Miss O says: *yes leave teabag in*

Mr says: *you like it left in? Ok, I can do that.*

Miss O says: *pmsl yes please*

Mr says: *do you like a splash or loads of milk?*

Miss O says: *the right amount*

Mr says: *lol ... and can i give you some sugar?*

Miss O says: *Lots of sugar sounds goood*

Mr says: *so, lets forget the tea and get back to the dare and hard bit.*

Miss O says: *ok so what do you dare me*

Mr says: *well that depends on how far you want me to go*

Miss O says: *ask me anything at all and i will answer*

Mr says: *Ok then ... anything?*

Miss O says: *anything ;)*

Mr says: *do you have a sex toy?*

Miss O says: *thats to easy. Yes.*

Mr says: *your turn*

Miss O says: *are u horny*

Mr says: *very very. What kind of sex toy?*

Miss O says: *mmmm a rabbit. Glad to hear youre horny*

Mr says: *is it near by?*

Miss O says: *hold on. My turn and yes it is very near. Very very near. Are you clothes*

Mr says: *I am but i don't have to be. I dare you to get your vibrator.*

Miss O says: *I have it already lol. girls best friend. Dare you to get your clothes off*

Mr says: *ok. I can do that. And i have. Can you get naked.*

Miss O says: *no but i can take off my knickers and I have a short skirt on. I can take off my tshirt as well. Done ;)*

The rest as some people say is history. I really do not believe you need to read the rest. It would be of no use and gets very graphic and explores some pretty wild things. It is also personal and some things are best kept that way. I hope your imagination can fill in the rest and I also hope that you will soon be exploring cybersex yourself. Don't forget the tissues.

Miss O says: *That was fun. I really enjoyed that mmmmmmm*

Mr says: *me too. Do you have a cam?*

Miss O says: *no but now i really want one. Would you cyber with me*

Mr says: *of course anytimne you wish as long as i don't have company lol*

Miss O says: *pmsl. Cam would be lovely and then maybe a meet/ date. Adrink mybe*

Mr says: *a drink of what lol. that would be good. I need to go as ive got to make some calls. Sorry*

Miss O says: *i need to get on as well. Workj soon grrrrrrrrrr*

Mr says: *are you around later?*

Miss O says: *no working late but will b in morning.*

Mr says: *ok then I'll look out for you. Have fun and keep smiling.*

Miss O says: *after that im going to be smiling all nihgt lol*

Mr says: *lol im glad. Speak soon*

Miss O says: *Will do xxxx*

Mr says: *xxxx*

I found it funny how some ladies can use a vibrator, play with themselves and type at the same time. They are obviously of the eight-armed variety and prove the male/female multi-tasking debate. I'm afraid us men lose on that one.

It's worth noticing the use of "lol" after a lot of sentences takes away any misunderstanding, embarrassment and to keep things light. Not that things stayed light for long. The spelling became almost unreadable, but that is understandable and more than acceptable. The gist was there and both parties were well understood. I have found that by following what the lady wants to hear is a good idea, can ensure a repeat experience and help to move things along to another level, like webcam as this conversation did. It does seem odd typing about someone's fantasy if in your eyes it's an odd one. At least it's easy as you don't have to keep a straight face when typing. Good luck on webcam though. These encounters are harmless and do not mean that there will be no relationship at the end. If you click while chatting, on cam or in bed, then there's no reason why romance shouldn't follow. If there is a sexual attraction and you get on, then why waste a good connection. Sex is important in most relationships, although not all, but for my partner and me it is very important. We have a wonderful sex life which is diverse, experimental and very frequent (not regular). It ranges from the loving to the lustful, and we are not averse to trying new things (as long as it doesn't involve horse cum). For us, the sexual side of our relationship is very important and we use this as a way to show our love for each other, as well as by conventional methods. There is no reason why a relationship shouldn't work in reverse and the romance, nights out, etc. can come after an initial sexual experience. I nearly wrote bed instead of sex but that would have been wrong. If you believe that sex should be reserved for bed, then maybe finding an intimate encounter online isn't for you. Not everyone believes that being indoors and in bed is the only place for sex. Trust me on this one. To meet someone for an encounter is both nerve-wracking and high pressure, but also a lot of fun if both parties connect. There is no real reason why you shouldn't connect, as you should both have some knowledge of each other from chatting online. To turn up at an encounter without any knowledge of the person you're meeting could be dangerous. Imagine being asked if it's all right if she ties you to the bed and you agree, only to find that once you are bound and gagged she phones her husband to "come over and join in", or worse – the local rugby club. Secretly this could be a fantasy of yours, but the chances of that are pretty slim. Take time to know who you are meeting and look for any discrepancies in what they say. Remember, not everyone is honest, and the thought of a husband or boyfriend walking in scares the life out of me. I would recommend never going on a sexual encounter without knowing something about the lady you are meeting. It's way too dangerous.

I would never have the nerve to say that every lady who is a member of a dating site is open to a sexual encounter. This most certainly isn't the case and I do not wish to wake up one morning to find my inbox full of messages from angry ladies. Neither am I saying that all men are open to, or join only, because of sex. But there is that option if you so wish. Many only join to find a partner or friends, and although I am sure that sex does occupy their minds some of the time, they would never consider just meeting someone for a night of passion or NSA. There are a lot of profiles that either start or finish with the words: "I am not here for a one-night stand, NSA, cybersex, webcam fun or dirty talk." Some say the same thing but a lot stronger:

Would all those that are messaging me for nsa please fck off and grow up. Maybe you cud grow some balls and at least get 2 know who i am 1st.

Unlike alot of men on here i am not after a fb or a good time. I do have some selfrespect so if you are here for that then jog on

Boring boring boring boring. If i wanted a cock then id buy a chicken. IAM NOT HERE FOR DIRTY MESSAGES OR SO YOU CAN KNOCK ONE OUT ON CAM!!!!!!

******PLEASE NOTE**** I am not looking for a one night stand or a ‘f’ Buddy. If that’s your interest, fine, but do not mail me!**

You cannot get clearer than that, can you? Although these ladies all say more or less the same thing, it doesn’t mean that they wouldn’t want txt sex, webcam, etc. given the right person. A lot of ladies get continuous messages from men looking for “fuck buddies” or “fun” and I am sure it gets boring and tedious after awhile.

From a survey (2011):

“One in ten people have met a stranger for sex after chatting online.”

What a statistic! When I read this, I was quite simply amazed. I thought it would be much higher ... only joking. It is a very high percentage, and this was asked of the general public. What would the percentage be if they were to ask dating-site members only? That statistic I would love to know.

Dating sites are supposedly renowned for being sex sites. They are not, but they can be if you want them to be. As I said earlier, you can change your search results to show only people who are looking for an intimate encounter or NSA. This isn’t difficult to do, and the results can be quite shocking but a lot of fun. There is absolutely no reason why two consenting adults should not meet for a night of sex. I have spoken to ladies who have divulged their wildest fantasies to me and wanted to act them out. Some were so shocking that, even though I thought I had heard everything, they still managed to astonish me. One left me wondering where one would procure a barrel of horse cum and a wetsuit. I really am not joking and I really did run a mile. I love my wetsuit way too much. I got to hear everything from al fresco to public, from dominant to submissive, from bondage to whipping, etc. One lady asked me if I had a fireman’s uniform, but the thought of hiring one and taking it back to the shop without a dry-clean first left me worried. The list is endless, very varied and sometimes scary.

As I said earlier, a friend of mine described the sites as places “to use and abuse women”, but I soon realised that it worked both ways – it wasn’t only some men who were on the sites for sex. These ladies knew exactly what they wanted and were happy to use dating sites to get it. I had offers again and again, and eventually I was surprised at how easy it was to procure a meet if I wanted. There was little old me thinking that picking and choosing was a luxury for women only. I will say at this point that not all ladies want to meet for sex, and unless it is discussed first, then you are in fact probably only going on a date. Turning up and throwing a packet of condoms on the table is probably not a good idea, and having a barrel of horse cum in the boot of your car is going to take a lot of explaining if the police stop you. Good luck if you are off on an encounter with this lady. Your hotel cleaning bill is going to be huge.

In the end my mobile phone was so full of ladies’ numbers that I could have sold it to any one of my

friends for a lot of money. My answer to them was “join a dating site” and I kept my phone. It will be up for auction on eBay soon though, so watch out!

The following are real profiles taken from a couple of dating sites. These are not sex-only sites, but the results came up just by changing my search criteria:

i am not looking to rock anyones boat neither do i want my boat rocked, thanks! just want some nsa fun. im of good intelligence and enjoy banter. im most definitely a bbw with plenty of parts that wobble!

Firstly I am a married woman who is a little bored with life but with no intention of ending my marriage so I am only looking for discreet fun. My hobbies include girly nights out, my dogs, going to the bingo lol and I love football matches. I like most types of music but I prefer words that mean something. NO UNDER 35's PLEASE

looking for no strings fun like to be in charge if you get my drift lol

The days go by and the more horny I get. I know that I'm really not supposed to peak until 40 or so but DAMN I'm horny now, and I don't how much more intense it could get. I need a man and I NEED him now!!! No jokes here...Not looking for anything really more than a purely lustful relationship. I have had too many commitments in my life that have gone bad so I'm just after no strings fun asap. Get in touch if you wanna know more? x

Not looking for anything serious at the moment, just some good, steamy, Animalistic sex to release the pressure. No missionary please...Also, my old school mate told me about the joys of knotty fun. Could anyone help?

Im a lively attractive female in a happy and healthy relationship ...we are looking for a STRAIGHT MALE to join us for fun and adventure!!OBVIOUSLY THERE ARE BOUNDRIES THAT NEED TO BE RESPECTED AND DISCUSSED.Also if you watch too much porn and are sexed up (it doesnt mean you got a high sex drive)so its not a case of everything goes so you may as well jog on now.

we dont cam or any cyber stuff...we really dont need quick fixes as we are very sexually active. also please after viewing my pics dont ask if you can just do me, it aint happening im offering a 3 sum or you can watch but my partner will be involved at all times.

i'm a preop transexual living in london. i have a partner and live together but i've found that there's sth missing in life. i'm looking for some casual fun. give me a shout if you're interested!!!

i like aerobics , chocolate, sex

i am a submissive blond nurse in south west i love to serve big muscled strong powerful dominant bodybuilding powerlifting strong man types the bigger stronger more muscled n dominant a man is the hotter i am to serve him.

I was quite enjoying reading those, but I have to stop somewhere. They are just a few examples of what can be found on dating sites apart from the usual relationship, friendship, etc. I suppose in a loose way they are also relationships, just of a different sort.

There are others who are actually looking for a relationship but also some fun along the way. It takes

a lot of nerve (or insanity) for a lady to put up a profile that says she is only looking for a sexual encounter, and many would never dream of doing so. Some hide behind the fact their profile says they are looking for a relationship, when in fact they have only joined for a sexual encounter, or many. It can come as a surprise when someone you have been talking to for a while suddenly offers a night of passion, but it does happen.

I had started chatting to Miss F after she first messaged me to compliment me on my profile. We soon found out we had a lot in common as we both loved driving and were both on the road a lot. We would talk live sometimes and swap driving stories or just talk about our hobbies. We got on very well, but there was never any mention of sex. We talked often about meeting but never seemed to be free at the same time. The distance wasn't great, but her lifestyle as a driver meant she got very little time off and when she did it was usually spent with family. We continued to chat sometimes and catch up when we could and became friends. For once I was happy not to meet as our friendship grew stronger over the following months by text and chat alone. As I spend a lot of time on the road and so did Miss F, it was great to be able to text her for traffic updates and to see how she was. I was really happy that for once there was no real pressure and that I had another friend out on the road. It was so nice to be able to relate to someone about how tiring and scary long-distance driving can be at times.

I came home one day after a long haul to find an email from Miss F waiting for me. It was simple and to the point. It had her address at the top and under that were the words: "You have waited for so long and been so patient, I'm free this weekend and you now have my address. Come on over and lets have some bed time together." Now, I have never been one to shirk my responsibilities, but I actually felt disappointed and let down. Miss F was by no means unattractive, but for me it just didn't seem right. I didn't want to go, and so I didn't. Contact slowly stopped and things ran down slowly. I never meant to reject Miss F or hurt her, but I thought we had something different. It had been nice that for once there had been no flirting or mention of sex at all, as there eventually is with most ladies. For once I thought I had found someone who just wanted a friend, and that was how I saw Miss F.

It may sound strange to you that I didn't jump in my car and go flying over, but Miss F made a pleasant change for me and with her there was no pressure. I did of course have friends on the sites and I still catch up with them sometimes, but as I had a lot in common with Miss F, what we had to me was nice. In some respects this proves that an encounter can happen even if you are not trying.

The Sexuality Research and Social Policy recently published an article about the sexual tendencies of women who date online.

According to the stats a staggering one-third of women in the US have sex with a person they met online on the first date. The US study, which surveyed 568 women, also found 27 per cent of respondents performed oral sex on the first date.

It might be worth looking into overseas dating after all, or at least an online dating trip to America – a kind of funky busman's holiday. I would love to know the equivalent UK stats.

There is no doubt that a lot of sexual meetings go on outside of the sites, and I found this quite a shock at first but soon got used to it. As I have said before, I lived in a little naive bubble. Nearly every person that I ever talked to would eventually mention sex, and I even began to time the online chat to see how quickly the subject would come up. Two minutes is the quickest, and the longest was Miss F. Of course, not every lady would want to talk about anything other than dating, etc., but a lot would

eventually get round to the subject of sex or start flirting. I found this to be true of every age group and every type of lady imaginable, although professional ladies seemed to be top of the list. Be it pressure of work or long hours that fuelled their fire, I don't know, but they knew exactly what they wanted and would be more than willing to travel to get it. It is with these ladies that I found a good use of English and an ability to be able to write a good reply a must. They were obviously not looking for a break-dancing, street-talking roughneck but someone who could at least hold a conversation in public and know which way up to hold the menu.

I found that many professional ladies never had time for what society calls "a normal relationship". Like ladies with young children, they spent many long hours in the employ of others or employing others, and when away from their work they would want to play hard. The pressure of work and the fact they were tied to their job for days on end left them very little chance of meeting someone except in the workplace, and as anyone that has had a partner that they work with will testify, it's not an easy situation. Usually being technically minded and conversant with computers, a lot of professional women join dating sites either for a relationship, company or quite simply sex.

The latter is common. Dating sites give them the ability to stay anonymous and arrange weekends away with someone, usually in a hotel. I talked with many professional ladies who would never, ever divulge where they worked and were possibly using a pseudonym. Their reasons for staying anonymous are obvious and understandable. I knew one lady who worked as a PA for someone very famous and another who was management for a very popular high street bank (if a bank can be popular?) These ladies would regularly spend weekends away with someone they had met on the sites with one purpose in mind, sex. They told me it was a great way to satisfy their sexual needs without getting into a conventional relationship. Simply put, it's a great way to let off steam and then return to their high-pressure lifestyle afterwards. All they want is a weekend of pure unadulterated sex with no strings attached. Just what the psychologist ordered. This type of meeting is by no means always a one off, and I am not saying they will meet a different man every time. If you can last out the weekend and are fun and imaginative, then there's a good chance that when they have time off again it will be you that they want to spend it with.

The lonely housewife or single mum was another type of lady who was to surprise me, but as I think about it now, "Why not?"

Once again they work hard, but loneliness and missing adult company can draw them not only into the need for a relationship but also (for some) the need for a sexual encounter. We all have needs, and anyone who tells me that it's only men will find themselves in a long and heated debate.

I was a full-time father for many years. I loved every minute and wouldn't have changed anything as I was very happy. The pre-playgroup days were very hard sometimes. With the ex out and about doing whatever it was the ex did, it was just my daughter and me nearly all day, every day. Although I enjoyed every second, I would often find myself missing adult company and conversation. I knew my friends were up to no good every weekend, and at times I would miss them a great deal. There is only so much Teletubbies a man can take. For me it was very rewarding, but the need to have time off for bad behaviour was overwhelming sometimes. I wish I knew then what I know now, and regardless of my then wife, I would have joined a dating site looking for friends. The upside to all this of course was the day I walked into playgroup and found myself surrounded by a lot of women. Being the only man, playgroup became my saviour. After almost two years of my daughter, myself, CBeebies and a

lot of playparks, I had finally found adult company, and by then I really needed it.

I was to talk to a lot of single mums, as I wanted to meet someone with children, and if you believe these ladies are boring and only “housewives”, then think again. If you think about it, these are ladies who remember what it was like to party hard and are more than willing to party hard again. They have a world of knowledge and in my opinion would eat most of us alive. If you think you are good in the bedroom, then you might be in for a shock. A few years of pent-up sexual tension released all in one go could leave you crawling for the door, or worse – in traction. It’s up to you, but if you find yourself tied to a bed, then be careful as these ladies seem to have an array of sex toys that could blow your mind (or any other body-part for that matter), and they are not scared to use them.

Then there were nurses and shop assistants and models and fitness instructors and and and and ... you get the idea.

Fuck buddy

When I was a young man, my first job was in the alcohol-fuelled world of Audio/Visual Advertising. It was a strange world that allowed me to meet people from every walk of life: from the everyday Joe and Joanne to the bizarre. I was to discover that most of the people I worked with were gay and that the world could be a strange place at times. I was very young and learnt a lot that would help me further on in life (apart from my career). I found myself in the world of gay clubs and sometimes the naughtier world of bondage clubs. Not once did I feel threatened, and not once did any person treat me with anything but respect and friendship. I made friends from everywhere, and unlike my friends outside of work, I had a wonderfully diverse and colourful life. I had discussions that would have turned my mum's hair grey and saw some sights that I will never forget. I learnt that not everyone follows the same path, but this doesn't make them different or strange (as some of the older generation tend to believe). I am heterosexual, but that didn't mean I couldn't have gay friends or go out with them at night. I must admit that, in a female gay bar one night, I did have to leave by the back door after beating the local champion at pool. I'm rubbish at pool and it was a total fluke. This was the only time I felt threatened. At the tender age of 18, I was certainly a busy lad about town and living my life to the full. It was wonderful. There was one thing that did shock me though, and that came in the form of our new receptionist. When our very camp roller-skating gay receptionist went off to tread (or roll) the footlights of a West End show, we needed someone to take his place, and that person came in the form of Miss J.

Miss J was a sight for any teenage eyes. She would leave all the young heterosexual staff standing with their jaws on the floor when she passed. The great thing about Miss J was that she was one of the loveliest people I had ever met. We soon became friends, but never anymore than that as she wasn't looking. Miss J didn't need the hassle of a conventional relationship as Miss J had a "fuck buddy". I remember sitting there naively as she relayed this information to me one evening at the pub. I had never in my life heard of anything like it before. It wasn't like an affair, as they were both single, but something completely different. She would come into work sometimes with an overnight bag that was usually full of underwear and sex toys, and once work had finished, off she would go for her night of fun. Miss J was way ahead of her time in my eyes. I know that these things existed before Miss J, but this was to be my introduction to the term "fuck buddy".

The "Urban Dictionary" says this about the FB:

A person who is not your boyfriend or girlfriend (or farmyard animal), with whom you have sexual relations on the mutual understanding that you both want sex and nothing more.

The expression "FB" is mentioned a lot on dating sites and in profiles. There are certain sites that commit to nothing more than finding an "FB" or a one-off sexual encounter, and the internet is full of them. As for their membership numbers, the percentage of men to women or the success rate, I cannot comment as I have never been a member. I found the regular sites enough to handle as it was. Don't get FB sites mixed up with the "affair sites", as there are a lot of them as well. If you want to run the risk of meeting a married woman or someone's girlfriend, then feel free to use "affair sites", but in my mind these sites are wrong and not needed. If you need to have sex outside of your relationship, then maybe you should take a long look at yourself and possibly talk to your partner, or even try being

single. Even better, find yourself a swinger or a partner who doesn't mind you playing away as long as she can as well. Do not get confused between the FB and an affair. They are two completely different things, and the latter in my opinion is a complete waste of time.

As it says above, an FB is someone you have no emotional ties to and you only meet each other with one thing in mind – and that's sex. The usual things such as birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries, future plans, marriage, etc. are never discussed. It can be a great way to experiment with different sexual kinks as you have no tie to the person and embarrassment is at a minimum. This can work, but believe it or not it takes two very special people to make it do so. The temptation to discuss the things in your life that are happening away from your meets is difficult to resist, and you can run the risk of becoming close to each other. If there are rules set down, then things can work. If you just run into a hotel or either of your houses, have a quickie without saying a word and then run out again, then discussion can be kept to a couple of groans and heavy breathing. It is very difficult to keep things on a sexual basis only, especially if you are spending days or nights together. The risk of one of the buddies becoming more than close is very high, and it can be very difficult and awkward if one of you is in love with the other, while in a relationship of this type. Believe me, it does happen, and that's the reason it takes two very special people to make it successful. There is no point in having an FB who you are not attracted to, as the experience wouldn't be a good one, so there will always be the risk of one of you falling for the other. Why have someone to share many wonderful sexual experiences with, who in reality is not, and never will be, your type? It's pointless.

So here lies the “catch 22” situation of the fuck buddy. For it to work, there can never be anything more than sex, because if it does become more than this, then it becomes a relationship. There is of course nothing wrong with this, and it's only old-fashioned rules that dictate how we should date. The other downside is that one person will eventually meet someone else. Where does this then leave the other person? Do you then carry on with your FB behind your new partner's back just to keep them both happy? You also run the risk of blackmail and, once again, trust me when I say this happens as well. The now defunct FB threatening to expose your every sexual kink to the world unless things carry on is not uncommon. The whole thing is a minefield.

If, however, the two responsible adults can keep their heads, then it can work. It can be a comfortable, fun way to have a sexual relationship that is satisfying without the need to meet the parents, or anyone else for that matter. If the meets are planned in advance, then it can leave both parties with something very exciting to look forward to. If there is no other contact (text, phone, etc.) apart from when and where to meet, then this can make it even more exciting and a very lustful time. It can be both primal and high adrenaline and can be built on from a “turn on” point of view over time. There could be things that you would not imagine telling a long-term partner but which can be explored with your FB. I am still of the belief that whatever your kink, it can be explored with a conventional partner, but the FB does take away any embarrassment you may have in telling someone you are going to be with long term. For a lot of men and ladies, having an FB fits perfectly within their busy lifestyle. In fact it complements it and helps them relieve the tension they build up at work or home. I can honestly say it beats sitting in front of porn on the internet with only a box of tissues for company.

There will never be flowers or presents, and unless you need to travel to see your FB, then there shouldn't even be any money spent (except on condoms, toys or hotels). You should never contact your FB to discuss your day or pour out your problems to her. Only ever call if it's to do with a

sexual meeting between you or phone sex.

Some do take it to extremes though:

SEX FRIEND CONTRACT / FUCK BUDDY CONTRACT

This Sex Friend Contract is entered into on the day of _____ 20____,
between _____ (hereafter referred to as PARTY A) and _____ (hereafter referred to as PARTY B).

Terms & Conditions

A sex session is hereafter referred to as IT. Best Effort is partaking in activities for as long as possible.

1. No sleeping over, unless IT is very good and PARTY A needs to repeat IT in the morning.
2. No meeting in public, except for dinner or drinks before IT, or when IT takes place in public.
3. No calls before _____ AM/PM.
4. PARTY A retains discretion on which fantasies are acted out.
5. This contract prohibits any emotional attachment. Refer clause 22.
6. No plans made in advance, that is why you are called the “back-up”.
7. This is not a mutually exclusive contract for PARTY A.
8. No baby talk; however, dirty talk is encouraged.
9. Any instructions/HOWTO’s given to PARTY B shall be remembered and practised.
10. No calling each other “friends with privileges”; we are not friends, just fuck buddies.
11. Procreation is not an option. Termination is the only course of action.
12. No extra clothing. I don’t want your ass leaving anything behind when you leave.
13. No falling asleep right after IT. It’s over; go home. See Clause 1.
14. Don’t be offended if I don’t ask if you enjoyed IT.
15. You cannot borrow my vehicle for any reason.
16. If anyone asks who you are, the standard response will be “my flatmate’s friend”.
17. Best Effort to accommodate all requests by PARTY A should be made by PARTY B.
18. Scheduling of IT is at the sole discretion of PARTY A, however PARTY B is welcome to make suggestions.
19. No condoms, no IT.
20. Bring your own alcohol. I am not your liquor store.
21. Documentation of PARTY B may be held for historical purposes by PARTY A.
22. Should PARTY A wish to terminate this contract, effect is immediate.
- 22a Should PARTY B wish to terminate this contract, 14 Days notice, or 6 ITs, whichever period is longer.

23. The aforementioned rules may only be altered by PARTY A.

23b. If PARTY B wishes to change or alter any terms of this Agreement, it is at the sole discretion of PARTY A

PARTY B's Signature _____ **Date** _____

PARTY A's Signature _____ **Date** _____

No matter how good liaisons are between yourself and your FB, you have to remember that both parties have the right to stop at any given time. Things can just finish and there doesn't even need to be a reason given. Maybe they have started dating or simply found another sexual partner. They don't owe you any explanation and can move on without ever letting you know why. All you can do is move on also and find another FB if you wish. This does of course work both ways, and you also have the right to move on whenever you want. I do suggest that if you decide to find another FB, then discuss this with your current FB and be honest about things. You might find that she has more than one FB herself and that the path is clear for you to do the same. You may even find that your old FB isn't averse to another, or even others, joining in. This is when things can become very interesting indeed, and a whole new world is opened. The offer of threesomes is not uncommon; it just depends on how comfortable you are with this. If you really do not have feelings other than sexual for your FB, then this should not be a problem. If, however, the thought of another man or woman joining in with your meetings brings up jealousy, then maybe you have more feelings for your FB than you first realised and you may need to rethink your situation.

Louise and I have discussed the possibility of threesomes many times. At first I thought it was a great idea and was all for it, as was Louise, but I noticed something that should have been obvious. I was OK with the thought of a threesome involving another woman, but the thought of another man left me cold. I could feel the green-eyed monster inside me rear his ugly head every time the subject was broached. This wasn't a small feeling, but a real "pit of the stomach" one. I thought things through and realised that my feelings were not misdirected as I was obviously in love with Louise. The man to me would be a threat whereas another lady would not be. There was the "What if it looked as though she was enjoying him more than me?" question that kept floating around my mind. I came to the conclusion that I needed to discuss this with Louise and so we did at some length. The result was simple, and we decided to put things on the back burner until we felt the time was right (if ever). There was still the question of another lady joining in, which I obviously felt at ease with, but would you believe I decided against it as I didn't believe it to be fair. I felt that it was double standards and that was that. We haven't completely dismissed the idea and maybe one day it will happen, but for now we are happy where we are and our sex life is hardly unexciting and non-existent. I am lucky enough to be able to discuss any subject with my partner and that's what makes us so close and happy. If you have been in relationships before where sex is never discussed and usually happens on a Saturday night, then having an FB should change that. It gives you the opportunity to discuss any sexual fantasies you may have and the opportunity to live them and explore them. If you are sexually compatible, then you should be in sex heaven. If you do find yourself in a situation that isn't comfortable, then discuss things and find something different that you both enjoy. It should be a

comfortable and fun journey of sexual discovery.

This whole sexual journey can of course be explored with a girlfriend or partner. Please remember, it's not only reserved for the FB.

There is always going to be something missing within a relationship of this type, but there is also something that is refreshing. There is never a need to explain your actions or say where you have been. You don't have the connection that most relationships have, and unless you have a meet, there will never be the phone call to the pub to see when you are coming home or to see how much you have had to drink. There will never be the need for explanations or the need to check if it's OK for you to spend the night blowing your wages at a strip club. You are quite simply free to go about your life as you normally would, but you need to remember that your FB has the same freedom as well. You have no hold over that person. You really need to remember that and not get angry or jealous if they are out every night painting the town the colour of their choice.

It is worth remembering that the world of the FB can be a promiscuous one and there is a need for safe sex. If you are both having sexual encounters away from your meets, then the need for condoms is even greater. We live in a world where STDs are commonplace and the need for safety is paramount – for yourself and all other people involved. If you are the kind of person who believes that condoms are rubbish and block sensation, then I believe you need to find yourself a steady partner and settle down. If you are going to explore a new sexual lifestyle, then get yourself suited and booted, unless you wish to be sitting in the STD clinic messaging your FB and any other people you have had sexual contact with, with some very bad news. It's just not worth it.

The FB should always be kept as someone you have sexual liaisons with and nothing more. If your FB suddenly says that she went to a work dinner and took a male friend, then do not be surprised, angry or jealous. To accompany someone on dinner dates, family gatherings or days out with friends is not the role of the FB. It is the role of the partner, friend or friend with benefits. Be thankful that you both complement each other in bed and that you share your intimate sexual secrets and moments together. To move from an FB to a “friend with benefits” is another category, and although just as much fun (even more sometimes), it can be just as difficult for those involved.

Friends with benefits (that's the sexual kind and not income-support etc.)

I find it amazing that people have a need to label things. Is this a new thing or have we always done it? Maybe we have got to an age where we are not comfortable unless something is pigeonholed. Who knows?

The FWB really does speak for itself. It's the same as the FB, but the two people involved are already friends. They sometimes have the same circle of friends, but no-one within that circle knows anything about the relationship.

The beauty of an FWB is that if you need a dinner date or someone to take to a friend's wedding, then why not them? After all, everyone knows that you are friends, so why not be seen together. It is also possible to talk about things outside of your friendship. With FBs the subject of conversation should be kept to sex, but with an FWB you can go onto any subject, even dating.

I now realise that in my past I have had a few FWBs myself, without even realising it. I am not talking about one-night stands where things usually went all wrong and you then had to face each other when

you were out with friends the next day, but the act of regular sex with someone without anyone else knowing. Maybe they did know and just giggled behind our backs and gossiped when we weren't around.

Miss K was a good friend and we had been within the same circle for years. We did everything together as a group and could all be found in the same pub in London every weekend. If anyone remembers the Pegasus in Green Lanes, then you may remember us. We were the noisy lot. There were some relationships within the group that were above board, and some are even together to this day. Miss K and I were forever flirting, but given what I said at the beginning of the book about my ability to read signals, nothing ever came of it. I thought it was just her being friendly, and I never imagined anything more would come of it. One night Miss K had to get home, and as it was late, I offered to give her a lift on my slightly old and knackered Lambretta. I took her home at a breathtaking and heart-stopping 18 mph, which was about my scooter's limit. We were soon outside her house chatting about the evening. Before I knew what was happening, we were in each other's arms and ended up in bed. Nothing was said afterwards, and there was no awkwardness between us. We said our goodbyes and I went back to our friends. I said nothing about this encounter to anyone and found the whole thing very exciting and slightly strange. It almost seemed as though it never happened. The next night we were at the same pub and once again Miss K asked for a lift home. The rest you can guess. Although our encounters became less frequent as it was becoming too obvious, the passion was always there. It was very exciting and we became more and more adventurous. We would sneak off when at a friend's house or at a party and have some fun together before going back and saying nothing. The glances we would share between ourselves were all knowing and a real turn-on.

Not once during this time did we talk about a relationship or of telling anyone else. Maybe Miss K mentioned it to friends, but I never did. It was our dirty little secret and it really was dirty. When out in public or with friends we would never go out of our way to sit together, and although we did have a few glancing touches, we never showed any affection apart from friendship. I can't be sure how long these liaisons lasted, but I know it was fun. However, all good things come to an end.

Miss K eventually came to the pub one night with a man she had met while at a scooter rally. They had fallen for each other then and there, and were now a couple. She came straight to me and introduced him and I could see in her eyes a question. It said, "Sorry, is this all right?" I took him by the hand and shook it. The new boyfriend and I went on to be good friends and often rode together, which was something I was happily doing with his girlfriend before he came along. There were often hints dropped by both myself and Miss K after she started her relationship, but we never had a sexual encounter again. There was no regret that she had moved on, as there was never any attraction apart from lust for either of us. And I got to save some petrol money as well. What we had was both basic and wonderful, and there were never any complications. When Miss K moved into a relationship, we simply stopped our encounters then and there. It was that easy.

The "Urban Dictionary" has these two entries about "Friends with benefits".

Two very good friends that share in sexual acts with each other with no emotional connection of the boyfriend/girlfriend label. Just engaging in the act of sex for fun.

A healthy, fun sexual relationship between two people..... Until one falls for the other and the friendship blows to pieces. And those two people find themselves worse off than they were

before.

The first description is perfect, and the second is very close to the truth. I know that the relationship I had with Miss K was, in the sense of what it was, perfect, but that is certainly not always the case. I have been told many times that friends with benefits do not always go to plan and, once again, either of you could fall in love. If, of course, both of you do, then there is no problem and you can both skip off into the sunset together. No matter how many discussions you have between yourselves at the outset and no matter how many rules you lay down, there is still the potential for one of you to fall for the other. It can be upsetting and soul-destroying for the person who has more than sexual feelings, knowing that their partner is only there for one thing. It is also dangerous when a boyfriend or girlfriend comes onto the scene and the sexual fun ends. I have been told of blackmail and continuous texts offering encounters outside of the new relationship by an old FWB who doesn't want to let go. If you have had an FB or an FWB and you find yourself with a new partner, then I believe the best policy is to come clean if you are getting any hassle at all. It's not worth risking a new relationship by keeping quiet about your past. If there's any chance that a recent FWB is going to relay any information to your new partner, then it's best to be open and honest. In my opinion, they are no longer a "friend with benefits" but a "foe without brains".

I have left many dating sites in the past at the request of someone I have started dating or been going to meet, and even though I knew this was the right thing to do, I found I had trouble doing so.

The first time I did this, I sat on my own that evening and remembered I had a television. I was amazed to find it was still talking to me. I remembered I was out of milk and had been for three days. The cat had moved in with the neighbours, and the dog had handed itself into Battersea Dogs Home claiming cruelty. I'm not going to mention the pile of bills under the letterbox or my severe loss of weight. I had become a dating-site addict. My excuse was, of course, something bizarre and along the lines of "well, it kept me busy". But if I had been honest with myself, I had become hooked. I had "profile withdrawal", and even though I vowed never to do so, I joined Facebook as a poor substitute: a strange sort of methadone dating-site substitute which didn't work.

It's very easy to become embroiled in the world of dating sites, but you did join to leave, and if you meet someone and you are going to start your relationship with honesty, then you will have to do just that. You will have to leave. It was tempting once to just hide my profile and carry on as a non-showing member, but I never did. The first time I closed all my accounts was when I started my first LDR and it felt very strange. The upside was that all the jobs I had been putting off were done within a week or so. It's very easy to let dating sites become a major part of your life. Be aware that if you are going to start talking to many ladies, then it is going to take up a lot of your free time. If you are serious about finding someone long term, then this is surely time well spent. Try not to make it your life as I did, however. Even though I was chair-bound and had little else to do, there was still a world going on around me. When I had been asked one too many times to put this book together and I decided to do it, I was given an excuse to be on the sites full time. What a wonderful world, I thought, but it soon started to drive me somewhat crazy. They can get you like that :) I was, of course, on my way to meeting the lady of my dreams, and I was compiling this book, but I also believe I was slowly losing my touch with reality. After all, I was online full time, and apart from a quick glance out the window every now and then, I was essentially living in front of a screen. I did have company though, and I did get out every now and then. Living online and on dating sites will eventually start to drive you insane. Remember my "Is anyone else on here losing their mind?" comment. It wasn't far from the truth.

A story or a warning

Miss Q found herself getting concerned about her sister, J. All J ever seemed to do these days was spend every waking moment on the computer. The sisters hardly ever seemed to talk any more. While they had once shared a close relationship, most of their conversations of late seemed to revolve around when the computer was going to be free for anybody else to use. And it would normally end in an argument, with J storming off and Miss Q being upset.

Then one day, Miss Q began to realise what it was that had J so hooked. While J had always been quiet and reserved, with not much of a social life, suddenly she was out every night. Or she was on the phone till the wee hours, when she was not at the computer, having whispered conversations. Miss Q accidentally chanced upon the computer when her sister had left the room in a hurry and the screen she was using was still active. It was a popular dating site. Normally, J was meticulous about leaving the screen blank whenever she finished. When Miss Q confronted her about it, J accused her of being jealous and not wanting her to have a good time.

What J did not realise was that Miss Q's concerns for her were legitimate ones. She and many like her, suffered from an addiction as real as substance abuse. And while the effects may not be as immediately devastating or life threatening, they are nonetheless long-lasting.

People like J who get addicted to cyberdating, soon become victims of it. It's one thing to enjoy meeting people through the internet, to flirt and chat with virtual strangers. But when it begins to consume one's life to the exclusion of everything else, it is a very real problem

What would be the harm in it, you might think? It seems totally harmless on the face of it. But it isn't so. Those who become addicted to internet dating have no idea of the damage they are doing to themselves and those around them. It becomes a drug that enters their system and they have little or no control over it. Just like a drug addict craves his next fix, they cannot wait till they can get on the computer and log in to another session of online dating.

Internet usage and dating cuts into their sleep and they will make do with little or no rest, just to engage in cyberdating.

They sign up with dating sites, actively seeking encounters with strangers to get acquainted with. When they get favourable replies, they start chatting with several people, sometimes simultaneously. They may or may not meet them, but carry on dating one or more people at a time on the internet. While they are doing so, they hide their profiles so that they are not available to anyone else.

By doing so, they use avoidance as a way of dealing with relationships. They simply withdraw and avoid dealing with problems which individuals in normal relationships encounter and face head-on. By using the internet as a means of dating, they hide themselves from reality and enjoy the anonymity that the internet affords.

It is a form of escapism, especially if they already feel that they have enough to deal with in the real world. Cyberdating affords them the luxury of retreating into a make-believe world where they can avoid facing the harsh realities, and possibly even pretend to be someone they're not.

If you find you are unable to have normal relationships and are relying on the internet exclusively for companionship and love, and as a substitute to having friends and relationships in the real world, you might be becoming addicted to it, and using it as an escape route.

If you are committed to getting out of this self-destruction, try and get out more and meet people. Involve yourself with pursuits that will discourage spending too much time on the computer. Spend time talking to family and friends and don't confine yourself to your room or cut yourself off from society. When you realise how much the real world has to offer, you will have the willpower to tear yourself away from the lure of the pretend world of cyberdating.

At least this means there is always someone online no matter what time you log in.

This is a true story and backs up what has been said before. It's easy to become addicted to dating sites and let them rule your life, but if you are getting out and meeting people and never did before, then surely this is a step forward. There has to be a balance, and it is easy to find if you are aware of the amount of time you spend online. I never have and still do not like TV, so I substituted Eastenders and other soaps for online dating. I wonder if there is a piece on the internet about soap-opera addiction?

If, like me, you think you have found someone and intend to leave the dating sites, then do not just close your account and go. If there are a lot of ladies you have been talking to over time, then sit back and take the time to write to them and explain why you are leaving. There is a good and selfish reason for this, as well as it being polite. I closed my account on one site at the insistence of a lady I had been talking to for a while. She decided it wouldn't work out between us three days later, and I had the dubious task of rejoining and explaining where I had disappeared to. Not easy, but I just told the truth as that was all I could do. This upset a lot of ladies as the idea I could just leave and not say anything felt wrong to them. They were right. When (once again) I was asked to close my account by someone I was dating, I did the polite thing and sent a message to every lady I was in contact with telling them why I was leaving. When the chosen lady turned out to be slightly short of mad, I just rejoined and a quick explanation of "It didn't work out" was enough. Why didn't I just hide my profile? Because I thought it would be wrong. What if I was about to date the lady of my dreams? I wouldn't have felt comfortable with starting off dishonestly, and I could never work out that if I hid my profile, then could it have been discovered? But if it could, then the lady in question would have had to have stayed a member and not left, and then she would have been ... and breathe. You get the idea.

I left and rejoined sites many times and always told the truth as to why I was leaving, so I could easily come back and start again. Each time I missed the sites, but the reason for leaving was a genuine and honest one. A relationship that is about to start cannot go well if one of you is still a member of a dating site. It will incur jealousy and distrust, and if you don't believe me, then I am living proof.

Both Louise and I are still members of a dating site, as we have to be to keep up with research. I could never write this book without popping back into sites to check certain things. I can use Louise's account to read men's profiles, and I can use my own to reaffirm some details about ladies profiles. For once, I can't wait to close my account and leave the sites behind so we can concentrate on our life together. I dislike the idea that Louise still has a profile open and feel a considerable amount of jealousy when she opens her email and there's a message from a dating site. Her profile

does in fact say that she is in a relationship and only uses the site to catch up with old friends, but remember the part about men (not) reading profiles.

I tell myself daily that I joined the dating sites to leave, and leave I will, as soon as I put this laptop to one side and get back to playing cards.

I have no regrets about joining dating sites. Without them I would not be sitting here in my girlfriend's cottage after a wonderful night out and a wonderful morning in bed. I would not be in the relationship I am in now, and I would not be as happy as I am or, dare I say, "we are". My journey wasn't always an easy one, but I learnt a lot and have certainly had my eyes forced open. I went on to meet, fall in love with, and live with a lady who I believe I would never have met without us both being members of a dating site. I dated and met many ladies, but in the long run things didn't work out with them for one reason or another. However, eventually I found someone who is my soulmate and best friend. I don't believe this was just luck, but that it had to happen eventually. In our first few months together we realised just how much we had in common, even though we are from two very different worlds. Louise is a country girl at heart and has stables, and I'm from a housing estate in London and have life insurance. We are two very different people who made contact on a dating site and are now living a very happy life together. Every dating site should have our happy smiling faces on their log-in page as a testament to the fact that dating sites do indeed work. There is no doubt and no argument that they don't. We and many others are living proof.

When I first joined the sites, I was not in a good space. I was down from months and months of treatment and the dreaded ex would not move on and leave me in peace, as is still the case. I needed something more in my life, and I certainly found a lot more than I could handle. I look back at the emails my editor sent me that questioned my sanity. He really did begin to get worried that I was finally losing my marbles, which to be honest is something I've been doing for most of my life. Another few and the bag will be empty, and I will resign myself to a life of Seroquel and therapy. I admit that at one point during my journey I even began to question my own sanity. I was spending so much time in an online world that I was losing grip on reality. As you know, I had the best of both worlds: I was researching for this book and looking to meet someone to share my life with, although I do believe that the book began to take over after a time. I started at the beginning, which is a good place to begin, but soon realised that there was no end. A person could just keep going deeper and deeper into the world of dating sites and forever find something new and different. There was always someone new to talk to and also a new part of a site that I never knew existed would emerge, sexual encounters being a good example. I became embroiled in a world that slowly chipped away at my mind as I got sucked ever further in. Dating sites began to be my only thought through the day, and I would often find myself staring into space. If you believe this to be an exaggeration, then think again – it isn't. Although this may sound negative, it isn't. I did have a lot of fun and wouldn't change a thing.

I hope from the bottom of my heart that I never have to return as a single member to the dating sites and begin all over again. At the moment there is certainly no need to believe that I will have to, as Louise and I are very happy together. But you never know what the future can dump on your doorstep. It would be with a heavy heart, should I have to return to the sites. When I open my mail and find a message from a dating site, I feel myself tremble with fear. Even when discussing dating sites with Louise, I become very curt and short. For me, they have served their purpose, and I now wish to leave them behind and get on with the relationship I have with the lady I love. The sites are now a pleasant memory and one that I will never forget. I do hope that they stay in my past, and as a memory.

I have said before that they can be “soul-destroying or ego-boosting”, and I mean it. I would go to bed some nights feeling drained and let down, but then awake the next morning to find a message that would lift me and make me smile through the day. I was not the only one who felt like this, and many ladies would tell me they had become disillusioned with the sites and men in general, fortunately not me though. Take the sites for what they are and don’t let them rule your life. Make them a complement to what you were doing before (unless you were doing nothing), and be sure to date as that is your goal. Always try to be honest or at least ample with the truth, and do not under any circumstances treat people as though they are disposable. They are real people with real hurts and real smiles, and you should never forget this. Treat them with the same respect that you would expect from others and build a base of friends and possible dates. It’s a lovely feeling to go online, have someone waiting for you and to be able to share what’s happened during your day with them. It’s wonderful to find messages from ladies who you haven’t even messaged first and to see replies from those you have contacted. It’s an ego boost to have your mobile come alive, and it’s great to know there are ladies out there thinking of you.

Try hard not to become a player, as the sites have too many already and they do not need any more. After a few weeks on the sites, any lady can sniff a play at a thousand feet, and to get to the dating stage with her will be almost impossible. With only the use of the internet to make initial contact, then your only ally is communication and the use of the written word. Read between the lines of profiles and always keep things personal, as that proves you are not cutting and pasting your messages. If you joined to find a partner, then keep this in mind and don’t become distracted along the way. It’s OK to experiment and have fun, but remember why you joined and keep that focus at all times, otherwise you may miss out on meeting your life partner. Go out, have fun, join sites, meet people, have sex, travel, fall in love, settle down, try things you have never tried before, etc. Do whatever you wish, but keep it real and do not join dating sites to hurt people as it’s not fair. I believe life to be a balance, and I live by many rules, two of them being “You reap what you sow” and “What goes around comes around”. Another few are “Drive it like you stole it”, “Live every day like it’s your last” and “Unless you go, you’ll never know”.

If you have not yet joined a site and decided to read this book first, then get on your laptop or your PC and start your journey into a new and interesting world. I hope that you now feel armed with a few tips and a few warnings that will make your journey easier and fun. Of course, there is no reason why you should follow what I have recommended and you could always go it alone. I think that by following your own course, then you will certainly have an interesting time, but you may miss out on meeting your very own soulmate. Never beat yourself up for making mistakes, as we all have to learn the hard way sometimes. Spend some time finding your feet. Apparently Rome wasn’t built in a day, which is pretty obvious, but a new relationship can be and is only a click away.

Thank you

I now find myself getting closer to the point where I can go into the dating sites and try and remember where the “close account” buttons are. My job here is almost done, and I hope you have enjoyed the book. The subject we have discussed is so expansive and varied that I could never have covered every aspect, but I have tried to give as much detail as a short book would allow. After starting my ramblings, I realised that, like dating sites, I could have gone on forever on any given subject, but it had to end somewhere, didn't it?

I have always enjoyed writing and will now miss lying in bed at night and going over in my mind the possible chapters for this book. I will miss sitting in front of the fire at night and going over each draft with Louise, and I will miss being in the position to wind my editor up with the promise of a new piece “by the end of next week”. This part for a start is three weeks overdue, and I am in so much trouble it's scary. I don't really need to worry though, as he's too lazy to drive out here and rant at me, although he does keep threatening to do so. Even if he does manage it, he won't find me (we moved last week and I have conveniently forgotten to forward our new address). I will, of course, let him know if he ever decides to pay me.

Throughout my short time on this ever-changing planet I have seen and done many things, but not once have I ever done anything in what is considered to be “the correct way”. I have never strove to be different, but somehow I have managed to be just that. Some may consider this to be a fault, but I do not. In my eyes it means that I get to explore and see things from a different point of view and not from the normal conventional view that others see them. It does mean, of course, that I actually fail at most things, but at least I know where I went wrong. With this in mind, my life has never been boring and to be part of the “Jay club” can be an interesting time.

What has always struck me as a shame is that most of my experiences have only been shared with friends, and not someone close. The time I was rescued by the coastguard while drifting aimlessly on a broken surfboard was seen by no-one, except possibly a couple of porpoises. The time I slept in a sewer pipe that emptied 30 seconds before I woke up was shared with no-one (luckily), except a couple of new forms of bacteria. The time I lived rough in a “Happy Eater” car park was only shared with the staff that filled and emptied the bins. And the time I caught a 15lb bass with my teeth? That time I was asleep and dreaming alone.

As I have said, I have always done things differently. When skateboarding, I broke both hands by trying to leap a set of stairs that were hard enough to walk down let alone jump. I alighted from an old London bus from the back platform as most people do, but when I did it the bus was still in motion. Another trip to A&E. When a beautiful tall ship took me on as crew, their first night out was hampered by a force nine storm. I was to become the ship Jonah, but at least we were never bored. After the storm, we were becalmed for three days and the captain still moaned. Some people are never happy.

I have never lived a boring life and I have been lucky enough to see some wonderful things, but unfortunately I haven't shared many of them with someone special. This has all changed now, and from the day I joined my first dating site I never looked back. For a few years now I have lived and

breathed dating, from the time I awoke to when I lay in bed awake at night and couldn't sleep. Although I will miss writing, I will be glad to put the sites to one side and get on with building my relationship with Louise. I can feel spring in the air and we have a busy summer ahead of us again. We will, of course, be online helping with people's profiles and any other dating problems they have, but that will be helping real people and will be a breath of fresh air. I suppose it would be a shame if someone like me, who knows the ins and outs of the sites, was to give it all up and walk away completely.

I guess I'm a lifer :)

More than anyone else, I would like to thank my ex-wife. Thank you for coming home and telling me you were leaving. Actually leaving would have been a start, but you did get round to it eventually. Without you, I would never be in the happy and fluffy place I am in today and none of this would exist.

I am giving all profits to the chickens, so don't even bother.

I would like to thank my mum and dad for their time and patience over the years. Thank you for looking after me through those very hard times.

I am giving all profits to the chickens, so don't even bother.

To my little 6ft 3 brother. Didn't we paint the town red, green, purple and just about every other colour we could find on our travels? To our days of road trips and endless summers.

Sorry bruv, it's chickens all the way.

I would also like to thank my lifelong friend and editor Jules. We've driven some long and fun roads and there's plenty more out there to be discovered.

Yep, chickens, every penny.

To my darling girlfriend and soulmate. Thank you for making me slim and fit and teaching me things I never knew existed. Thank you for giving us both a chance and for showing me an alternative lifestyle. Thank you for keeping me covered in mud and for your never-ending help and enthusiasm when compiling these here pages. You are the lucky one ... you own the chickens :) xxx

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--- END ---