

## Navigating The Internet Dating Minefield: What To Know, How To Do It, And How Not To Screw Up!

It's changed the world of dating and relating forever. Internet Dating has become a valid, exciting, inventive way for searching singles to connect--and maybe even find lasting love online. Can you finally forget those predictable bar scenes? Shun the awkwardness of speed dating? And, of course, avoid those "blind dates-from-hell" so aptly arranged by your well-meaning friends? Ultimately, with some preparation and the click of the mouse, you can literally forge a new social life and help hasten romantic destiny toward the partner of your dreams...

Well, at least all that would happen in an ideal world. But whoever said the world, or the Net, was perfect? Internet Dating can be a tempestuous and tempting minefield that dare not be navigated without caution and good sense. You'll really want to do your homework and know the hazards and pitfalls, long before embarking on the online dating experience.

And what are the most common dilemmas associated with Internet Dating? How do you sidestep dangers, disappointments, dumb decisions and jerks? How do you NOT screw up your Net-based dating options?

First of all -- ask yourself these key questions:

- \* What am I seeking? Am I looking for friendship? A fling? Simply sex? A temporary one-event date? Marriage material?
- \* How desperate am I? (Keep in mind that over-eagerness will seem magnified in your online profile! Avoid meeting AND avoid being one of those desperate daters!)
- \* What criteria are absolutes on my list of an ideal partner, and which things are flexible?

Then, it's absolutely crucial to understand the three general types of Internet Dating sites:

1. The "Candy Stores." These are the typical dating sites where you post your personal bio, significant statistics, age, etc. You might include everything from your income and religion to your smoking/drinking/tattoo preferences, and probably a description of your ideal mate. Many "shoppers" will also expect to see your photo.

The first time you visit any of these sites, you'll be amazed at the sheer numbers of people, and all the choices. Some -- like Match.com and Yahoo.personals.com -- cater to the general population. Other sites are aimed at specific faiths (Christian Singles.com) or even specific health issues that people share, like Prescription4Love.com.

While they may seem like a treasure chest of perfect mates, daters on the Candy Store sites can rule you out without having to ask you anything, since you've already posted your entire life history there. Some won't even look at you as they've rejected your age bracket completely. And unless you post a photo, the odds of getting any replies will be slim and none. So if you're the local psychologist seeking romance and not too keen on posting your photos, then this site is not your best bet.

2. Psychological and Behavioral Matching Sites. This is the type of dating site (such as eHarmony.com, a paid site) where you fill out a specific and usually lengthy personality profile, so the company can send qualifying "matches" to you. It's a closed loop system where you'll likely only see the profiles with whom you match-up. Theoretically the company weeds out people "wrong" for you.

The downside to this type of site is that some clients are told that "no one" matches them in the network. Talk about a blow to the ego!

3. The Open Forums. (Craigslist.com for example.) This type of site is really more like a chat room. You can post something as simple as "I have tickets to the so-and-so concert/game/event on Wednesday and need a date." Or you can offer an in-depth story about yourself and/or a lengthy description of your "Mr. or Ms. Right." Photos on these sites run the gamut -- from wholesome to graphic!

There's a bit more flexibility, as well as mystery, to this type of site, and may yield many more responses for you -- especially if you're a woman (even if you don't feature a photo) as there seems to be many more men than women posting.

Some helpful tips for this type of site:

- You don't need to post your photo for everyone to view. A pretty standard line is "your pic gets mine."

- Don't volunteer your entire life history. Leave something to the imagination.

- Be upfront when it counts. Don't want to meet a smoker? Say so! Finished with raising a family? Then be willing to state "no kids under 18."

- Be aware of what frustrates men and women. Don't proclaim that you're drop dead gorgeous to a world that might disagree. And sometimes it's best to list an age range that you're seeking, rather than your own.

No matter the site, the smart guy or gal who responds to your post should sound happy, gainfully employed (or otherwise with a good purpose in life), not bitter from a former relationship, and clear about what he/she is seeking. Keep this in mind for your own profile AND for those you're willing to respond to.

When it comes to any Internet Dating site, you'll want to know buzz words like these:

BBW = Big Beautiful Woman

MSW = Man Seeking Woman

SWF = Single White Female

D&D Free = Drug and Disease Free

ISO = In Search Of

FWB = Friends with benefits (sex-only relationship)

LTR = Long Term Relationship

420 Friendly = You're OK with smoking pot

More essentials about dating online:

Look for the red flag handles used by people you should avoid, such as "Babe Magnet" (especially if his photo suggests otherwise) or "Your Princess" (sounds high maintenance!)... Don't try to "make" something work if it's not meant to... And most importantly trust your instincts, don't ever settle, be genuine, be yourself and be honest. And for your safety, it's extremely wise to have separate email addresses to use when you're playing the Internet Dating game. This high tech world offers so many opportunities -- but you just can't be TOO careful!

### About the Author

Mary Jo Fay, RN, MSN, is the leader of the Denver Savvy Singles Dating, Mating, and Relating Group. Her best-selling books include THE SEVEN SECRETS OF LOVE (including much advice on Internet Dating). She can be reached at 303-841-7691 or through her web site at

<http://www.RelationshipWIZE.com>

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