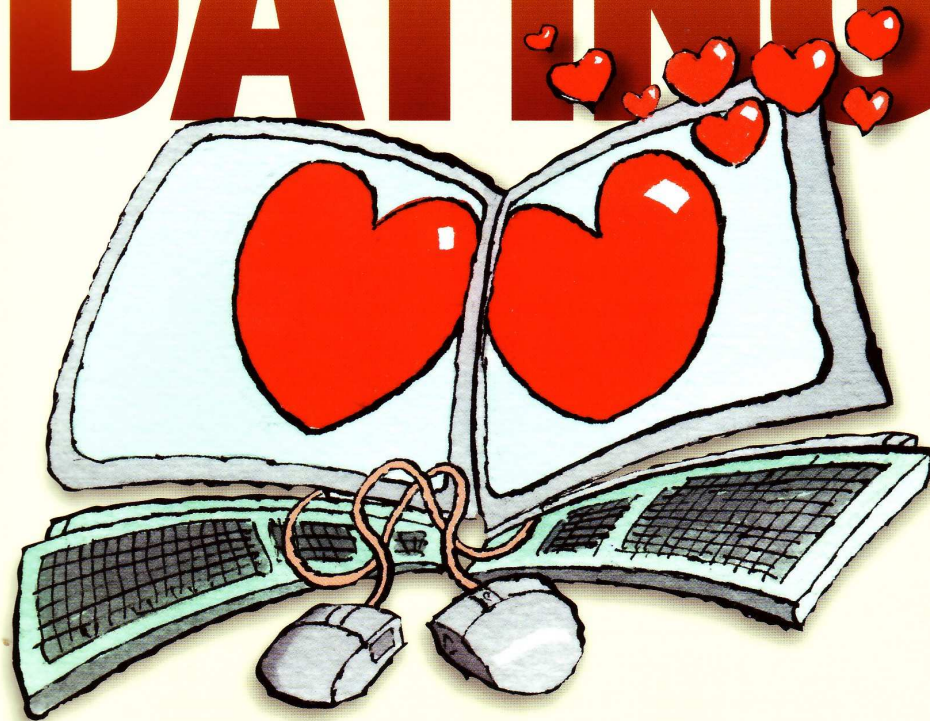


Everyone's Guide to
**ONLINE
DATING**



How to find love and friendship
on the internet

SHIMRIT ELISAR

Published by How to Books Ltd,
Spring Hill House, Spring Hill Road,
Begbroke, Oxford OX5 1RX, United Kingdom
Tel: (01865) 375794. Fax: (01865) 379162
email: info@howtobooks.co.uk
www.howtobooks.co.uk

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 84528 186 1

Cover design by Baseline Arts Ltd, Oxford
Cover illustration by David Mostyn
Illustrations by Zephyr Pfothenaur
Produced for How to Books by Deer Park Productions, Tavistock
Typeset by Pantek Arts Ltd, Maidstone, Kent
Printed and bound by

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About the Author

Shimrit Elisar is an online dating expert with 15 years' experience of dating and socialising on the Internet. She spent over five years working as an online moderator monitoring and advising customers on some of the largest message boards, online forums and dating sites in the UK. Although she is not a nerd, Shimrit was one of the first people to use the Internet for social purposes, as well as being one of the first women on the world's first chat room. She has lived in three different countries, worked as a journalist in two different languages and has travelled extensively around the world. She currently works for Allegran Limited, one of the UK's leading online dating companies.

Preface

If we could go back in time to the last days of the 20th century, pick a random UK town and ask the first person we saw what they thought about online dating, we would be lucky to get more than a blank stare or a raised eyebrow. ‘Meet people on the Internet? That’s crazy! Why would anyone want to do that?’

Nowadays, practically everyone is doing it.

Most of us know at least one person who’s tried it, if not many more. In fact, stories about online dating are in the papers almost every day, as well as on TV and on the radio. What we have here is a craze, a phenomenon – a whole new method of dating that has completely changed the lives of many people.

I probably don’t need to tell you all this. If you weren’t already considering online dating, you wouldn’t have picked up this book in the first place. Maybe you’re even dating online already, but want to learn more about the subject so you can get better results.

Online dating can be an amazingly useful tool. Like any other tool you need to learn what it can do for you and how, before you can use it effectively. You need to learn its limitations so you can work around them and you need to get the feel of it so that you can find your own method of making it work for you. The purpose of this book is to help you understand the inner workings of online dating so you can get what you want out of it, whatever that might be.

This book grew out of my personal experience of dating online as well as my professional experience of working in the online dating industry. It’s based on many hundreds of case studies that I’ve come across during 15 years of both working and socialising on the Internet. As part of my work, I’ve met many wonderful, intelligent people who were unintentionally hurting their own chances of finding love online. Most of the mistakes they made would have been easy to avoid with a bit of forward planning and an understanding of how online dating works. I wrote this book in order to address such problems and offer easy, straightforward solutions.

Because online dating is still a relatively new concept to most people, it still suffers from hype, scaremongering and the prevalence of much unnecessary jargon. I tried to avoid all of these in this book and aimed, instead, to give an unbiased, clear picture of the subject.

I wholeheartedly believe that there is someone out there for everyone. Maybe online dating will be your means of finding that someone, maybe not. You'll never know until you've given it a go. The time to start is now.

I wish you good luck in your search and hope that this book will help you find what you are looking for.

Shimrit

A note about genders

In order to simplify things, I have chosen to use the masculine gender for pronouns and collective nouns throughout this book. This, to me, seems less annoying than using 'he/she' or 'his/her' when writing about stuff that could apply to both sexes. I realise that this may occasionally paint an askew picture and for this I apologise. It was a matter of simple convenience, nothing more.

Chapter 1

An introduction to online dating



In this chapter you will learn:

- What online dating is all about
- Things you need to know before you start
- What makes online dating different
- Naming your objectives

What is online dating?

Online dating, as you probably know, is simply the name given to the process of meeting and socialising with people on the Internet. The term 'online dating' itself is rather inaccurate: people generally don't 'date' on the Internet – they just use it to make initial contact. A more accurate term would have been 'online introductions', but that doesn't sound nearly as catchy.

Online dating is now a highly popular activity: approximately ten million people in the UK use online dating sites every month. In the USA, where Internet dating is now virtually a mainstream activity, the number is even higher.

Although most people associate online dating with dedicated dating sites, there are other means of using the Net to socialise. These will be discussed in Chapter 12 of this book and include platforms such as social networking sites, message boards and chat rooms. If you take all these into account, you will realise that billions, rather than mere millions of people are using the Internet for social purposes every day.

What's in it for me?

People turn to online dating for different reasons; what you get out of it largely depends on what you want to achieve. It's a highly versatile medium that is aimed at fulfilling a variety of needs.

Using the Internet you could:

- Expand your social circle
- Find activity partners
- Find new sexual partners
- Fall in love
- Find your next husband or wife

Some people are comfortable with the prospect of communicating with people in writing over the Internet and some prefer more tradi-

tional methods like phone calls or meeting up in person. If the thought of spending your spare time chatting online doesn't appeal to you, don't worry. Using online dating does not necessarily mean spending long periods of time exchanging messages or emails. Many people nowadays choose to keep their online interaction time to a minimum and there are sites where this form of online dating is actively encouraged. On the other hand, if you want to take your time and be more cautious that's perfectly acceptable too.

A brief history of online dating

Most people think about the World Wide Web when they think about online dating. The truth is, online dating predates the invention of the Web itself and goes back to the early days of the Internet. Back in those days, when the Internet was a plain, text-only medium, people used to make new friends by means of simple chat software, multi-user games and discussion groups. Surprisingly, early Internet users still managed to fall in love with each other, even though their less nerdy friends all thought they were crazy. With the invention of the Web, operating systems like Microsoft Windows and user-friendly chat programs such as ICQ and MSN Messenger, even less technically minded people started using the Internet to communicate with others.

Sadly, as the Internet became more popular, it also became more open to abuse. Chat rooms, previously thought of as the best means of online social interaction, became infested with spammers and perverts who ruined the experience for everyone. It was only a matter of time until dating websites started appearing, in order to provide a safer, more convenient alternative. Dating sites have now become one of the most popular ways of meeting people online. As a result, they have evolved into a multi-million pound industry, which is still growing every day.

Will online dating work for me?

Simply put, anyone can try online dating. However, your level of success will depend on several different factors.

4 Everyone's guide to online dating

Using the Internet, you can connect with thousands of new people without ever having to leave the house. This makes online dating particularly useful for those who fall under the below categories:

- People who are generally unable to go out and socialise regularly such as single parents, busy professionals, and those who are bed-ridden or disabled
- People with small social circles that lack suitable singles (recent divorcees, people in rural areas and anyone who's recently moved to a new city)
- People who want to know more about their potential dates before meeting them in person
- People who do not enjoy the loud social situations that are usually involved in the traditional dating process and are seeking an alternative

While dating sites are a great way to help you meet people, they cannot transform anyone's personality overnight or perform miracles. Those who fall under the below categories are not likely to benefit from their online dating experience:

- People with severe psychological or behavioural problems
- People who are still recovering from a bad break-up and are not yet ready to start dating again
- People who expect fast results with zero effort on their part

Online dating requirements

The technical stuff

Dating sites are designed to be as simple as possible to use, but there are still a few things you will need before you can embark on your search.

The most important requirement is a basic understanding of how to send and receive emails and how to use a web browser. Dating sites will generally assume you know how to do these things; some even have disclaimers saying they won't be able to help you if you don't. Knowing

how to scan and upload pictures onto a website will also be useful, as photos are a key feature of online dating. Some dating sites offer support for people who are unable to digitise photos but you can't always count on it.

If you want to make use of some of the fancier features that are available on some dating sites (such as video and voice chat) you will need to familiarise yourself with the workings of web cameras and microphones. Although not essential, these are usually quite simple to use and can certainly make your experience more enjoyable.

Helpful attitudes

Not everything about online dating is down to technical knowledge. Being in the right frame of mind is also important. First and foremost, you need to have faith. If you convince yourself that you're never going to find love, you'll end up with a self-fulfilling prophecy. Millions of people all over the world find love online every day. If you want to join them, the first step is making yourself believe that it's possible (or at least not impossible).

While such optimism (or suspended disbelief) will work in your favour, it's also essential to have reasonable expectations. Putting it bluntly: there are no quick fixes. Cases where people go online and find their prince or princess charming within minutes/hours/days are as rare as people bumping into their soulmate on the bus. Yes, it does sometimes happen, but if you expect it to, you may be greatly disappointed.

During my time as a moderator, I came across a large number of people who joined a dating site and expected to be immediately united with their ideal man or woman. Unfortunately for those people, online dating is not the lottery; it's more of an investment. If you want to give it a real try, you will have to put time, effort and thought into the experience. Be willing to spend time (and often money) looking for the right site and the right people, be willing to go on a lot of dates and, most importantly, be willing to go back to the drawing board until you find what (and who) you want.

Common myths and misconceptions

When talking to people about online dating I have realised that there is still a huge amount of misinformation out there. While the stigma associated with it is dying out, people still bring up the same concerns again and again. If the below statements ring true to you, you may be surprised when you find out what things are really like.

Online dating is only for geeks

This may have been true back in the early days when only computing students and hardcore computer nerds knew what the Internet was. Nowadays, when people from all walks of life use the Internet every day, things are rather different. How many people you know use email either as part of their work or socially? How many of them used it 10 or 15 years ago? Times have changed, the Internet has changed and the world has moved on. Online dating is designed to be simple even if you don't know that much about computers. As a result, the people who use this method now are a pretty varied bunch.

Online dating is full of freaks

I won't lie to you: there are freaks out there. When you start dating online you will come across them sooner or later. The Internet has always been the preferred mode of communication for people who found it difficult to handle standard social situations. There was once a famous cartoon published in *The New Yorker* that showed dogs sat in front of a PC. The caption read: 'On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog'. This, to me, sums the whole thing up beautifully: even the most unappealing, socially inept individuals can shine online and pretend they are well adjusted and attractive.

Being able to communicate with people without showing your face or stepping out of the house has an obvious appeal to such people. Luckily, now that the world has discovered the other advantages of dating on the Internet, social ineptness is not the only reason people choose to do it. In fact, many intelligent, professional and even trendy people turn to online dating because it's so simple and effective. The

weirdos that you've heard of are still there, but they are merely a small portion of the online population, which is now a more accurate representation of the world we live in. You needn't let them put you off.

Online dating is unsafe and full of liars and scammers

This is still a major concern among those who are new to online dating and the Internet in general. Many people seem to still deem the Net unsafe. Certain members of my family, for example, still refuse to use their credit cards online for fear of having their details stolen. Those same people would quite happily hand over their card to a waiter at a restaurant, without fully considering the possible dangers of putting their trust in a complete stranger. People have been committing card fraud for years – long before the days of the Internet. Have they stopped using the old methods, now the Internet exists? Of course not, it's just that the Internet is new and we have a tendency to mistrust anything we don't fully understand.

The same goes for online dating. Of course some people out there lie and cheat, but adultery and fraud are not recent inventions. There are no more liars online than there are offline. After all, the people on the Internet exist in the real world too; they are not some kind of alien beings. Using the same common sense you'd use to sniff out those people in real life (plus the handy information available later on in this book) you can easily avoid these fraudsters and enjoy a safe and healthy dating experience.

Online dating is better (or worse) than traditional dating

Some people will tell you that online dating is far superior to traditional dating, while others will say it's grossly deficient. Frankly, neither of these is true. Online dating is just another way of meeting people. It has advantages and disadvantages like anything else and is not guaranteed to work for everyone. The only way to tell if it will work for you is to give it a go and see what happens.

Online dating will solve all your problems

It's amazing how many people turn to online dating expecting a miracle cure for everything that's wrong with their lives. Sadly, reality is not

quite as straightforward as that. The act of looking for love online rather than offline is not in itself enough to guarantee good, long-lasting relationships. If you had a bad dating pattern, for example, where you found yourself repeatedly attracted to unsuitable people, this pattern would likely follow you until you stopped to deal with its causes. The medium of online dating alone would not be enough to stop it from repeating itself. This isn't to say that you should stop all human contact until you're sure you are 'perfect' (because none of us ever are) but be aware that it takes more than signing up to a dating site to fix any damaging relationship patterns or to heal a broken heart.

Online dating is a method used only by young people

For every person who thinks online dating is the realm of the geeky and the freaky, there is one who believes he is too old and 'uncool' to start searching for love online. While it's true that younger people are generally more comfortable with using the Net (as well as mobile phones, gadgets etc.) there are plenty of older people who use computers every day. The fact of the matter is that if you can send an email and use a web browser, you have all the skills you need to use an online dating site – regardless of your age.

You don't need to learn how to program and you won't be expected to use 'textspeak' to communicate with others (though some people choose to, for reasons I may never understand). The best news is, though, that whatever age you are, you will be able to find people of the same age group online.

The Internet is a place where you can get away with being rude and offensive for fun

For many people, the online dating experience is quite novel: and why not? It's different, it's entertaining and can even be quite silly and surreal at times. Sadly, sometimes it's too easy to forget that there are real people on the other side of the line; people with real feelings that can be hurt. Those users may be reduced to nothing more than a picture and a bit of text on our screens, but that doesn't mean they deserve to be treated in a disrespectful manner.

Insulting someone's looks or making racist and otherwise bigoted comments are things that are not tolerated online in much the same way they are frowned upon anywhere else. People who act in this way, generally find themselves kicked off their dating sites very quickly – and for a very good reason.

Dating online means you are desperate

This is a natural progression from the days when people who published lonely-hearts personals in the paper were seen as desperate. Luckily, this dated stigma is finally dying out.

If instead of saying you were unhappy with your love life, you said you were unhappy with your job, no one would criticise you for scanning the wanted ads for a better one. This may seem pretty obvious to you and me, yet it was only during the second half of the last century that people moved away from the notion that one's job was for life. Up until then, you would have met with scorn if you'd consciously tried to have a change of career at any point in your life.

For some reason, even though we now allow ourselves to actively attempt to improve the professional part of our lives, we may still be reluctant to do so when love and relationships are concerned. There is absolutely nothing wrong with admitting to yourself that you want to share your life with someone. There is also nothing wrong with wanting to put yourself out there in order to improve your chances of meeting that someone. Luckily, more and more people now realise this and are willing to take control of their love lives. Social attitudes don't change by themselves: they change as we realise that the world we live in is not the same one our parents lived in. Millions of people are dating online every day and the world is changing with them. Join them and you too can be a part of a revolution, if not a global one, then at least a personal one.

Online vs traditional dating

When I say that online dating is revolutionary, I really mean it. In many ways, the dating process is completely reversed when meeting someone

on the Net. It's good to have an understanding of how things work before you jump in, so you can be aware of what makes online dating different.

The advantages of online dating include:

Earlier deal breakers

In traditional dating, we rely on our five senses, as well as our intuition, our emotions and our intellect in order to gauge our attraction to someone. Often, our intellect is engaged last, after we've already decided we are physically attracted to that person.

One of the main problems with traditional dating (as us online dating professionals love to point out) is that being physically attracted to someone or even being in love with him is no guarantee of your compatibility. Here is an example of a scenario that is, unfortunately, all too common.

A woman I know in her late thirties, has recently ended a ten-year relationship with a man after finding out that, unlike her, he never wanted to have children. Although he had never lied about it, she had always assumed he would change his mind. When he didn't, she had no choice but to leave him. Needless to say, they were both devastated.

Such fundamental disagreements, known in the industry as *deal breakers*, are incredibly common and include other things such as smoking/drinking habits, political orientation, religion, ethnicity, etc. These are the fundamental differences that make it impossible for two people to form a successful relationship. Cue the main advantage of online dating and the reason why it's so successful among thirty-somethings with a long history of dating behind them.

In the world of online dating, the deal breakers are among the first things you will see when you browse people's profiles. From the first time you look at someone's profile, you will be able to tell whether he smokes, whether or not he wants kids and many other useful things, all depending on the dating site you are using. Imagine trying to ask a

person you've just met whether or not he wants to have children: he would be out of the door before you could finish the sentence!

On the Internet, such behaviour is more than acceptable: it's practically built in to your registration process when you join a dating site. By specifying such information in your profile, you can instantly filter out unsuitable matches.

While knowing that person X wants to have babies does not in itself guarantee you would find him or her attractive or interesting, it does tell you that if you did, you would be able to develop your relationship to the desirable extent without coming across nasty surprises in the future.

Anonymity and control

For those who are reluctant to let strangers into their lives straight away, online dating affords an easy way of being in control of the dating process without giving away too much personal information too soon. Of course, chatting to someone online and finding him OK may not always be a guarantee of his ultimate sanity, but being able to maintain a level of privacy while communicating with someone can only be a good thing. On dating sites, the person on the other side won't even know your real name or email address unless you choose to share these with him. The best thing is, you will still be able to communicate quite happily until you decide whether you want to take things further.

Keeping your options open

One of the things that made online shopping so popular is the fact that it takes far less time to window-shop online than it does to travel from one shop to another and compare prices. Online dating is similar in the sense that it's much easier to browse user profiles and chat to different people than it does to go on the same number of dates. This means that you can have quite a busy social life, without ever leaving your desk.

You can still keep your options open even when it comes to meeting up in person. Most reasonable people won't expect you to have decided

whether or not you are attracted to them based on a few online conversations. As a result, it's perfectly acceptable for both men and women to meet up with a selection of different people before making their mind up. However, it's also perfectly acceptable to cancel planned dates if you feel that you've already found the right person.

Now we come to some of the possible disadvantages of online dating.

False intimacy

One of the stranger issues that you may encounter is the issue of false intimacy. Online interaction only provides you with some of the information required in order to form a complete opinion of a person. The rest is filled out by your brain, based on your hopes, desires and fears. If you are new to online dating, you may find it hard to believe you could fall in love with someone based only on a picture, some personal blurb and a few text-based conversations. You may be shocked to discover that, in reality, you don't even need a picture. I'm always amazed anew at how much you can learn about what a person is like by simply exchanging emails. It's very possible to be won over by someone's personality without ever having seen his face. While such feelings usually grow over time, rather than appear instantly, it's very common to quickly develop a certain affinity with someone online or build up expectations based on someone's profile.

The difficult thing is remembering that the person you are talking to may really be quite different from the image you have constructed in your mind.

Social vs antisocial dating

When we think of traditional dating we usually think of clubs, pubs and other loud places where people congregate. I am not here to tell you that those methods are dated and ineffective in the face of online dating. On the contrary, I think they work pretty well for some people, with the added benefit of getting those people out of the house and into the company of others. While this form of social dating can be fun, it has obvious flaws. If it didn't, online dating would never have been invented.

Not everyone in the world is a loud, extroverted social butterfly who

can walk up to a complete stranger on the dance floor and introduce himself. Social dating can therefore lend itself to much shallowness, putting some people at an obvious disadvantage.

Online dating offers those with a shy disposition the chance to compose themselves and approach people in a more gentle manner, thus levelling the playing field. However, chatting on the Internet can become highly addictive and can end up keeping you from going out and interacting with people in a less detached manner. Spending too much time at home on your own in front of the PC can be quite damaging when done exclusively. It's important to try and find a balance between the two dating methods. Your goal should always be to meet up in person as soon as you feel comfortable.

The personal checklist

Often, people come to online dating with only a vague idea of what they want to achieve. This, I believe, is why so many people find that they spend much time online without getting very far. Being vague about what you want is fine if you just want to have a look around and check out the different possibilities, but if you want to get anything more out of the experience, you'll be better off thinking in advance about your goals. This is true even if you are only interested in flirting or casual dating, but is especially important if you are serious about finding love. It's worth spending the time it takes to work out what you really want to find, before setting off on your search.

The following list of questions is meant to get you thinking about where you are now and where you want to be. Think of this exercise as preparation for a journey, like marking your position and ultimate destination on a map before planning a route. Be as honest as possible; this is for you and you alone. The clearer you are about your goals, the easier it will be for you to achieve them. Don't be tempted to abandon your real goal (such as finding a wife or a husband) even if you think it may not be possible to achieve. Choose the goal you would want to achieve in an ideal world where everything is possible.

Write down your answers somewhere so you can refer to them if and when you need to.

Your goals

- What made you want to try online dating?
- What are you hoping to get out of the experience?
 - Friendship/socialising
 - Casual dating/sex
 - Serious dating/love
 - Marriage
 - I want to find out what all the fuss is about

The person you would like to meet

We all have our vision of a perfect partner. While in reality we may sometimes compromise, in an ideal world we wouldn't have to. Write down the things that make up your ideal partner. Be as detailed and descriptive as possible and try to go beyond physical attributes.

- What qualities must he have (looks, character, profession, aspirations, religion, ethnicity, hobbies, level of income, etc.)?
- What qualities must he *not* have (the 'deal breakers' or turn-offs)?

Where are you now?

Like everything else in the world, online dating is a venture that is likely to be more successful if you set off on the right foot. These questions should help you assess your own starting position so you can see where you are in your life.

- How do you feel about your love life at the moment?
- Not taking that into account, how do you feel about the rest of your life?
- List six things you like about yourself

- List three things you dislike about your life or about yourself that you would like to improve
- How do you feel about your chances of finding love?

If you have answered these truthfully, you should now be closer to understanding your position. Were any of these questions difficult to answer? Most of us find it easy to think about things that make us complain but more difficult to think of what makes us happy. Ideally, though, you should be able to think up answers to all of the above questions.

Sadly, some people turn to online dating (and dating in general) in an attempt to compensate for other parts of their lives that are lacking. Unfortunately, relationships that form out of this kind of need are not likely to be good and long-lasting. To put things bluntly, this means that if you are generally unhappy with all aspects of your life, you may not be in the best position to try online dating at this time. This isn't to say that you can't or shouldn't try it or even that you wouldn't get results. All it does is highlight the need for you to look at other areas of your life and bring yourself to a level where you are happy with yourself before bringing somebody else into the equation. Similarly, if you are pessimistic about your chances of finding love, you could end up with limited success unless you consider the reasons behind this pessimism and address them. If you wholeheartedly believe you're incapable of finding someone, you will most likely prove yourself right. If you tried online dating at this point, you would take any temporary setback as a sign that you were right and stop trying. You must get yourself to a point where you are at least open to the possibility of finding love and happiness, if you are to ever succeed.

To purchase your copy of *Everyone's Guide to Online Dating* at a 34% discount on RRP [click here](#)