

Online Dating

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A Step-By-Step Guide To Using The Internet For Safe And Exciting Dating

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Introduction

This e-pamphlet will guide you through the various aspects of using the Internet to find a partner. This medium provides some exciting opportunities but also comes with unique challenges that need to be addressed in order to have a happy, safe search. Follow my guidelines and you'll be off to a great start. Give it your best shot, you never know who you may meet!

Getting Started

Although some online personals services will provide a form of online communication, the most usual means of conversing will be via standard e-mail. Although many systems say they provide online anonymity they don't always deliver. Sometimes your e-mail address gets passed to the recipient when you reply to a message. In order to protect your privacy get an e-mail address from one of the free services offered by [Yahoo!](#) or [MSN Hotmail](#) . Make sure you use a name or "handle" that doesn't directly identify you. Using your first name only is preferable but in most cases this name will already be taken by someone else. Try using a variation on your name such as "JoesMail" or "CoolJoe". Another option is to use a name that is descriptive of you. Examples include "SurferDude", "DanceManiac" and "Run4Life".

Even if you already have an e-mail account and/or instant messaging I suggest you obtain a new account specifically for your online dating. If you start receiving unwanted mail you may simply stop using this account and switch to a new one.

An issue that I've discovered with some of these free services is that they will send out your full name along with your "handle". As a first step send yourself a message to see if your full name comes through with it. If it does you'll have to make sure that information is removed. With MSN Messenger simply right click on your name near the top and choose "Personal Settings" which brings up a page allowing you to enter exactly what the recipient will see. With MSN Hotmail you have to provide a first and last name when you choose "Options" and then "Personal Profile", so I enter only my last initial. I prefer this to entering false information.

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Once you have your free e-mail you should sign up for [ICQ messaging](#) and/or [MSN Messenger](#). The latter links to your Hotmail account and is very convenient if you use Hotmail.

Although there has been some publicity concerning the dangers of online communication these can be managed if you are careful. We'll talk a little later about the issues of getting too personal online. For now I'd like to stress that you be careful about what information you provide to anyone, online or not. Never give out more contact information than your anonymous email, ICQ number, city where you live and FIRST name. Never reveal your identity or address and make sure any of your friends who have this information never give it out on your behalf. Your telephone number may be given out once you've built a rapport with someone but even then I suggest women not give out their numbers and have the man supply a number instead. Women are much more susceptible to problems and a resourceful individual could use a telephone number to obtain a name and address.

Personals Sites

You'll start your online search with a little investigative work in order to identify which online personals are best for you. There are thousands of these sites to choose from but the majority really don't have sufficient content to make them useful. The link below takes you to an updated listing of these sites.

<http://www.DocDom.com/OnlineDating/Personals.shtml>

During my investigations I came across several personals services that targeted my location. Although on the surface this seemed the best solution I found that none of these sites had sufficient traffic to make it worth the effort. Watch out for a lack of traffic on other sites as well. They may appear to have numerous listings for your area but some of those listings may be several years old and no longer active.

If you have any special circumstances such as a disability, a transmittable disease or a religious requirement in your partner some sites will cater to your needs better than others. For more recent listings of available sites or to search for sites catering to your specific needs search **Yahoo!** for "personals". Send me an e-mail if you find a site I haven't listed that works for you.

Most of these sites will allow you to browse their advertisements but if you are a man you'll need to become a member in order to make contact. Most sites allow the ladies free access and contact but prevent them from sending out their e-mail address. Some will provide a free trial membership that you can use to evaluate their service. Keep track of each site you visit, how good the search results were and how many times you were able to make contact. This will help you decide which sites are worth the cost. I have trimmed my own list down to a

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single site I pay for regularly, another I pay for periodically when there are a handful of people I wish to contact and a few others that I monitor at no cost.

The Advertisement

Lets start thinking about your online advertisement. This is similar to a resume but much more personal. It must present you in the best possible light and provide enough incentive for potential partners to make contact. Some services charge for making initial contact so you'll have to make your advertisement interesting enough that someone will be willing to pay to contact you.

Start by reading some competing ads to get a feel for the market and also read some of the ads placed by your potential suitors as they'll be indicating what they're looking for in a partner. Keep notes on what you find that appeals to you and also things that don't. Notice the length and style of the ads to get a feel for how long you should make yours and how you could make it stand out from the crowd.

If you've read one of my [relationship e-books](#), use your "**Myself**" list to provide ideas for your ad. Identify what traits and interests make you unique. Try to give an accurate description of who you are in order to attract people looking for someone like you. When you submit your ad, there should be special fields for the basics such as physical dimensions, marital status and age so you can leave these and any other repeated traits out of your description.

Some online personals services allow a place for you to enter what you are looking for in a partner. If they don't, simply insert this into your description. Again, my [relationship e-books](#) are a great source of additional information, use your "**My Partner**" list from these e-books as the basis for the description of your partner.

Once you feel your description provides an accurate representation of yourself try to think of things you can add that would make you sound unique. Mention

your favorite movie or song, add an eye-catching opening line or use some humor or poetry to show you've put some effort into this endeavor. Try to say something different than the other ads but keep it in style with your personality. Keep in mind that you don't want to bare your soul and tell your life story. This is only an introduction, just enough to entice someone to contact you for more.

Pick a snappy header for your ad. An introduction of "Looking for my soul mate" won't catch the eye nearly as well as "Dance fanatic seeks life partner". Avoid sentences that don't tell anything about yourself but instead point out that you've got a "beef" unless of course this is a big part of who you are. There are so many introductions I've seen that are of the flavor "No players please!", "No head games!" or "No jerks allowed!". What is this telling someone reading it? Make sure your header gives the correct impression and enticement. Most people won't even get past the header when scanning ads.

Your ad will be read by a very wide audience, not just people who are looking for someone like you. You want your ad to filter out the undesirables so contacts made are more appropriate. Have a few close friends read it over and tell you if it accurately describes you. Remember that sometimes things may make sense to you but may not to someone else. This is particularly true of sarcasm online so your friends should keep their eyes open for these types of issues.

Proofread your advertisement several times in order to make sure there are no grammatical or spelling mistakes. A profile with errors shows inattention to detail and lack of sincerity. Attach your best recent photograph to your profile. This is an essential step as profiles without pictures are mostly ignored. Those with photographs show a level of seriousness and that the person has nothing to hide physically. Make sure your picture shows you in the best light with a big smile on your face. I have heard people say that they don't post pictures for security

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reasons but there is no issue here. Anyone you meet on the street can see you so why shouldn't someone online?

Most online personals services will allow you to choose a name or handle that you will use to log in and that others will use for contacting you. Use the same techniques here as you did when selecting the name for your anonymous e-mail. You could even use the same handle to keep things easy but do not use the same password. You don't want those who manage these personals sites to have your e-mail password.

Many sites will put your profile into a hidden state until they have reviewed your photograph and/or description. They do this in order to screen profanity, pictures of graphic nature and those depicting minors. Once your profile is available online check it over and have a friend take a look and comment on it's appearance. Make sure to keep your profile accurate over time. You should make changes to it every few months or so. This will make your advertisement appear more prominently in search results for sites that sort their results by the age of the advertisement. Remember, however, not to contact new prospective partners while your profile is pending review. If a new prospect is unable to view your profile they are not likely to bother returning later.

Searching

Every personals site will provide a search feature. You enter some criteria that are important to you and the tool will search their database and return any results. If you've used database search tools before you should have no difficulty but if not there are some things to consider. Most of these tools are fairly "dumb" in the sense that they don't try to pick matches *close* to what you want, they'll only return results that match *exactly*. This can return far fewer results than the total of those profiles that you may find acceptable. The first key here is to limit the criteria in your search. The fewer things you specify the more results will be returned. If a specific criteria really wouldn't prevent you from having a relationship with someone leave it blank.

Some of these criteria are very easy to specify such as age or other physical characteristics. Where you'll usually run into trouble are with the less specific and gray areas. For example one option may specify a level of education. Someone with a very advanced education may not necessarily match any of the options on the list, say for example they were tutored or took correspondence education, they may not have an appropriate option to choose and therefore left that field blank. By doing this they may not appear in your results if you specified an education requirement.

Another problem you'll find on some sites is the inability to pick multiple options in a criteria. For example you may be interested in slim or muscular partners but the search tool only allows you to select one or the other. A related issue involves options which increase in range. For example with education and income the values increase towards the end of the list. If you pick an option somewhere in the middle of the list you would expect that those items farther down the list would also apply. If I choose \$30,000 as the level of income I want from a mate, I would expect that someone earning \$50,000 would match, but

remember that search engines usually only return *exact* matches. In these cases your only solution is to perform multiple searches. Remember to search every permutation of the options which interest you in order to cover all the matching profiles. If the site you're using offers the ability to save multiple searches this makes things much easier.

One particular criteria that has caused me trouble on various sites is the location. On some sites the location, or part of the location like the city, is something that is typed manually. Frequently people will place advertisements with typos in their location, resulting in no matches. Another problem is people entering non-standard formats for their location. As an example someone who travels a bit and enters their location as "Victoria, Vancouver" won't match with anyone who is looking for "Victoria" or "Vancouver". Remember these search engines aren't intelligent, they won't return these types of matches. In this regard be very careful with your spelling and use of names. If you live in an area that sometimes goes by more than one name pick the most prevalent version for your advertisement and try using the alternates as well in your searches.

Some sites offer a distance criteria based on the nearest large city, a telephone area code or a postal code. Keep in mind that these aren't always accurate and the latter two are based on arbitrary bounds which can change over time making the results incorrect. In order not to miss any potential matches increase your distance a little to allow for some of these issues.

Make your search efforts a regular activity. Set aside time one day a week to perform a search at each of your selected sites and contact all members who are a potential match. If there are a large number of these break them down into batches so you aren't overwhelmed with responses. When you first start your search you'll likely have too many results to cover in one sitting. Take your time and cover all the profiles thoroughly. Once you've reviewed all the existing

profiles you'll only have to concern yourself with new postings.

Automated Matching

Some personals sites offer a feature whereby your search criteria are saved in their database to be used for automated matching. With this feature their system searches the new personals advertisements that are added and when one matches your criteria they'll send you an e-mail notifying you of the match. This feature is very convenient and gives you the opportunity to contact someone very soon after they have created their profile, giving you a leg up over all the other people who respond later.

Keeping Track

Once you start making contact with people online you'll find that there are times when matches are few and there are other times where you may make a number of new friends fairly quickly. During these busy periods I occasionally found it difficult to keep track of these new contacts and on one occasion embarrassed myself by confusing two people. I solved this problem by keeping notes on new friends until I got to know them well enough that these were no longer necessary. I use Microsoft Word for this purpose as it allows me to paste profiles I copied from my Web browser and pictures I may have received online or via e-mail. I found it very convenient to open up the document and read my notes prior to, or while chatting with, my new friends online. I kept the notes updated after a chat session or after exchanging an e-mail. I noted not only information I had received but also information I had sent in order to prevent repeating myself. This task can be simplified by creating a spreadsheet of the common pieces of information you may request from or send to a potential partner and check them off as this information is exchanged.

In your e-mail program create folders to keep track of e-mails received. Label one for new contacts, another for people with whom you have an ongoing discussion, another for e-mails requiring a response since you may not always want or need to respond immediately. If you have an active communication going on with a particular person you may want to create a special folder just for them in order to more easily scan past correspondence.

Online Chat

Let's talk a little about online communication. This applies to group chats, one-on-one chats and e-mail. Try to type in a similar style to your regular speech. Use regular vocabulary and try to present yourself in a manner that matches your offline style. Don't say anything online that you wouldn't say to someone face to face either due to politeness or embarrassment and shyness.

Have fun with your online discussions. Be yourself, be flirtatious, be witty, whatever suits you at the moment. Use emoticons (described later in this pamphlet) to give the other person a clue as to your intention when being sarcastic and also to let them know when they've made you laugh or when you would otherwise have made a "face". Talk about yourself but also listen to your partner and save some of what you want to say for a physical meeting.

Be very open and honest with your communication and don't be shy. Ask the questions that are important to you and listen carefully to the answers. Be attentive and show interest in your partner. Try to build an image of this person in your mind as it is difficult to associate an online name with an actual personality. Don't make your decisions too quickly. People can have very different personalities online than off.

Personalize all your communications. Include a greeting with the recipients name and a closing with your name. Never send bulk messages. Reply to everyone who takes the time to write to you. Even if it's just to say you aren't interested. It's common courtesy.

Some additional points to keep in mind with respect to online chatting:

- Proofread everything and make sure the recipient will take what you've written as intended. The beauty of online communication is that you can take

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the time required to communicate effectively and taking a little more time builds anticipation.

- Check your spreadsheet to make sure you're not repeating yourself or asking questions that have already been answered.
- Consider leaving a new email for a while and come back to re-read and send it later. You may find an error you missed earlier.
- Use humor and honesty to recover from mistakes you have made. Your online friend has likely made the same mistakes at some point and should understand.

Emoticons

Emoticons are text or graphic images that are displayed in e-mail, chat or other messaging systems to help overcome the fact that typed messages don't include the same queues that accompany natural speech. Sometimes a typed message can be misinterpreted, especially when it is meant to be taken in a humorous fashion rather than literally. Emoticons were originally included as a sequence of characters in a message. The most widely used is the winking face ;-) which is used to denote a remark that is meant to be taken humorously. Here are a few more descriptions:

Annoyed	> :- (Sad	: - (
Astonished	8 - O	Sarcasm	: -]
Blowing a kiss	: - { }	Stick out tongue	: - p
Devil] : - >	Surprised	: - O
Happy	: ^ D	Winking	; -)
Hugs	((()))	Yawning	- O
Good grief!	- {		

With modern text messaging systems such as MSN Messenger these emoticons can be inserted into a message as a graphical image, giving a more dramatic and clear effect than what can be achieved with the character version. Most of these systems provide keystrokes you can type for entering the emoticons. Look through the online help for your particular product and search for "emoticons" to find the appropriate section.

Another technique used in online messaging doesn't have a sexy name like "emoticons" so I'll refer to it as abbreviations. These are acronyms or abbreviations of common terms. For example the four letters "IMHO" stand for "in my humble opinion". Here are some common abbreviations:

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Grin	<g>	In my humble opinion	IMHO
As a matter of fact	AAMOF	Later	L8R
As far as I'm concerned	AFAIC	Laughing my ass off	LMAO
As soon as possible	ASAP	Laughing my head off	LMHO
Boy friend	BF	Laughing out loud	LOL
Beats the hell outta me	BTHOM	Mind your own business	MYOB
Correct me if I'm wrong	CMIIW	None of your business	NOYB
Hug	H	On the floor laughing	OTFL
If you know what I mean	IYKWIM	Pain in the ass	PITA
In real life	IRL	Rolling on the floor laughing	ROTFL
Kiss	K	Repondez s'il vous plait (please reply)	RSVP
See you later	CUL8R	Smile	S
See ya	CYA	Situation normal, all f*cked up	SNAFU
See you all later	CYAL8R	Sh*t out of luck	SOL
Significant other	SO	That's all for now	TAFN
Face to face	F2F	This oughta be good	TOBG
For your information	FYI	Ta-ta for now	TTFN
Get a life	GAL	Talk to you later	TTYL
Girl friend	GF		

Emoticons and abbreviations are a fun way to get a little chummy in an online communication and cut down on the amount of typing involved. Be prepared to explain one of these if your partner doesn't understand.

Save on typing

In your dating efforts you will likely converse with close to a hundred potential partners a year. This can lead to a great deal of repetitive typing. In my efforts I found it easier to keep a number of pre-typed messages in a document and copy and paste them as necessary into e-mails I sent. These pre-typed messages included initial e-mails to potential matches, common questions I liked to ask, answers to questions I was frequently asked and little stories about myself that I shared. Be **very** careful not to repeat yourself when sending these pre-typed messages. You can use a spreadsheet to indicate which items you've sent to a contact to avoid this embarrassing situation.

Knock, knock!

With tools such as MSN Messenger you can tell when your friends are online. Try not to be too distracting to others as a result of this feature. When you receive notification that one of your friends has come online don't immediately try to start a conversation with them. They've likely come to their computer for a specific reason and your interruption may be unwelcome. Instead wait a little before contacting them. This will also help in the case where they've turned on their computer but are doing something else while it boots.

A minor privacy issue relating to the above mentioned feature is that you may not want people to know your online status. Your communication software should have the ability to set your status to "offline" regardless of whether you're around or not. If you notice that some of your friends are online and you would like to let them know you're available you can set yourself back to "online" for a short while. Your software may also have the ability to block certain users from contacting you and seeing whether you are online.

Exercise Caution

Be careful when building friendships online. It's very easy for someone to assume a persona and wait for you to become overly comfortable before making their true intentions known. The combination of someone else misleading you and your mind reading into their profile what you want to hear can lead to a very dangerous situation. Be on the lookout for mistakes or slip-ups that can identify these people. I suggest getting to know someone offline in a safe environment before sharing any personal information.

Be careful about becoming too involved online. It is a well known fact that the perceived anonymity of online communication makes people open up more than they would in person.

Take care with your online discussions until you've met your partner in person. This means no really personal information and nothing that goes beyond friendship should be discussed. This includes cybersex and to some degree excessive "flirting" because you don't have the visual and aural clues that you would have in real life that indicate you are just flirting. This same problem exists for sarcasm online but this can be overcome with the use of the ;-) emoticon.

There is much more to a person than what they may present to you online. In order to keep your online discussions in perspective try to keep in mind that your goal while communicating online is to discover good friends. Progressing to something more should happen offline.

Try not to let your online discussions become too obsessive. Write clearly and not too often. Focus on one person at a time and don't get into the habit of maintaining multiple simultaneous conversations. If you start feeling like the online world has become an addiction take some time away from it.

Ask plenty of questions and listen closely to the answers you receive. Watch for inconsistencies that indicate the person may not be what they describe. Pop into a chat room at one of the personals sites and just watch for a while. Try different rooms to get a feel for what other people chat about online. Some of the rooms can get very steamy so don't follow those examples until you and your partner are ready.

Some things to keep in mind when dealing with a new prospect:

- If it sounds too good to be true, keep your guard up and find out if it is.
- If things seem to be moving too quickly, take some time off to regroup.
- If there are any inconsistencies in the information provided by your partner do not let things progress until you've resolved those issues.
- If you are unsure of a situation discuss it with a close friend for input.

Ready to meet?

Once you've communicated enough with someone online to know that there is some compatibility, plan a face-to-face meeting. Use this as a test to see if you can build a real rapport with this person and if there truly is some chemistry between you. If your partner refuses to meet or swap pictures even after a considerable amount of communication online, break it off and continue your search. They may have no intention of forming "real" relationships and may just be playing games. If you receive a polite rejection online always send a polite response thanking the sender for taking the time to respond. If the rejection was less than polite don't fuel the fire, instead simply drop it.

When choosing your place to meet pick a public location. Remember that you shouldn't trust this person until you've known them face-to-face for some time. Plan for a short first meeting so either party won't feel uncomfortable too long if things don't work out.

Go over all the information you've accumulated about this person before meeting. Note the names of family, friends and pets as you don't want to get these wrong. Put together a list of topics you'd like to cover in the meeting.

Remember that until you've spent significant time with this person you haven't built a level of trust with them. Watch your drink and food, if they do leave your sight make an excuse for either not finishing or ordering a replacement. Don't leave your purse or other valuables or personal items unattended. Think about having a cell phone along so that you can call for assistance if required. Don't provide personal information such as where you live or work just yet. Take your time to build that trust before proceeding. I suggest you don't drink on the first meeting in order to ensure that you are in control of your decisions and don't inadvertently say something you shouldn't.

Make sure you've got your own mode of transportation and that someone you trust knows where you are, who you'll be seeing and when to expect you back. This person must be prepared to come looking for you and take the necessary steps should you not call at the appointed time. If you have a cell phone have this person call you at designated times to make sure things are going along well. One of these calls can be used as an excuse to cut a meeting short if things aren't going well. Trust your instincts when you feel things aren't right and make a polite exit. There is no need to stay if you're not comfortable.

If you are stuck for things to talk about and places to meet consider my [relationship e-books](#). They provide a wealth of information on these and many other topics.

Keep your first meeting a little short. You should allow enough time to exchange some essential information but you want to leave your partner wanting to meet again to continue. Try to avoid a situation where you've run out of questions. Choose a reason for ending the meeting other than "well that's all I wanted to ask", but instead provide some indication that you wish you didn't have to end so soon.

Never extend a meeting unexpectedly. An offer to continue the meeting past what you had planned is a bad idea. Have a definite time by which you want to end the meeting and don't go over.

Always follow up your offline meeting with a quick e-mail thanking your partner, even if it's only to politely say that you're not interested or even better if you'd like to meet again!

Long distance meetings

The world of Internet dating transcends geographical bounds. Two people may meet and become friends regardless of their respective location. Once a long-distance relationship moves offline however, there are some special issues that come into play. Before taking this step get to know your partner very well and include a number of telephone conversations to get a better feel for the person. In order to cut down on telephone costs consider using Internet telephony such as [Net2Phone](#). Make sure you have exchanged some good pictures so neither of you are surprised when you meet.

If you know someone living near your partner consider asking them to meet to get an opinion of this person before you commit to meeting them yourself. Even though you may have swapped pictures, don't expect immediate recognition. Make sure your initial meeting is well planned so you don't miss each other and have a backup plan such as a home phone number in case your travel plans go awry.

Since there is so much more cost in such a meeting ensure you are both clear on your expectations. Plan a couple of hours to spend together at the most. You can plan for two meetings on separate days but make sure your partner is aware that the second meeting is subject to how well the first meeting goes. Follow the same safety guidelines outlined for local meetings and under no circumstances get involved in the living arrangements of your visiting friend. They should be making arrangements for accommodation at a local hotel.

If you are the one traveling, have someone you trust expect to hear from you every day. If you don't call they should be prepared to provide your itinerary, name and address of your host to the authorities. Arrange your own accommodation at a hotel where your room has an inside door, requiring visitors

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to walk by the front desk. Keep your key to yourself.

You should discuss the costs of a long distance visit with your partner. Consider splitting the cost of the first visit.

Epilogue

The Internet is a wonderful tool but your search involves much more. For in-depth information on finding everything from an exciting date to a lifelong partner review my growing selection of [relationship e-books](#) which list all the tools at your disposal and how best to employ them to maximize your results. You'll learn how to overcome old relationships, where to look for a new partner both online and offline, how to recognize a compatible partner, how to overcome shyness in order to approach people and strike up a conversation. You will learn the techniques and methods used by countless people to do everything from spicing up their sex life to finding their soul mate.

I am always ready to accept your comments, suggestions and stories as they enrich my life and allow me to improve my work. Please feel free to drop me an e-mail at OnlineDating@DocDom.com and I'll be sure to read it.

I hope this pamphlet has been of use to you. Please feel free to share a copy with your friends! As a special "thank you" for spreading this work I give you the following coupon which you may apply towards the purchase of one of my e-books.

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