The How and Why Guide

Benefits of Online Dating

Online dating is a popular way to meet people and is being used by more and more singles every year. Online dating is not as personable as real life relationship-hunting in many ways, but there are too many benefits to online dating to discount this new dating world altogether.

People choose online dating for many reasons. It is first and foremost an easier way to make connections for many. Online, there is less embarrassment when making initial contact and you can get to know a person before sharing pictures. When you date online, connections can be based more on personality than on looks, something that people wish could occur in the regular dating world. This is beneficial for you, but for other people as well, since you will be less biased about looks.

Online dating also gives you a way to connect with more people who are better suited to your specific wants and needs. By looking at a person's profile you can get to know them before making initial contact, so you can save yourself and others from conversations and dates that are simply a waste of time. For example, if you don't want children but are physically attracted to a girl who has written in her profile that she is a single mother, you know that the match probably will not work. In real life, you might not find out that information until after the first few dates, and by that time both people could be attached and feelings get hurt. Online dating also lets you match up with people who have similar religions, smoking preferences, political affiliations, and interests so you can find better matches.

Lastly, online dating links you with people all over the world. If you are moving soon or have recently moved, you can find singles in that new area without physically being out there yet. You can also pursue relationships from afar if you find that you are willing to move for someone but are not sure yet where you'd like to go. In most profiles, you can see if the other person is willing to move for a relationship or not, so it makes it easy for you to understand another's feelings about such things.

This is a dating method that is very cost effective, since a number of sites are free. Going to a bar every weekend in search of the perfect girl or guy can get expensive. Any sites with monthly fees will not require as much money as going out every weekend. You can also search on your own time—like during lunch breaks or late at night—so you aren't limited if you have a strict work schedule. There are many benefits to online dating, so you should definitely consider this option when searching for love.

Different Types of Online Dating Services

The online dating world is growing every day. A number of sites exist to help people connect, and these varied sites all provide different things for users who sign up for their services. Before you begin your online dating experience, research your many choices of online dating sites by checking out reviews and policies. Dating sites typically fall into five general categories, so be sure you know what you need in an online dating website before you make a choice about which kind of site to join.

First, chose how general you would like to be with your online dating. General online dating sites are most common and by registering (often for free) you can have access to literally millions of online daters. Profiles can be very specific or very general depending on the website, and you will find that everyone uses these websites for different purposes—some to find casual dates and friendships, other to find relationships, and still others to find physical encounters.

Compatibility websites, however, are more focused on finding serious daters who are looking for long-term relationships and, eventually, marriage. Here, it is not uncommon to pay for services to find your matches. You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire upon applying so that the website can match you with the best potential relationship candidates. Eharmony is one of the best-known compatibility websites.

You might also try your luck at a niche website. These online dating sites are special for people of a certain interest, hobby, religion, et cetera. This can be a great way to meet friends, not just people you would consider for relationships. There are hundreds of websites to meet anyone's needs, from those that target pet lovers to those who target Christians.

Another type of online dating site is really not based on online dating at all. These networking sites are large websites seeking to connect friends with people they already know. College students often use Facebook for this purpose, and MySpace is another popular choice. These can, however, become dating websites, since you can browse through a number of profiles to meet new people. It is important to remember here that most people on these sites are not there to date, so proceed with caution.

Lastly, there is a group of websites that are becoming more popular, and are designed to merge real world dating and online dating. These services allow to you create and place a profile online and then print your site onto a business card, which you can than hand to people you meet in real life so that they can connect with you at a later date if desired. It is the online dating equivalent to giving someone your phone number.

Because these types of websites are so different, research all options fully before making a decision. Online dating can be time consuming, so you'll want to be prepared no matter what website you ultimately choose.

Who Dates Online?

Surprisingly, online dating began as a fad and now is a staple in the dating world. Daters took this tool and used it full force, and now new sites are appearing every day to focus on matching people with those who could be true love. Multi-million dollar campaigns are now used to promote dating websites, and billions of accounts have been created, some of which are no longer in service because of the success rate of online dating. So who dates online? The answer to that question may surprise you.

Everyone dates online. From college students to senior citizens, online dating has taken full force. If you are considering online dating, it is nothing to be embarrassed about. Although there are still some who are opposed to such ideas, online dating is essentially setting yourself up on a blind date—and you can probably do a better job at it than your friends do.

Young adults date online regularly. This generation grew up having Internet access and so online dating is not a strange concept. Online, you can find people who go to the same college as you or have similar plans following graduation. Young adults can use online dating resources to find other things as well—namely, networking connections. It is easy to strike up a conversation on an online dating website with someone who goes to a graduate school you are considering, and this connection may be able to give you insight about the admissions process. The same is true in the job world.

Older adults also use online dating websites. With work and sometimes even children to take up time, traditional dating can be difficult. Everyone is short on time these days, especially when it takes multiple dates with different people to find the right one. You can check your email at any time of day, however, so this is a perfect solution to the problem.

As far as people go, you can find people from almost every race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual preference dating online. Corporate executives date online; so do hourly custodians. Christians, Hindus, and atheists all date online. Single mothers date online—single fathers do as well. Online, you can even search for people who best suit your relationship needs. That is, you can find people who enjoy the same music as you, like to eat the same food as you, and practice the same religion as you. Online dating is something you should consider, because more people have used this method successfully than you probably realize.

Safety First: Making Sure Your Profile Doesn't Reveal Too Much

The first impression people will get of you when you join a dating website is from your profile. Depending on what website you use, your profile may reveal a number of things about you, including your location, interests, musical tastes, and future plans. When creating your profile, it is important that you are honest and complete, as you will get more matches or messages this way. However, it is also very important for you to be sure that your profile does not reveal too much information—remember that anyone, from the innocent lonely man next door to the predator looking for a new woman to attack can read your profile. Be complete and honest, but be safe as well.

The first step to being safe is to be elusive about the place where you live. In most cases you will be asked to list a city and state. In some cases, you may only feel comfortable listing a state—in your profile you can write a little more, such as you live in "southern Iowa" or "near the finger lake region of New York." This is a good option if you live in a very small town. If you live in a larger city, however, there is usually no harm in listing that you live in Philadelphia, for example, or Los Angeles. It is unsafe, though, to ever list your address or phone number, and you may even wish to consider leaving out your zip code. Being too specific is dangerous.

Also carefully view your profile for specifics that you may not have realized you were writing. For example, you may have pride in your college, but naming your colors, mascot, and school name can lead predators to your location if you still live in the area. Specifics can be found in your pictures as well. When you post a picture at your favorite nightclub, amusement park, golf range, etc, you give criminals a clue as to where you live.

Lastly, be safe when communicating with others. Most online dating websites provide options for daters to talk to one another through either email or instant messages. When you feel comfortable with another person, you may be able to let down your guard slightly, but still be wary of people wanting specific information and your whereabouts or daily routine. Always remember that it is very easy for people to lie over the Internet. Keep your wits about you and carefully review your profile often to make sure that you stay safe.

The Popularity Contest: How to Grab Attention with Your Profile

Many online sites include counters so that you can see how many viewers look at your page every day. Some sites even make this information public—that is, they post the counter on your profile for everyone to see. Now, it goes without saying that the longer you're a member, the higher your number of views will be. However, you may have noticed that others who seem to be similar to you have countless views every day while you simply get one or two. If you're serious about online dating, it is important to understand why you aren't getting a large number of views, and then correct the problems. The more people who view your profile, the more likely it will be that you meet someone with relationship potential.

First off, you need to grab a person's attention. Be sure that you have a location selected so that when people use search options based on location, your name appears on their list. Find out what information is listed when you perform a search. Many dating websites give users the option to create a "headline" for their profiles, and this, along with age and location (and sometimes picture) is given to the searcher, who can choose to click on your name and continue on to your profile.

Be sure to have a picture uploaded. Many people will only consider contacting people who post pictures. If you do not have a picture on your profile, you arouse the suspicions of other online daters. In short, it seems like you have something to hide. Any picture, even if you consider it unflattering, is better than no picture at all.

Always write a creative headline and always be concerned with your user name. The headline "Looking for a Date" may not get many views based on its generic qualities. However, a headline such as "Anyone want to Go Golfing?" shows that you have specific interests and are up for a possible real life meeting. Your user name works in much of the same way. Joe123 will never get as many messages as EaglesFan2003. Make sure your name and headline say something about you. However, bring attention in a good way—stay away from blatantly sexual names and phrases, which are unattractive to most users and show you in a light that may not be best.

As a final step, reply to the messages you receive, even if you are not interested. Many sites list the percentage of messages that are viewed and how often you reply. Someone who sees that you only view 20% of your messages and even further, only reply to 8% of them may be instantly discouraged from messaging you. However, if you view 100% of your messages and reply to 85% of them, he or she may not be so timid.

Be honest, be responsive, and be creative. With a little hard work, your profile can gain the popularity that you see others have. The more views

you get, the more likely you are to meet online daters who have similar interests as you, so it is in your best interest to create an attention-grabbing profile.

Speak Up: Online Conversation Starters

Once you have joined an online dating site, it is simple to browse through hundreds or even thousands of potential online friends. Starting the actual conversation, however, can be difficult if you are not sure what to say. Don't let nerves get the best of you! If you do not start conversations online, you may never meet people who have relationship potential. Finding things to talk about should be easy once you get the conversation started, but the first few words are always the most difficult ones.

Commonly, people message those they are interested in with a simple "hello" or "hi." This is fine, because it gives the other person your screen name and he or she can check your profile to see if a conversation would be appropriate. If the other person does not answer, do not be offended—Internet connections are sometimes lost. After saying hello for the first time, you can choose to either generically start the conversation by asking how the other person is doing or asking what they are doing at the moment. However, if you have not planned ahead further than that, your conversation could die with one-word answers.

A good starting point can usually be found in the other person's profile. What attracted you to him or her in the first place? Perhaps you share a common interest—talk about that. For example, if he or she lists that they love to cook, you might want to talk about your favorite recipes. Likewise, if you notice a common band that you both enjoy is listed in the other's profile, comment on that and share a story about seeing them in concert (or your wish to see them in concert!). You can talk about anything and everything about your hobbies this way and it will also lead to other questions about other hobbies.

Talking about future plans and goals is a good place to start as well. Ask the other person about their job or schooling and tell them about yours. Are career changes likely in the future? Why? You can also talk about other commonalties, like family and religion, as well as a variety of other things. Think of a few initial questions and let the conversation flow from there. If it does not, chances are that you are not very compatible. There is no shame is saying goodbye to someone and not talking to them again in the future—online dating is not about meeting hundreds of people, it is about finding one who has relationship potential or perhaps finding a few who can become closer friends. Let the conversation gauge whether this is possible, but remember that you must get things started, so be prepared with a few conversational topics.

Learn how to LOL

When you begin your online search for love or friendship, one of the most common ways to communicate with another online dater is through an instant messenger system. Some websites have these programs embedded in their sites, while others do not. In either case, you can choose to use a third party messenger system, such as those provided for free by AOL or Yahoo. However, no matter how you connect with another person for a chat session, one thing is a certainty—you need to understand the modern language used on messaging programs.

Talk may be cheap, but time is priceless, so when speaking online, many shortcuts are used to speed up the process. Conversations, because of this, take less time online than say, for instance, on the telephone. Many phrases once unique to online instant message talk include acronyms such as LOL (laugh out loud), BRB (be right back), BBL (be back later), ILU (I love you), and TTYL (talk to you later.) A/S/L is a common online acronym used exclusively on dating sites—it means "age, sex, location?" and is used to show initial interest in getting to know another person.

Learning to use online instant messenger systems goes beyond LOL and BRB. You also must be able to use emoticons, also called "smilies." Use by all of the major free online messenger systems, emoticons can also be inserted into the text or emails. A happy face appears, for example, as the following: :-). Other commonly used emoticons include :-(sad, >:-(angry, :-o surprised, :-* kiss, :-x not speaking, ;-) wink, and the ever popular :-p tongue-stick-out. Of course, you can be creative and make your own or search the web to see elaborate and funny emoticon creations. Some messenger programs have certain set emoticons that you can choose from a list to be inserted into your text as a picture.

Online language is all about being quick and to the point. Many people find that instant messaging can become addicting, as it is often more easy to be frank when you are not face to face with another person. Flirting online can be fun and addicting as well. Remember not to take up too much of the other person's time. If you are both enjoying the conversation, that's great, but if the other person is not replying to your messages, he or she may not be interested or may have stepped away from the computer. Respect this and wait politely before sending yet another message. If you learn the language of the Internet, you are one step closer to finding your love online, so practice your LOLing and I'll TTYL.

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