

Lessons in love: online

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The facts about online dating

Maybe you work long hours. Maybe you don't like the bar scene. Or maybe you're just too shy to take the initiative to introduce yourself to someone. It's the day-to-day obstacles that keep people from finding "the one."

People of all ages, lifestyles and locations have all faced this problem. In the last 10 years or so, a new solution has arrived to help lonely hearts find their soul mates: online dating.

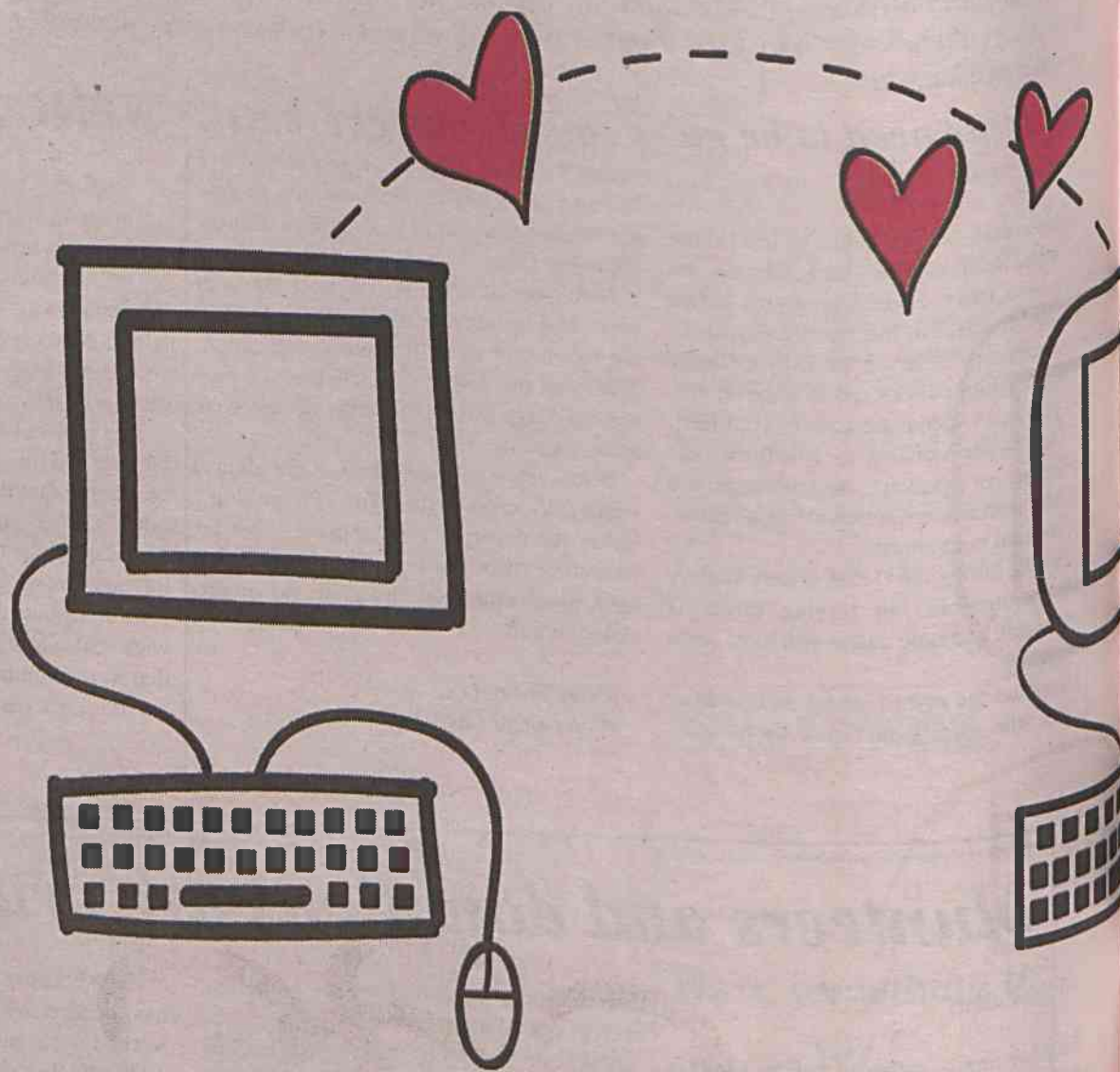
So many of us work too hard, or spend so much time doing other things that we don't have time to get out and meet people. While many of us expect someone to just appear, most of us realize that this won't happen. As more people are having trouble meeting someone, more are turning to online dating services.

There are over 100 million single adults in the United States alone and over 17 million looked at online dating services in 2002, with a prediction that this number will have doubled by the end of the year, according to an article titled "How Online Dating Works." And it is not just a female thing either. About 48 percent of men have used online dating services to find their new soul mate.

Whether someone is looking for a long-term relationship or a fun fling, the process can be made easier online. There's no having to worry about what you're wearing or where you are going since meeting and talking to someone can be done in the privacy of your own home with you, the computer and a potential match.

There are so many dating sites out on the Web. Several have even started to focus on getting specific groups of people to their sites. For example, there are Web sites specifically for seniors, Muslims, fitness-oriented people or people who are just looking for new friends. However, the sites with the most members are still the ones that boast romantic match-making as their number one priority. <http://www.Eharmony.com> reports 10,000 to 15,000 new users every day and <http://www.Match.com>, the leader in online dating services, has over 8 million members. Match.com opened in 1995 and their site reports that each year over 200,000 members find the partner they were looking for.

After entering an online dating site, you can look at other people's profiles without making one of your own. The amount of information you can look at depends on the site. Some sites let users restrict access to their profiles to paying members only. Sometimes photos are only displayed if you have a paid membership. This preserves anonymity, so no one looks at your profile unless you want them to. Only with a paid subscription can someone see the picture on your profile.



The Basics: All you need to know about creating your own profile

To make your own profile you start with basic information. Are you a male or a female? Are you looking for a relationship or are you interested in? Where do you live? Profile information may also include where you were born and an e-mail address to communicate with you through this address. Some sites let users send messages to your e-mail address while others send you a message, it is routed through the site's system and redirected to your e-mail without the other user ever seeing it. Next is usually next. Height, weight, hair and eye color and body type are common questions. Then you describe whether you like authors, music or movies or how you like to spend weekends. More personal questions might include whether you want children, your religious beliefs and your political views. Pets, occupation, income and living situation are also asked. Next, you'll be asked to answer questions like these to describe your ideal date. The site will then use this information to provide you with a list of matches.

If you are a paying member of the dating site, you can then start contacting other users if you like what you see. You can tell them you want to contact and what you'll say. After e-mailing back and forth, many people start meeting in person.

Many of the Web sites for dating are free, which makes them an even bigger convenience when you are trying to find a date. Some sites that make people subscribe, which may seem like a disadvantage, but can really be a good thing. If people are serious about finding a date. This can be comforting, especially when you begin to get more serious with someone. Some sites also have access to better profile searches and other advanced features.