

Chapter 1

The Magic of Online Dating

In This Chapter

- Understanding what makes Internet dating such a powerful tool for meeting new people
- Overcoming your stereotypes about Internet dating

Close your eyes and imagine you're walking down a crowded street in Manhattan during the lunchtime rush on a pleasant summer day. Assume you're a single woman, divorced six months ago, in your late 30s or early 40s, and finally ready to start dating again.

You scan the crowd. Half are women. Of the men, some are way too young, too old, or too unattractive, but among the 200 or so people in your field of vision, 15 or so, may be age and gender appropriate. And within that 15, you see three that strike you as datable. What do you do? Do you go up to each of them and ask them if they're single, straight, and interested in a date this Saturday? And even if you had the courage to do just that, would you really want to date a complete stranger? By the time you had the courage to walk over to him, he may have already headed back to work, and you just missed him and the two other prospects across the street. This is the dilemma of modern urban adult singles. Dates (and maybe even mates) are out there, but where? And in any case, how many dates can you go on before randomly stumbling into a match?

Now imagine this alternate reality: You log on XYZ-onlinedating.com. You run a search of the database of prospects that sound suitable to you: a man, divorced, living within 25 miles (40km) from your home, about 5-feet-10-inches (180cm) tall, weight 160 to 180 lbs (70–80 kg), with a master's degree and children. The search returns 75 prospects, of which 55 have photos.

Scanning the photos, you find five who are extremely attractive, 15 more whose looks appeal to you, five more who give you a so-so

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chemical response, and the rest, you couldn't imagine dating. Of the 20 or so that pique your interest, you read their personal essays and preferences in women. Half of the essays are pretty lame, but a few show signs of life. In fact, after reading the essays of some of the guys you didn't think were visually interesting, you find a couple more who seem to have enough upstairs to make up for their apparent visual weakness. You write to a few, and a few respond. You've done this all in about two hours from your kitchen and in your pajamas, late at night.

Both scenarios are completely realistic. In each case, appropriate singles are out there but in the first case, you simply don't know who they are. Even if they held up signs saying "I'm available," you wouldn't know anything about them. So making contact is a double crapshoot. What are the odds that you will pick out a good, single one before your confidence goes below sea level?

Adding a Little Order to Your Dating

Traditional dating is fundamentally random. Consider this:

By sheer luck, you're invited to a party. By chance, you meet a friend there. The friend is talking to someone who is single. You find the person physically interesting. He or she also shows signs of interest. You start a conversation that goes well. The party ends. One of you has the courage to propose exchanging phone numbers. You have a second date. You find out more about this person. You like what you see. So does he or she. And so on and so on.

Notice that if, at any step along the way, you realize you're not a match, you quit and wait until another random event (like the party) occurs and you try again.

Considering the advantages of online dating, especially when compared to finding a mate in the nonvirtual world, we are amazed that the human race has managed to propagate without the benefit of computers up to this point in time.

Internet dating offers these benefits:

- ✔ You know that (almost) every person posted online is available and looking for some kind of companionship, so that embarrassing question "are you in a relationship" is assumed to be "no".

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- ✓ You know with a reasonable degree of accuracy, a great deal of data about each prospect (age, height, location, education, vocation, children, religion, and so on) before you exchange word one. (Dating sites that use personality profiles provide even more advanced data.)
- ✓ You know something about how he or she thinks and writes (depending on the dating site).
- ✓ You know roughly what he or she looks like.
- ✓ You know how to contact him or her.
- ✓ You have the chance to exchange e-mail and talk on the phone without ever revealing your identity, until you're comfortable doing so.
- ✓ You can move on to the next prospect quickly if there seems to be little interest after initial contacts.
- ✓ You can do all this for less than what it costs you to go out to dinner at a moderate-priced restaurant.

No other form of dating compares in its ability to bring so many available singles together with tons of information about each, and it provides a quick and efficient way to ferret out matches.

Why Online Dating Is a Good Idea

You're reading this book, so you're at least intrigued by the concept of online dating. If you're not sure if this mode of dating is right for you, the next few sections offer some selling points, and if you need more convincing, check out the rest of Part I.

An almost limitless supply of people are online

Remember the earlier example about meeting someone at a party? Never mind how random that whole event is. How *frequent* is it that you find yourself in a situation where you're surrounded by age-appropriate singles? Online, you're surrounded by age-appropriate singles every time you log on. And if you don't find enough people at one site, you can go to any of hundreds of other sites, or you can simply wait a while and a new crop of singles will have signed on.

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In effect the number of potential matches is essentially limitless and perpetually changing. Compare that to your current social circles. In addition to college, when was the last time you were exposed to a few hundred age-appropriate matches?

Internet dating is way more convenient than traditional dating

When was the last time you prospected for dates in your pajamas at 3 a.m.? The whole concept of virtual dating is that the community of single prospects is available to you whenever you want to meet them. For people with day jobs, children, and other social obligations, prospecting online at odd hours is the only way to go.

Not only can you log on at odd hours, but you also can log on for short amounts of time. In our example of the party, you have to dress up and commit to several hours of socializing with the possibility of not even meeting one age-appropriate single. You know who is age appropriate online, and you can initiate contact in ten minutes and log off. Then log on again later or the next day and see if you got a response.

You can parallel-date at warp speed

In our party example, your odds of striking up a conversation with *one* potential prospect is relatively small, but the chances of meeting two or three? Well, your chances are right up there with being hit by a meteorite.

Online, you can certainly initiate contact with multiple prospects at the same time because the process of initiating contact is so simple. Then you can engage them in e-mail and phone exchanges until you can determine which, if any, are worth dating. If none, you just go back to the trough.

Some “brilliant” mastermind once said dating is a “numbers game.” As you meet more people, your odds of meeting a “good one” improve. Internet dating is entirely designed around fast and efficient initial contacts. After you see potential, you can then slow down the normal dating speed and concentrate on determining if you have a true match — just like in traditional dating.

Internet dating eliminates the awkwardness of first introductions

Are you good at walking up to a stranger and saying hello? Not too many people are and we weren't either. In online dating, the effort of making first contact is so slight that the fear of rejection simply melts away. After you initiate an e-mail exchange, a reply arrives and the ice thaws. For many people, just getting past the initial encounter successfully makes the rest of dating easier.

Unlocking Internet Dating's Secrets

If you're going to succeed at online dating, you have to recognize that it's different from traditional dating. So, what's the secret to Internet dating? In order to succeed, remember to use the Internet as a way to gain insight into the available and appropriate singles. Remember that a dating site is much more than a directory of available singles; it's a means to get into the prospect's character and personality by virtue of an ongoing exchange that takes place before you meet! And that's why Internet dating is traditional dating turned on its head. When you finally do meet your prospect in person, you aren't strangers. The date is with someone who is a suitable match with respect to age, values, and future goals. The date feels like a reunion and proceeds at a much more advanced level. The date is like getting "together again. . . for the first time" (thanks Yogi Berra).

Therefore, to succeed at Internet dating, you must

- ✓ Have a good sense of who you are
- ✓ Have a good sense of what you're looking for in a date/mate
- ✓ Have a reliable way to get online, surf the Web, send and receive e-mail, and maybe even take part in online chats
- ✓ Read the prospects' profiles carefully (for example, looking past the photos) and try to find nuggets of information about the prospects that make them suitable
- ✓ Engage in e-mail exchanges with prospects to ferret out additional information that can tell you if your prospects are a reasonable match
- ✓ If you discover you're not a match, you can disengage quickly, and move on with minimal discomfort.

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If you follow this plan, which we explain thoroughly in this book, you can vastly improve your odds of de-randomizing the dating process.

Overcoming Preconceived Notions of Who Is Online

If we have convinced you that online dating makes perfect sense as an efficient and effective way to meet appropriate people, make sure you head into the process in the right state of mind.

Every new invention ever developed has had its naysayers. Internet dating is just one more example that has its detractors. The press loves to run stories of nightmare experiences of online daters, but in fact these stories are rare, and certainly more likely with encounters at a bar. We also suspect that these nightmarish online encounters are far more likely to occur in the many available free chat rooms, rather than a reputable online dating service with its requisite essay and cost commitments.

The fact is that Internet dating is *very* mainstream today. The numbers of people reported dating online in North America ranges from 10 to 30 million! And Internet dating includes more than just 20-somethings. The fastest-growing segment of online daters is older than 40, and it makes perfect sense, because that group is the least likely to have access to more traditional avenues for dating (see Chapter 2).

Furthermore, dating sites indicate that their members tend to be more highly educated and financially well off than the general public. Part of that may be due to the fact that Internet dating requires some knowledge and access to computers, as well as the ability to pay the subscription fee.

So if you're thinking that Internet dating is for computer geeks or desperate people who can't get a date, you need only spend a few minutes perusing any national dating site to change your mind in a hurry.