

A relationship shopping spree

Online dating now a common reply to 'how did you two meet'



BY DAHLIA KURTZ, QMI AGENCY

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A growing number of Canadians find love in the cyber air. (QMI Agency files)

A few years ago when I met my husband online, Internet dating wasn't widely accepted. Now, not only is it accepted, but it's also almost expected.

Back then it had a stigma, but when my older brother tried and suggested e-dating, I reluctantly went for it too.

So I logged on, input my criteria, and lo and behold, who's the first match to pop up on my screen? My brother.

One major hurdle later -- and one day before my 30-day free membership expiry -- I met my future husband (who couldn't be any more different than my brother). We started off as long-distance friends of two years, then a couple, and now we're just part of the growing statistics literally marrying online to offline.

When it began in 1995, who knew Internet dating would become a bigger industry than porn.

Between 2007 and 2012 the online dating industry more than doubled its revenue, going from \$900 million to \$1.9 billion annually, and had a jump in visitors from 20 million to 40 million a year, according to information from MBAprograms.org.

With an estimated 1,500 sites there's something for every singleton, including farmers, over-50s, single parents, religious-minded, marriage-seekers, booty-callers, and there's even Positivesingles.com -- for those with HIV and other STDs.

But it's not just dating sites matching mates; it's social media too. After all, how many people use Facebook's relationship status as a free advertisement? A British survey found 72% of respondents used both dating sites and social networks to search for love, while 19% used social media sites alone.

And about half the people surveyed by research firm Synovate believe web dating is a great way to meet their

match. Even people who don't like it agree.

"I just really, really dislike online dating. But, I feel I have to do it anyway," says Samantha Tate. The 35-year-old cites the same need for it that many studies indicate: She has to look outside her own social circles to find someone, and long work hours equate to less workin' it hours.

So much like online shopping allows us to furnish our homes or closets in a click, it also allows us to furnish our relationships.

Jennifer Gibbs is an associate professor of communication at Rutgers University in New Jersey, who has done in-depth research on the subject (including meeting her husband online).

She says it can promote "relationshipshopping" (people-shopping and selling themselves) more than "relationshipshipping."

"Online dating can be a great portal or introduction, but it's just the first step and needs to be followed up with relationshipshipping to develop a relationship, a lot of which does happen offline," she says.

With relationshipshopping come picky buyers. Gibbs notes exaggerated importance is often placed on small cues such as typos, which can lead to quick rejection.

"It's easy for someone to decide they only want to date men 6 feet or taller, and filter out someone who is 5'11 -- when in person an inch of height difference would not be perceptible."

It may come as a surprise, but Gibbs thinks that most online dating participants strive to present themselves honestly. "My colleagues and I did find a lot of embellishment in our research, as many online daters do try to present an ideal version of themselves to attract potential partners -- in the same way that job-seekers embellish their resumes."

But she says it's mostly "white lies," and participants found lies were a waste since the truth comes out by the first date or later.

In the end, looking for love online may not be for you. The same way it wasn't for me -- the person who met her husband online.

CONTEST

Win a sleek HTC Raider Smartphone to create and capture those online dating moments. It retails for \$499.99 and up. To enter, comment on Dahlia's Facebook page ([Facebook.com/DahliaKurtz](https://www.facebook.com/DahliaKurtz)), or follow @DahliaKurtz on Twitter and tweet this story with the hashtag #eSaidSheSaid.

POLL

Have you tried online dating?

24%
No.

78
votes

64%
Yes.

210
votes

11%
I haven't, but I'm thinking about it.
36
votes

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