

Communicating with people on the internet



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The arrival of the internet has heralded a lot of new opportunities, created new markets, and afforded us new ways of interacting with each other. 'Meeting' new people is no longer limited to talking to the person you're sitting beside on the bus, or keeping in touch with someone you met at a bar. Now we can find friends from continents away. The internet is a busy place, full of people, many of whom share your own passions and interests. And not just friends, it's also a place where it's possible to meet someone special.

Naturally the hyper-connected youths of today use the internet as if it's an extension of themselves. For them meeting new people online seems like a given. But the internet holds just as much promise for the rest of us. It has grown in popularity as a way to find friends, to chat among like minded people, and for finding love, sex, quick flings, soulmates, partners, husbands and wives – depending on who's looking.

Nowadays there are more and more people who are single enough to use it. The number of people getting divorced is higher than ever. The US, UK, Canada, Russia, New Zealand and Australia all in the top ten for highest divorce rates (per 1, 000 people). Society has changed, and with it our values. It is no longer seen as socially unacceptable to leave someone. Why stay in an unhappy marriage? There are many women and men who have faced that very question. Of course there are still those who see it as a sign of a sinful society, or feminism run rampant, or the natural progression of a morally bankrupt western culture, or any number of fantasies that explain a trend in statistics they don't understand. In the past divorces were rare, but were the couples happy? Thankfully society is breaking free of old fashioned

attitudes. Where it would have been seen as debauched and morally sinful for a woman to leave her husband, or a man to leave his wife, now individuals have an 'out'. The modern world is about individual choice and personal freedom. Because of this, more people are single, and open to the possibility of meeting someone new.

People are also working harder. A busy career can leave little time to build a social life and result in a stagnant love life. Success can often bring more work, and more money, at the expense of someone to share it with. Many successful individuals are even reticent when it comes to looking for 'love'. Relationships can be a lot of trouble, and some people are content without them. Being far removed from our primitive origins, we are no longer slaves to biological imperatives. On the other end of the scale, it's thought that as many as a third of the 'singles' on the internet aren't quite as single as you'd think. But assuming we are single, free, and would like to find someone special, where do we look in the 21st century?

Bars and clubs are naturally as popular as ever. Many people still meet through work and friends. Many people bump into that special someone through a random encounter – a dropped batch of paperwork, getting stuck in a lift – it could be cliché, but it will still happen for some of us.

With the advent of the internet, meeting people online has become yet another option. A natural one, in this connected world we live in. Personals and dating are big business, bringing in \$503.4 million (US) in 2005 and showing consistent year after year growth. And in the UK, with its population

of around 60 million, 7.8 million singles used some form of dating service in 2007 according to a press release by dating service PARSIHIP.

Meeting people on the internet doesn't have to be conducted through 'dating' sites either. Many people who use the internet find people naturally as they wander the landscape of cyberspace. Nor is this a new phenomenon. The dawn of the internet saw the creation of crude bulletin boards and internet relay chat. People found each other using these services just as they do using Messenger clients and forums today. The technology has definitely advanced through, and this has brought people a large number of places to go on the internet.

There are many different services that run on the internet, here are some of them:

Internet relay chat

One of the oldest services on the internet, internet relay chat (IRC) is a service that posts messages to the page instantaneously so that the users can have a conversation that flows naturally in real time. There are thousands upon thousands of chatrooms available through IRC servers, and most of them are free. They can be accessed by downloading an IRC client, though sometimes a bit of configuring is needed to make it work. IRC isn't the easiest thing in the world to pick up and learn, a throwback from its early origins.

Messenger clients

From Yahoo Messenger to MSN, and now more recently Skype (which can be used in much the same way as a messenger between calls), messenger

<https://assignbuster.com/communicating-with-people-on-the-internet/>

clients allowed people to manage a list of contacts and then chat with those contacts just like in IRC. Unlike IRC, big improvements were made to the interfaces and ease-of-use that helped to explode the popularity of messengers until we find that most people use at least one. Messengers are also great for keeping in touch with business contacts, family, friends, among many other uses. One of the earliest messenger service called ICQ had a random chat button that would find you someone to chat to, or indeed allow them to find you.

Social Networks

Like them or loath them, social networks found their place as the heart of meeting people on the internet. At first they were places to link up with your friends and share information about you – what you were doing, how you felt, where you were, or indeed where you weren't (such as working). Social networks soon snowballed into a giant productivity eating monster. If you haven't heard of social networks then hello, and greetings 'under-rock person'. Some of the more well known include LiveJournal, MySpace, Facebook, and Bebo. LiveJournal mixes blogging and social networking, Facebook has become synonymous with social networks, MySpace synonymous with controversy and Bebo was huge in the UK then fell out of favour with users. The phenomena of keeping in touch with contracts led to new companies trying spinoffs of the idea. One of these – Twitter – lets users post short messages of up to 140 characters. These "tweets" can then be read by followers. Like them or loath them, social networks appear to be here to stay.

Work

Rather than have separate disjointed categories, let's lump everything that's done for the sake of work together. It can be emails, video conferencing, virtual conferencing, social networking, messaging. If your work requires you to liaise with anyone at all over the internet then there's always the chance of meeting someone you hit it off with. It happens all the time.

Friends

Friends are always looking out for you. If you're single then you can guarantee that your friends are looking out for someone to hook you up with. On the internet this behaviour is no different.

Dating services

Dating services started off as simple catalogs of user-made profiles, that could be searched according to any criteria. Paying users could then contact the users they found interesting. Growing from these primitive early systems, they added features such as live chat, messenger services, social networking and so on in order to stay ahead of competing services. Their combination of the best ideas found on the internet to provide the optimal environment for users to meet each other, and maintained the 'value' of the service so that people would continue to pay. Dating services have been one of the leading drivers of growth. Similarly there's also a lot of overlap between dating services and other internet services such as social networks.

Online Universes

Pushing internet interactions further into the futuristic vision of cyberspace, online worlds give us the Neuromancer vision of cyberspace. Gamers were

among the first to explore online universes. The advent of massively multiplayer online games (or worlds/universes/spaces) collectively known as MMOs added a new dimension to the internet. The earliest were game worlds, where users had no set goals, other than lead a double (and supposedly exciting) life as a mage, wizard, ranger, space pilot or any number of alternative personas depending on the game. These evolved, and soon virtual universes began to appear which played down gaming aspects and played up its usage as an alternative universe. Second Life proved to be one of the most popular, and its name captures the spirit in which many of these new universes were formed. Others, such as Entropia Universe grew out of games, but diversified into a platform for delivering anything the partner company could imagine (by renting out world). In these spaces, you can wander through virtual towns and meet people's avatars as they in turn go about their business. Avatars are, to steal a description from the matrix films, "the mental projection of your digital self". People customize their avatars and in doing so reveal a lot about themselves. Interestingly, people behave similarly to the way they do in real life, albeit with less inhibitions. Sociologists have a great time studying virtual worlds because of this, but that is a story for a different article. Virtual universes however are a little too gamelike for some of us. A more recent addition to the virtual universe landscape called IMVU cleverly combines messenger services with Virtual Universe services to create a hybrid that has found a more mainstream popularity than other virtual worlds. Users can keep in touch through a messenger like contact list, or use its social network-like website, and chat to users in virtual rooms. Unlike virtual worlds, there is no walking around. You can move your avatar around, but only to fixed locations called nodes.

<https://assignbuster.com/communicating-with-people-on-the-internet/>

Standing nodes feature in all rooms, and adding furniture adds more nodes. A couch will come with sitting nodes, and some furniture includes nodes for couples to sit snuggled together. Removing the ability to walk around, kept IMVU simple enough that the virtual universe features didn't overwhelm the chat features. Users can buy new rooms, furniture, clothes, pets. They can also buy streaming music to play in their rooms. People meet in virtual universes all the time. Sometimes they even get married in the online universe. Often they get married and then quickly split. Sometimes couples take their relationship further, and meet in 'real life'.

Does it work?

Implications

Dangers

Anonymity

Conclusion

What are people looking for? When asked the question: "For me, dating is mainly about.....?" in the top dating tips survey, the most popular answer was simply 'love', edging ahead of the rest with 21% of the votes.

Surprisingly, next came Marriage and Sex with 19% each.

1. Love 21%

2. Marriage 19%

3. Friendship 8%

4. Partnership 6%

5. Sex 19%

6. Company 3%

7. Social life 3%

8. Romance 12%

9. Conversation 3%

10. Sharing 6%

(Source: TopDatingTips. com)