

# Confessions of a (former) Online Dater

By Susan Johnston

As a member of the “My Space generation,” I use my computer for just about everything. I book airline flights on Orbitz, browse the headlines on CNN and search for cheap movies on eBay. One thing I haven’t found online is a boyfriend.

According to numerous dating sites, my perfect match is “just a click away.” All I need to do is check a few boxes, select a hair color, age range, even a religion, and... voila! Thousands of single men right at my fingertips, almost as easy as ordering a sweater from The Gap. But in reality I’m rarely happy with clothes I haven’t tried on first, and the men I’ve met online rarely live up to their profiles.

I had coffee with a guy who was so nervous he barely spoke for two hours. I nearly got arrested on a date with a grad student who spent the entire time regaling me with stories about his lab rats. And don’t get me started on the dozens of unsuitable suitors who emailed me X-rated photos or poetry too embarrassing to repeat here.

Online dating is not as simple as choosing a size, style and color from your favorite online retailer. I would say that it’s more akin to discount shopping. Sure, TJ Maxx has some great finds, but you have to dig through a whole lot of triple X t-shirts and irregular sweaters to find those perfect black pants conveniently marked down to 50% off. Similarly, you have to date a lot of people who are ten pounds heavier, two inches shorter and a lot less witty than their profiles suggest before meeting someone who approximates boyfriend or girlfriend material.

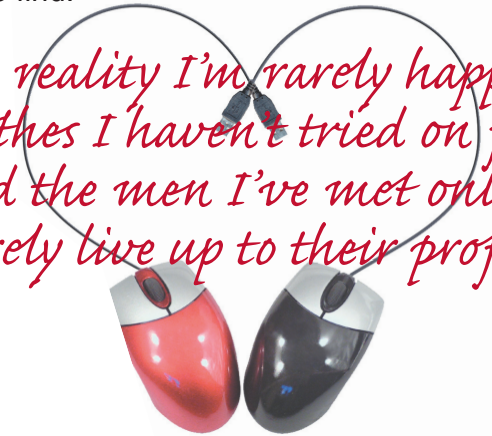
Eight months into my online dating odyssey I met someone who embodied all of the qualities I thought I was looking for. This tall, athletic Ivy Leaguer seemed perfect - he was confident but not cocky, romantic but not over-the-top, intelligent but not stuffy. Two months into our awkward courtship, I realized that this “good on paper” guy was not the guy for me. Even with all my “criteria” met, there was still something lacking.

Often internet daters look for superficial commonalities. It’s like the next generation of DataMatch. (Remember back in junior high when you filled out a bubble sheet with questions like “how do you eat your Reece’s?” and “which Ninja Turtle do you identify with?” Then for a mere two dollars, the student council told you who should be your Valentine. Even then, I was unlucky in love. My little brother appeared at the top of my list with 88% compatibility.)

Browsing online profiles will tell you someone’s hair color, star sign and income, but it won’t tell you about their conversation skills, their dating demeanor, or their lovable little quirks.

You can only discover those things face-to-face, and by then you’ve probably ruled out a lot of potential matches based on their height, income or photo.

If I limited my search to men who shared my love of showtunes and shopping, I would be in for a long, lonely life. I can see Wicked and hit the sale racks with my female (and gay male) friends, while he plays poker or cheers on the Pats with his buddies. Most single city dwellers don’t lack for activity partners – its that unexpected spark with the opposite sex that is so hard to find.



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And to find that connection, some online daters choose to comparison shop, posting their profiles on multiple websites. Instead of upping their odds, they often create more work for themselves, as they sift through the same profiles on match.com, lavalife, Yahoo Personals, Jdate and so on. Think about it - most of the large department stores have essentially the same merchandise, just as dating sites list many of the same people.

Don’t get me wrong. I’ve heard the success stories, the urban romances that sprouted in the face of friends’ skepticism and flowered into a living example of modern-day love. One of my best friends has had two successful relationships with men she met online (not simultaneously, in case you’re wondering). She recently moved in with Online Boyfriend Number Two, and they have a good laugh whenever someone brings up the circumstances of their meeting.

I, on the other hand, can only cringe when I think back on my cyber suitors. Call me old-fashioned, but from now on I’ll stick to meeting men in person instead of relying on my PC. ❤️