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Looking for love online

Can social media help you find 'the one' — or just a fling, asks
BROOKE EVANS-BUTLER



Picture: Getty Images/
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Online dating is more mainstream than ever, with people of all ages signing up in the hope of finding love.

“It is very, and increasingly, popular,” says Toby Miller, professor of cultural studies at Murdoch University. “The statistics show more than 4.5 million Australians have used online dating services.”

Are these people finding true love? Professor Miller says it is not known how many people are looking for love or brief encounters. There are a number of sites and apps available, depending on the type of relationship you are looking for (from casual to serious commitment) but he says some of the most popular sites for Australians looking for love include RSVP, eHarmony and PlentyOfFish.

EHARMONY

Professor Miller says eHarmony is focused on people forming

a serious commitment — with the site using a system to match individuals based on their compatibility.

In fact, eHarmony claims to be responsible for more than 11,000 marriages.

● eharmony.com.au

RSVP

RSVP caters for people looking for serious relationships or casual

dates, with more than 1200 new members signing up every day.

According to Lara Delahunty, RSVP senior marketing manager, members can use a range of ways to meet people through the site, including advanced-search functions and matches based on compatibility criteria and behavioural trends.

“This control and flexibility extends to how much our members choose to spend. It’s free to join, search and say hello



through our RSVP Kiss messages — members only pay when they want to chat further,” she says.

“They then choose to use the site on a pay-per-contact basis or monthly upgraded memberships.”

● *rsvp.com.au*

PLENTYOFFISH

Kate MacLean, PR co-ordinator at PlentyOfFish, says the site has more than 100 million registered users, with more than four million active daily users.

“Since our user base is so large and always growing, we provide the most selection in terms of finding a mate,” she says.

“We match our users based on a complex variety of matching algorithms, which are built around the individual’s interests and behaviour on the site.”

● *pof.com*

BEING AWARE

Although there are many reputable dating sites, no one wants to fall victim to a scam, so Professor Miller recommends looking for the following features before signing up:

- No automatic renewal.
- Easy termination process.
- Advertises no selling of information.

He also recommends looking at review sites for member feedback. Being personally safe and savvy is also important and Frederika Davies, counsellor and Relationship Australia WA manager of clinical training, warns that how people present themselves online may be a long stretch from the real thing.

“If online contact moves to chat-room or email contact, people can have the tendency to share a lot about themselves and can quickly feel an intimacy with the other person,” she says. “This could have negative repercussions if you later meet the person. You may find they are not someone you would want to confide in so intimately.”

SAFE DATING

● **Don't go alone.** Take someone with you for the initial meeting or tell someone you trust about your plans. Meet new dates in a public place.

● **Start the relationship anew.** Treat it like a new beginning and make sure you have your barriers up, even if you think you know the person.

● **Be in control.** Don't do anything you don't want to do and have ways to leave the situation safely.

Source: Relationships Australia.

I FOUND LOVE

Newlywed Cassie Gurman, 31, met her husband Stephen via dating site PlentyOfFish.

“I tried online dating because I thought it gave a better chance of connecting with someone who wanted to be in a committed relationship than meeting someone at a bar,” she says.

“That turned out to be exactly right.”