

The art of online dating, Part 1

Subtitle: Profile, profile, profile.

“Sup, I’m [K@e](#) but my friends call me KC cos Im a kewl cat lol. Theres not much 2 say bout me lol...I hav a gsoh, like to go out partying but also stay home & watch DVDs snuggled up wit my fav [bi@ch](#) & my cats ;-)
Im a prety normal chick but my mates wud tel u Im krazy. Iv jst cum out of a 5 yr relattinship but Im prob 2 old 4 u anyway, huh? lol. If u wanna chat my msn is xxxxxxxxxx.”

And that, my dear readers, is a conglomeration of some of the worst things you could ever do or say if you were to message me in an online dating environment. Oh I know that might sound harsh, but if you’re going to survive or even prosper online then you need to get tough. Internet dating can be brutal, as there are few of the same social consequences that exist in the face-to-face world. In reality you would never purposefully approach an overweight person to call them a “fat bitch” or tell someone you barely know that they’re up themselves and will never find love. But I’ve seen or experienced that online, and why? Because the freedom of social interaction on the internet allows people to do and say what they please, knowing that they won’t have to face up to the reactions of others to the same extent as they would offline.

Of course not everyone online is nasty like that, abusing their privileges in the self-regulated environment of the internet. While it seems simple to log on, whack up a profile about yourself and go trawling, the most savvy net daters realise that social life on the internet has its own set of unwritten rules. It is a text you must learn to navigate, just as you have learnt to navigate real life. And like ‘reality’, some people get it better than others.

The best way to begin is to develop a great profile for yourself – if it is well written and captures you as a real person you’ve already got off to a good start. My biggest tip is to keep in mind that on dating sites you are a commodity. And whether you’re looking for sex, friendship or the love of your life, the key is selling yourself in a way that attracts more of the right kind of people, and less of the unsavoury characters lurking around in cyberspace with their bits hanging out.

I can’t tell you exactly what to put on your profile of course, because everyone is different. But these are my top three pointers:

- 1) Take the time to think about what things you choose to put in your profile. While you know there’s more to you than what will fit in a little box, the people skimming over your profile will judge you on the tiny bit of information you display, and make a snap decision about whether you’re the kind of person they want to talk to. Choose snippets of information that reveal different parts of your personality, so you have a more rounded version of yourself online. At the same time, avoid clichés. Everyone likes to go out and party sometimes, and everyone likes to stay home and watch DVDs sometimes. So tell people about some of the less common things you like to do instead, or at least write about your party-DVD habits in an interesting way.
- 2) You might do this with humour. It shows that you don’t take yourself too seriously. And it’s better to come across as a little bit kooky or weird than bland and boring – amongst the hundreds of profiles on these sites, you want yours to stand out! Not everyone will

find you funny, but someone (hopefully) will, which helps to sort out the kind of people who you want to meet too – the ones who get you!

- 3) And my personal online dating necessity: grammar and spelling. The sample message at the top of the page shows how terrible it looks if your writing has text language and acronyms scattered throughout it, coupled with wayward caps locks, incorrect punctuation and bad spelling. I understand that not everyone is great with spelling and grammar, but when you have lots of mistakes it shows that you haven't taken the time to think about what you're saying. Would you go out on a date without at least brushing your hair and checking you don't have food stuck in your teeth? Not if you want to make a good impression, that's for sure. This is the equivalent in the online dating world.

Once you have your profile, you can go searching for ladies or fellas, whichever you prefer. The great thing about the internet is that it isn't bound by the same kind of societal pressures and judgements as the real world, making it the ideal place for gay people for flirt and chat. But it won't come as much of a surprise that as a lesbian online, I often find myself wading through screeds of messages from bicurious girls who either ask if I'd like to be their 'first', or if I'd care to join her and her boyfriend for a shag fest. Hmm, both tempting offers, but no thanks.

I know, I shouldn't be so rough on the poor bicurious girls, hell, you've got to start somewhere, right? But just a warning to those of you reading this who want to try out girl-on-girl; the internet may not be the best way to go about it. Sure, it seems to be the easy route (excuse the pun) because of all the other bicurious girls on there. But be cautious, because if you think a near-blind sex date is pressure, try adding your first lesbian experience on top of that!

In the end, nothing beats face-to-face interaction and connections. Our virtual selves will never be a completely accurate representation of who we are, because we pick and choose what we want to present to others – our photos, our profile information, the way we chat, everything. Which means that when you meet someone from the internet for the first time, strange things can happen.

Next month I continue the theme of internet dating, and introduce the new phenomena called 'facial shock'. I'll also delve more deeply into why the sample message at the top of this month's column is just...so...bad (besides the fact that it breaks my rule about spelling, grammar and txt language a gazillion times over!)

'Til then,

Lil