

The NETucation Report

Online Dating in South Africa 2004

Research lead by **Ramon Thomas** during June 2004 and September 2004



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| THE NETUCATION REPORT: ONLINE DATING IN SOUTH AFRICA 2004..... | 1 |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS..... | 2 |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 3 |
| OVERALL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS..... | 6 |
| METHODOLOGY..... | 7 |
| DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS..... | 8 |
| <i>Where do they live?</i> | 8 |
| <i>Age / gender</i> | 8 |
| GENDER VS. SEXUALITY..... | 9 |
| ETHNICITY..... | 10 |
| RELATIONSHIP STATUS..... | 11 |
| EDUCATIONAL LEVEL..... | 12 |
| WHAT KIND OF WORK DO ONLINE DATERS DO?..... | 13 |
| WHAT IS THE INCOME LEVELS?..... | 14 |
| WHAT IS THE FAVOURITE ONLINE DATING WEBSITE FOR SOUTH AFRICANS?..... | 15 |
| ONLINE DATING TRENDS 2004..... | 16 |
| ONLINE DATING EXPERIENCE..... | 16 |
| WHAT IS THE GENERAL LEVEL OF INTERNET EXPERIENCE AMONGST ONLINE DATING USERS?..... | 17 |
| HOW DO OUR RESPONDENTS FIND ONLINE DATING?..... | 18 |
| DO YOU PREFER ONLINE DATING TO TRADITIONAL DATING?..... | 19 |
| WHY DO PEOPLE USE ONLINE DATING?..... | 19 |
| WHAT DO PEOPLE HOPE TO FIND?..... | 20 |
| HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE THEY MET IN-PERSON?..... | 21 |
| HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO MEET PEOPLE IN-PERSON?..... | 22 |
| DO PEOPLE LIKE TO POST THEIR PHOTO ON THE INTERNET FOR ONLINE DATING?..... | 23 |
| HOW HONEST ARE PEOPLE ON THE INTERNET?..... | 24 |
| WOULD PEOPLE RECOMMEND ONLINE DATING?..... | 26 |
| DO PEOPLE TAKE ONLINE DATING SERIOUSLY IN SOUTH AFRICA?..... | 26 |
| PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT TRIED ONLINE DATING..... | 27 |
| WHAT OTHER FORMS OF DATING HAVE YOU TRIED?..... | 27 |
| WHY DO PEOPLE NOT WANT TO TRY ONLINE DATING?..... | 28 |
| WHY WOULD PEOPLE TRY ONLINE DATING?..... | 29 |
| HONESTY..... | 29 |
| IN ALL SERIOUSNESS..... | 30 |
| ONLINE DATING VS. SPEED DATING..... | 31 |
| INTERVIEW WITH DR. ANDREW THATCHER..... | 33 |
| THE COUPLES TEAM, WWW.COUPLES.CO.ZA..... | 36 |
| INTERVIEW WITH MIKE HAINEBACH FROM DATELINE SA..... | 39 |
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| | |
|---|----|
| INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BURSTEIN FROM DATINGBUZZ..... | 42 |
| CLIVE ENGELBERG, MD WWW.GALAXYSINGLES.COM..... | 45 |
| INTERVIEW WITH JOE SOKOLIC FROM LOVEFINDA..... | 47 |
| FELIX ERKEN, MD JUNKMAIL SPEAKS ABOUT LOVEMAIL: WWW.LOVEMAIL.CO.ZA..... | 51 |
| INTERVIEW WITH BEN SASSMAN FROM “THE POSITIVE CONNECTION”..... | 55 |
| AUTHOR’S CONTACT DETAILS..... | 58 |

INTRODUCTION

According to Wikipedia¹ dating, courtship, or “going steady” is the process of selecting and attracting a mate for marriage. In many “traditional” societies, courtship is a highly structured activity, with well-known rules. In liberal Western societies, a date is an occasion when one socializes with a potential lover or future spouse. In this sense, the purpose of a date is for the people dating to get to know each other and decide whether they want to have a relationship. We therefore define “*Online Dating*” as the act of using the Internet for courtship or meeting people with the purpose of developing a meaningful relationship that will lead to either friendship, companionship, sexual gratification, a long-term relationship or marriage. According to Dr Andrew Thatcher², a psychologist in the School of Human and Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, there are two kinds of people who do online dating, “The people that are doing it purely out of fun, and the people that want to get something out of it.”

Dating and courtship is such a universal phenomenon it appeals to a very broad spectrum of society. Irrespective of age, race, and gender, all people are interested in it at some point during their lives. NETucation undertook the first South African online dating survey between June and July 2004 to establish and understand the trends driving the growing Online Dating market in South Africa. The Online Dating websites who participated in the 2004 survey and analysis are [Couples](#), [Dateline SA](#), [DatingBuzz](#), [GalaxySingles](#), [LoveFinda](#), [LoveMail](#), [MyDate](#), [MSN Match](#) and [The Positive Connection](#).

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dating>

² See Appendix for complete interview with Dr. Andrew Thatcher
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Almost a quarter million South Africans have used online dating services – and those who engage in it take it very seriously. This is one of the key findings in *The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa 2004*. According to the survey conducted in June 2004 by NETucation, an independent Internet Marketing company, 67% of people using online dating services in South Africa take them seriously enough to pay for the privilege.

“People pay real money for the privilege of connecting with other prospective mates via online dating,” says Ramon Thomas, Managing Director of NETucation. “The market is worth approximately R20 million in 2004 and there are currently between 200,000 and 250,000 people who have tried online dating in South Africa.” This is still only 7.5% of the total population of Internet users and is substantially less than the 1 million online banking users reported earlier this year by World Wide Worx.

However, the findings suggest that online taking may well be one of the four big applications of the Internet, after e-mail, banking, and news.

And there is a strong indication that this market is set to challenge the big three for leadership. There are 11 substantial online dating website operating in South Africa with three launched in the last year. The most popular online dating service chosen by the respondents is DatingBuzz (63.5%), followed by MSN Match (9.7%), part of the international match.com network, and Galaxy Singles (5.6%).

About 10% of users become paying subscribers who shell out from R30 to R130 a month for the privilege of connecting with like-minded individuals.

There are several factors that are bringing online dating into the mainstream, such as people getting married at an older age, a high divorce rate, disillusionment with the bar and club scene, and people being busier than ever before.

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

According to Dr Andrew Thatcher, a psychologist in the School of Human and Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, “Online dating allows you to meet people in a safe environment; you cannot catch STD’s or HIV/AIDS through sending a message.”

Says Thomas: “The leading age group is the 25 to 32-year old category, who still considers themselves young adults by modern standards. Perhaps surprisingly, about 54.5% of people are looking for companionship and friendship, not sex.”

The biggest alternatives to online dating are SMS dating and speed dating.

NETucation also conducted a website analysis of 9 participating online dating companies, using the Webagility web analysis tool from World Wide Worx. The three best-performing websites all achieved a score of 70% or more, namely DatingBuzz (70%), LoveFinda (71%) and LoveMail (71%).

“There is still much that can be done to improve the online dating experience for the average South African hoping to meet someone on the Internet,” suggests Thomas. “More marketing will certainly help to remove the stigma that people used to associate with dating via the Internet. It is clear from our survey that the average online dater is not a nerd or a lonely person. Instead, they are between 24 and 32 years old, single, having a post-Matric qualification, working in IT or Finance and earning more than R10, 000 per month.”

OVERALL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Although online dating seems to be a young industry several players like DatingBuzz and Lovemail have been in operation for more than five years. Two new industry players have emerged over the last 12 months: LoveFinda, The Positive Connection. The overall market size (also counting people who have multiple accounts) is 244, 066 and this is set to grow at 24% to 318, 593 in 2005. These numbers exclude Dateline SA who didn't provide us with their user database numbers at the time of writing. We have produced the following forecast model based on a growth rate of 24% compounded monthly as more people sign up they tell more people about online dating and it becomes less stigmatised and even more people sign up:

| YEAR | GROWTH FORECAST |
|------|-----------------|
| 2005 | 318,593.40 |
| 2006 | 401,848.93 |
| 2007 | 494,854.76 |
| 2008 | 598,752.79 |
| 2009 | 714,818.63 |

Figure 1.1: Growth Forecast

METHODOLOGY

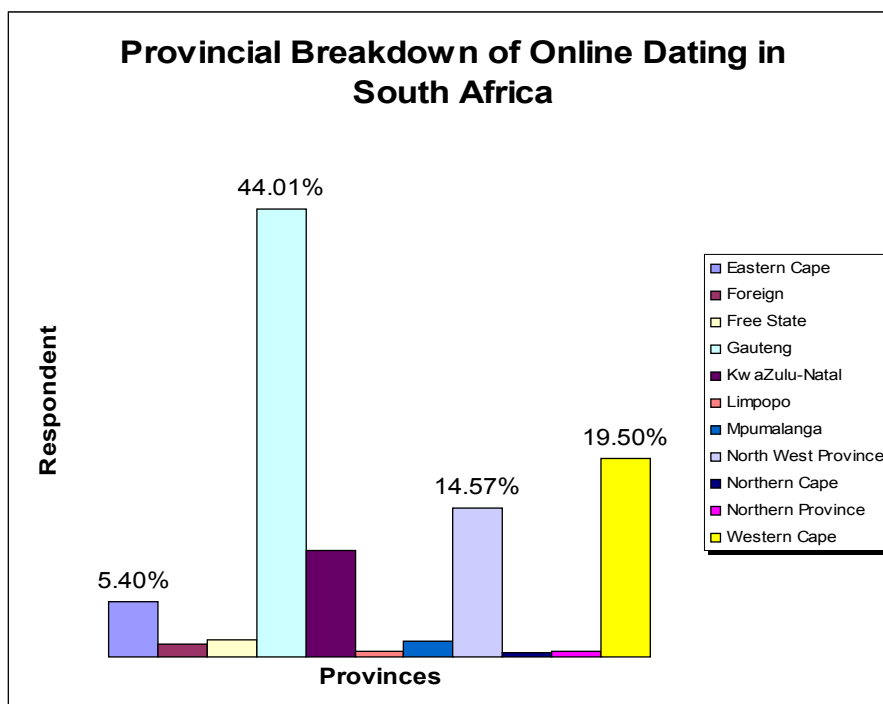
The survey was conducted through an online questionnaire from 1 June – 15 July 2004. We collected 1781 responses in total. Of these, there were 27 duplicates and they were removed from the sample leaving 1754. Another 45 were deemed invalid and removed as well, leaving 1709 qualified respondents. Of these 1277 (74.7%) have tried online dating and 432 (25.3%) have not. To establish the demographics 16 questions were asked including 3 related to a competition. Those who have tried online dating were asked an additional 22 questions, and those who have not tried Online Dating were asked an additional seven questions. All respondents were asked if they thought people took online dating seriously. The second part of the research evaluated the websites based on usability. In 2005 we include a comparison of the matching software among the various websites. The final part of the research compares South Africa to North America and Europe in terms of the adoption of online dating. The appendix includes an article on Speed Dating as well as interviews with key industry players.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

We focus on the demographics of the people who have tried online dating.

Where do they live?

Not surprisingly most of the people who do Online Dating are in Gauteng (44%), followed by the Western Cape (19.5%), North West Province (14.6%) and KwaZulu-Natal (10.5%). A small percentage (1.25%) of the respondents was from foreign countries; although the survey was primarily aimed at South Africans. The leading cities include Johannesburg (328), Cape Town (226), Rustenberg (169) and then Durban (103).

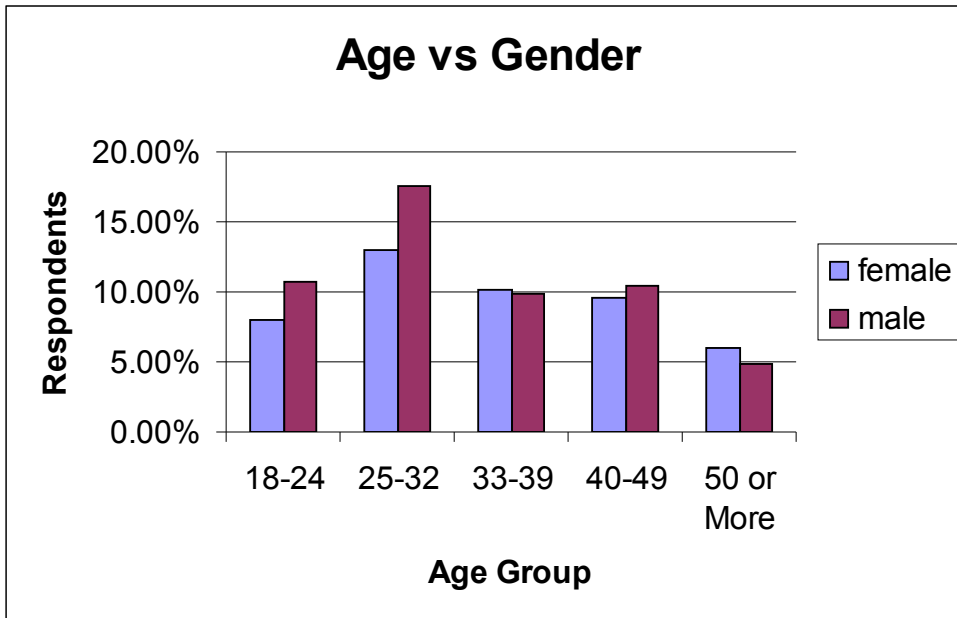


Age / gender

The age profile for Online Dating is very interesting. One would almost assume more men than women do Online Dating and that is the case except that in the age group “50 or more” there is more women (6%) than men (4.9%) doing Online Dating. A telling statistic that substantiates this trend is the fact that 13.6% of all women were divorced vs. 8.9% men, which can be interpreted as women finding it more difficult to get back into a committed relationship than their male counterparts. The dominating age groups are “25-32” which is still considered young adult. The hectic pace of modern life and demands from work, social life and other commitments are making it more difficult for this group to find a suitable match and they, subsequently, will end up getting married later in life. The next two age groups “33-39” and “40-49” are almost equal and we see this as a fact that people who do online dating are serious about finding a partner. The younger age groups are, as Dr Andrew Thatcher described, “people that are doing it purely out of fun”. They are

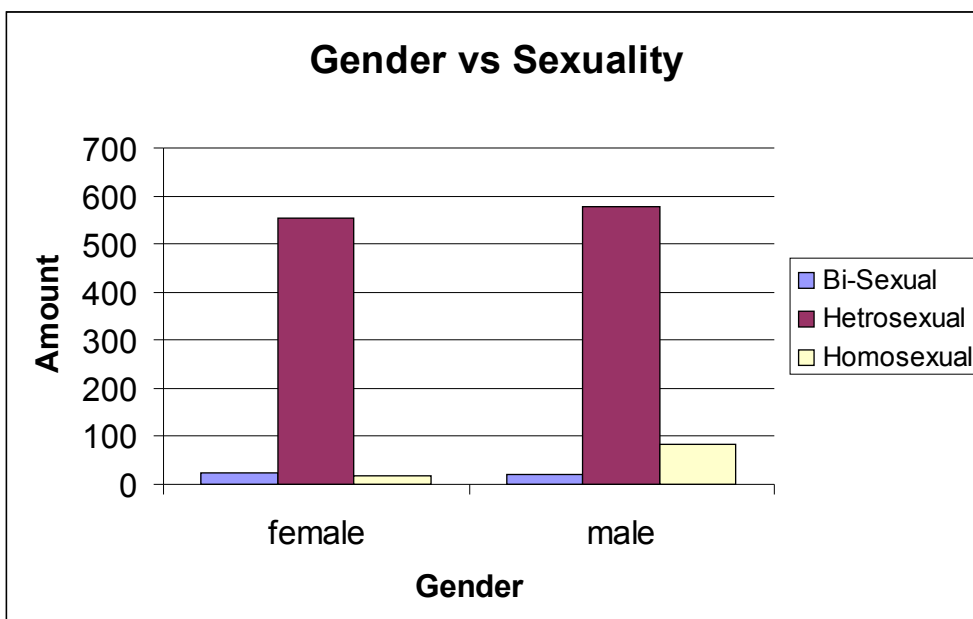
The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

mostly students, and are experimenting with online dating more as a novelty. People in this age group would not succumb to the same pressures as the older groups e.g. they would go out more to parties, clubs, etc and therefore meeting a reasonable amount of people vs. the older, above 33 generation, who has to cope with possibly raising children, work pressures and more.



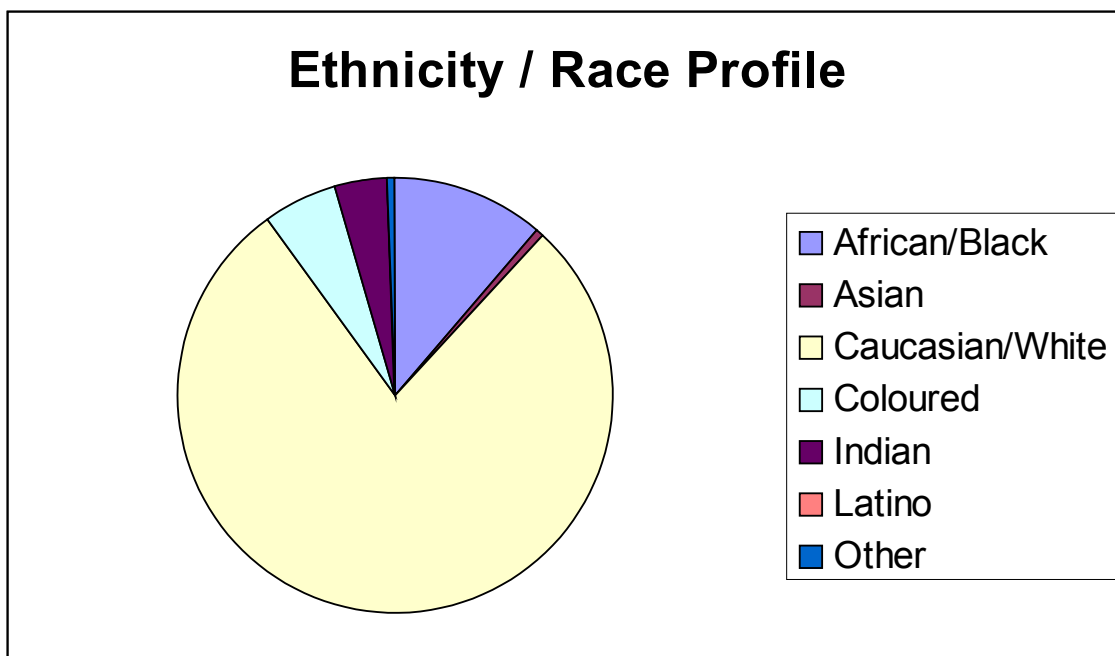
GENDER VS. SEXUALITY

The most interesting fact about sexuality is that almost 5 times as many homosexual men (6.42%) are doing online dating compared to women (1.3%). The amount of bi-sexual men (1.6%) and women (1.9%) as well as heterosexual men (45.3%) and women (43.5%) are about the same.



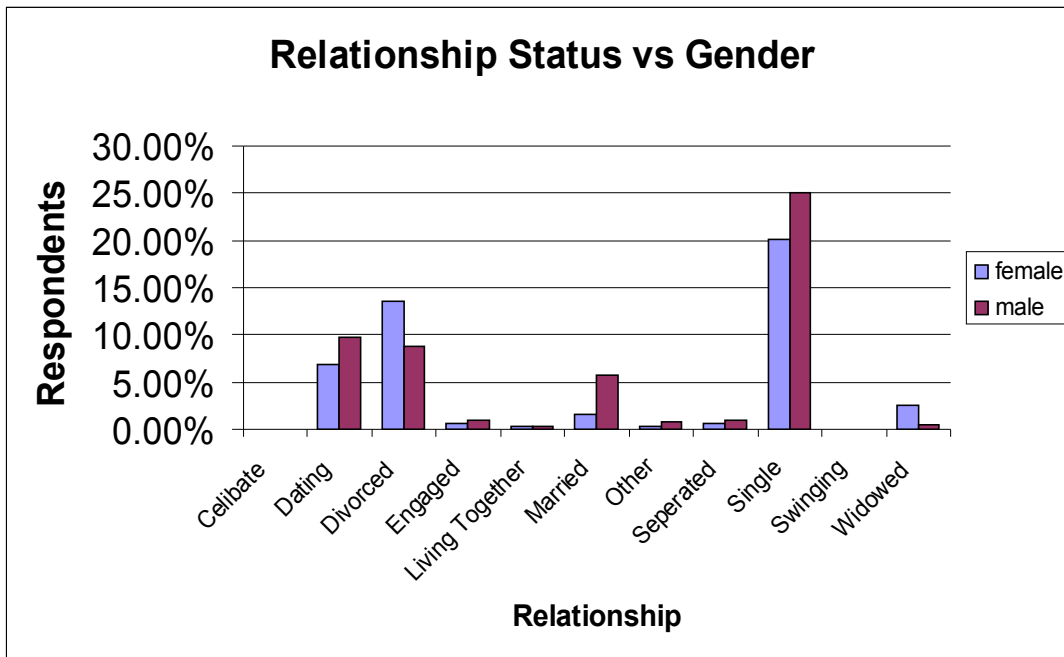
ETHNICITY

A sad state of affairs is that the ethnicity or race profile of the online dating users in South Africa is diametrically opposite to population of the country. About 78% are Caucasian/white, followed by 11.4% African/black, 5.6% “Coloured” and 3.7% of Indian decent. This is not an issue that can be addressed over night, but it is related to the imbalances caused by the history of South Africa. The systematic exclusion of non-white races has led to the digital divide we have today. Other factors such as cultural prejudices also play a small role in the big discrepancy between the ethnic race groups that do online dating in South Africa.



RELATIONSHIP STATUS

Although most of the people that do online dating are single (45%), perhaps a not to shocking figure is that the amount of divorcees are the second largest group (22.5%), followed by people actually dating (16.6%) and married (7.4%). Now it is even more interesting that there are 3.7 times more married men than women that are doing online dating. Either these men are blatantly cheating or they are extremely bored in their current relationships. We previously mentioned 1.5 times more women (13.6%) than men (8.9%) are divorced. This has contributed to older women considering online dating as a viable alternative to the usual club/bar scene.

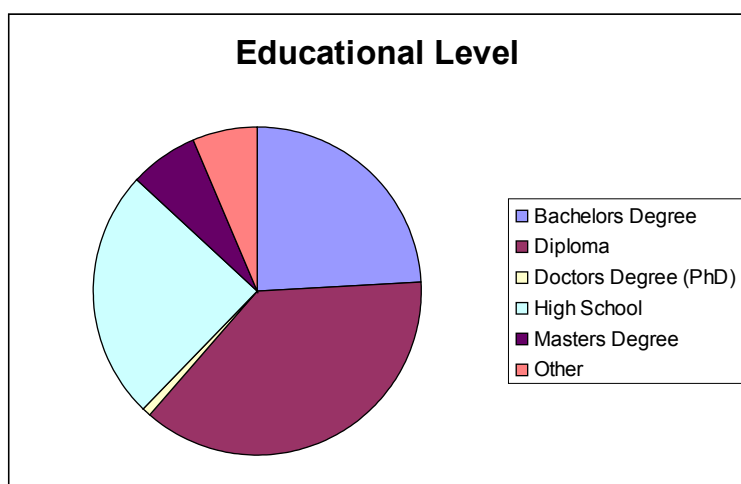


EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

We found that 75% of people that do online dating have a post-high school qualification. This is again in stark contrast in a country where 25% of the population³ are illiterate and another 25% are considered under schooled according to Statistics SA. Essentially, it points to the growing digital divide in South Africa and most other African countries. To be able to use online dating the person needs to have access to a computer with Internet, and be reasonably educated to be able to make use

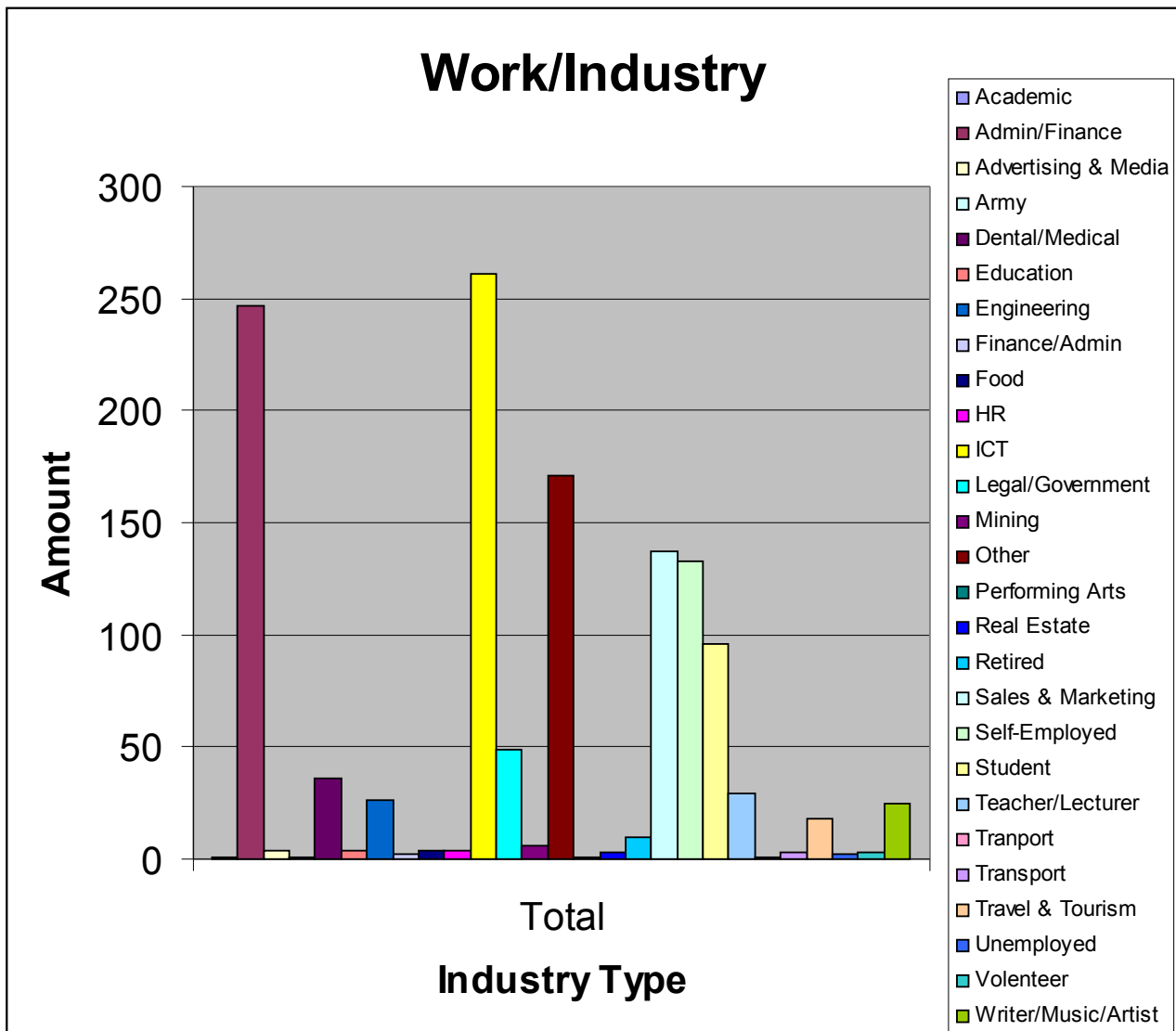
³ Project Literacy <http://www.projectliteracy.org.za/>
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of this alternative, or even consider it a worth while exercise.

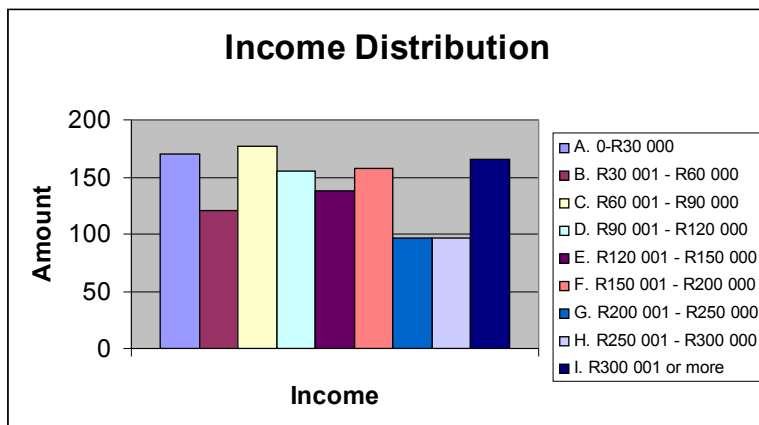


WHAT KIND OF WORK DO ONLINE DATERS DO?

We almost expected to find most of the people working in the Information Technology industry (20.4%). These people are most comfortable with the Internet. It is part of the work that they do on a daily basis to communicate, to implement systems, or interact with customers through their websites, etc. The second biggest group are people working in the “admin/finance” category (19.34%). The bulk of this group would be people employed in either banks or insurance companies. The famous Management Consultant, Peter Drucker said all workers in the future would become knowledge workers. Working in banks or insurance companies is all knowledge driven. Another large group is people who are self-employed (10.4%). This goes with the argument that they are generally too busy to meet quality people. Internet Dating allows them the opportunity to “date” at any time of the day and night. Not surprisingly, students only make up a small percentage (7.5%) of the total amount of online daters in South Africa. This again is testament that people who are doing online dating are indeed serious about meeting a person and not doing it for the fun of it. Students are more social than any other group and get to meet new people on campus, at parties and sports events all the time.



WHAT IS THE INCOME LEVELS?



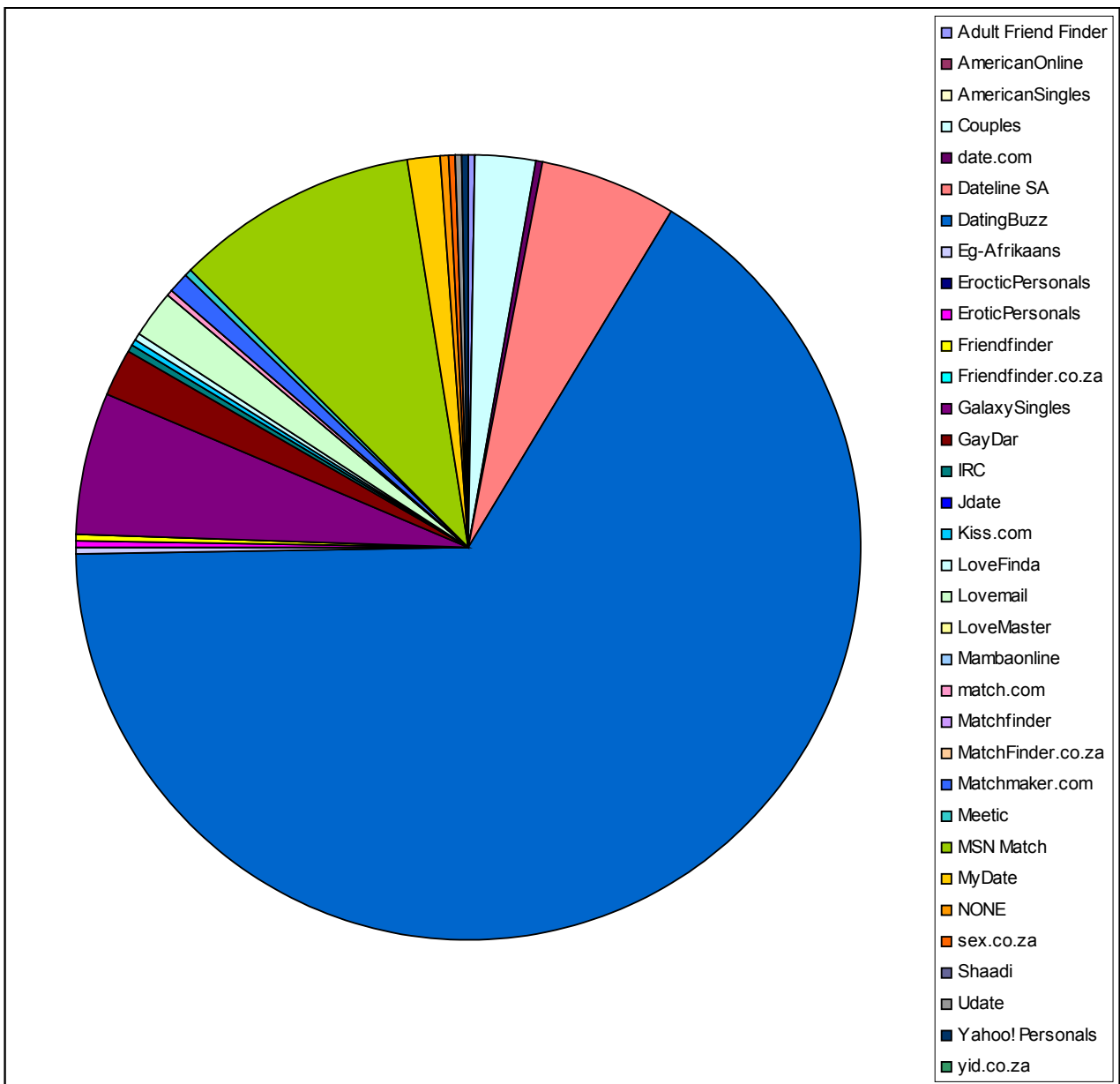
Although there seems to be an even distribution of income levels from the lowest 0-R30, 000.00 (13.3%) to “R300, 000 or more” (12.9%) slightly more than half (51.2%) of people are earning

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more than R10, 000 per month. The average online dater has a higher level of disposable income. At the bottom end of the scale, mostly students (6. 8%) fall into the lower income levels.

WHAT IS THE FAVOURITE ONLINE DATING WEBSITE FOR SOUTH AFRICANS?

The clear leader is DatingBuzz with a market share of 63.5%. The winning formula for DatingBuzz is their multi-brand strategy. Several of the biggest media companies in South Africa offer their users Online Dating that is managed by DatingBuzz. These include Mail & Guardian, M-Web, Ananzi to name but a few. All of this contributes to the largest database amongst all South African websites. This is generally very attractive to someone who wants to find a date because the larger the database the better the chances of finding a suitable mate. MSN Match, with 9.7% of the South Africa market, follows DatingBuzz in distant second. MSN is the Microsoft portal website www.msn.co.za, which is the default website in Internet Explorer web browser. Third in the stakes is Galaxy Singles, with a 5.6% share of the market. Galaxy Singles is also a very popular second choice for people we surveyed. It is followed by Dateline SA in 4th place with 5.3% of the market. Couples, a fairly new website, come in at 5th place with 2.36% of the market. Gaydar, a website focussed on the gay community, made a relatively strong showing with 2% in 6th place, followed by Lovemail in 8th place with 1.7% of the market. MyDate, one of the longest running websites, comes in at #9 with 1.2%, even though it seems the website has not been updated or upgraded in a very long time. The international Matchmaker.com websites (not to be confused with matchmaker.co.za, which is operated by DatingBuzz) comes in at 10th place with 0.8% of the market. Therefore, except for MSN Match, which is part of the international match.com network, South Africans definitely prefer locally developed websites for their online dating experience.

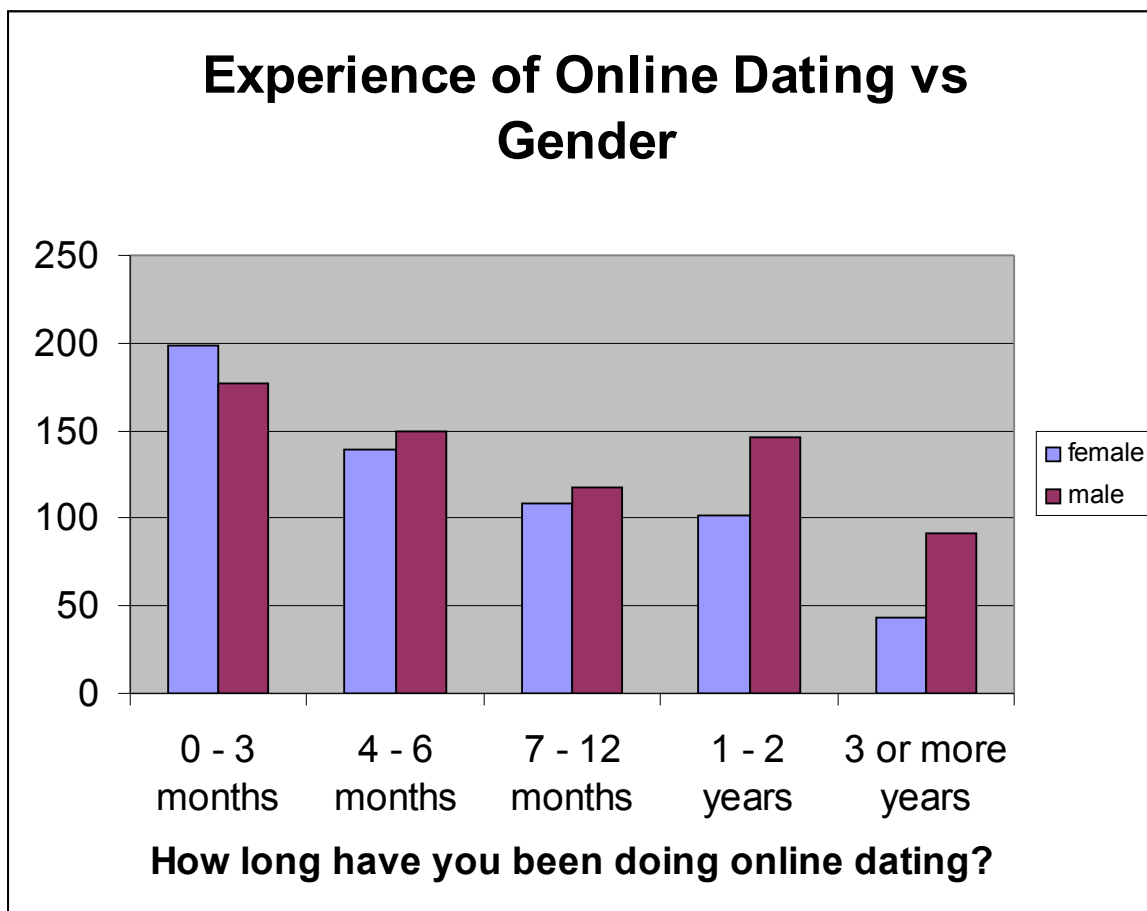


Online Dating Trends 2004

ONLINE DATING EXPERIENCE

Online Dating can be seen as relatively new to most South Africans. There is scant covering in the South African press and if there are any articles, they tend to focus on North America where it has been a booming industry over the last couple of years. In South Africa more than half (52.1%) of the people in our survey have been experimenting with Online Dating for less than 6 months, and a mere 10.5% have been doing it for three years or more. When we compare the genders we find that

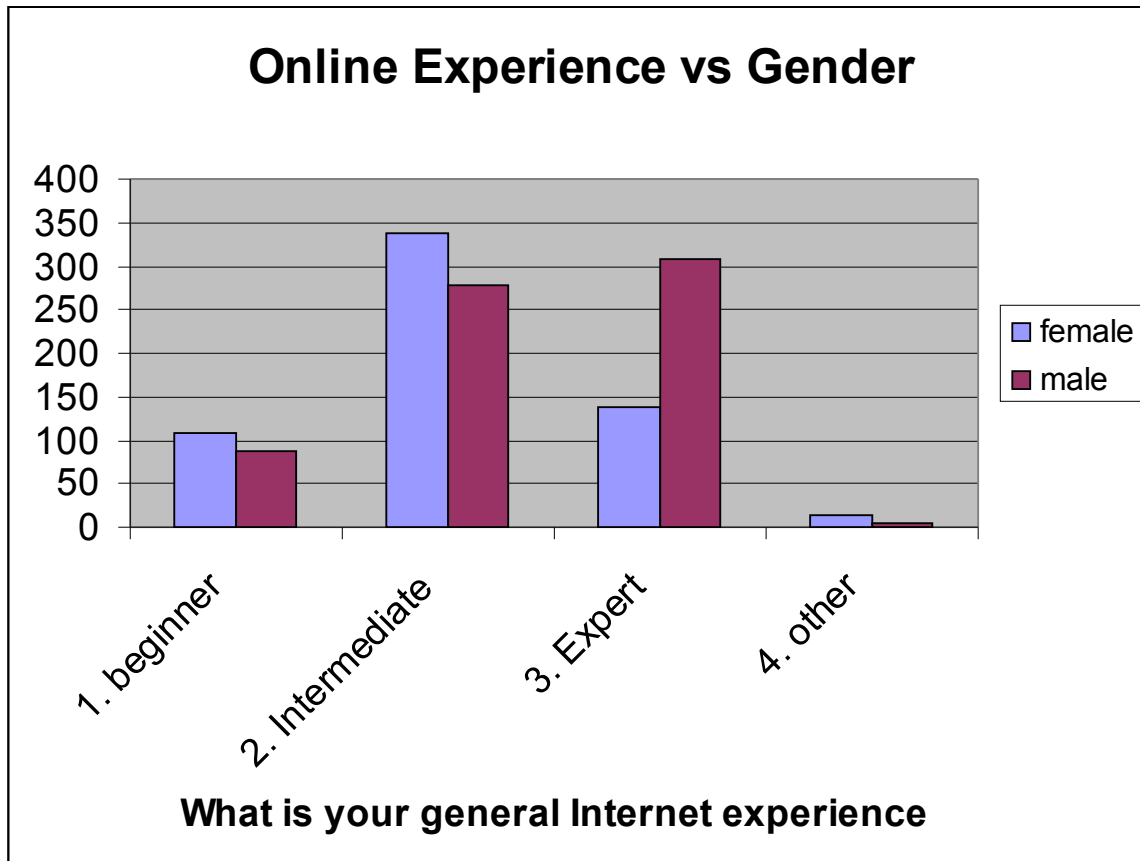
more than two times as many men than women have more than three years experience with Online Dating. In contrast marginally more females (15.6%) have less than 3 months experience compared to men (13.9%). This means that more females are starting to try Online Dating and will get more experienced with time. Men have always been seen as early adopters of technology, but that is fast changing in the new millennium as women have started using the Internet in many more ways than was the case five years ago.



WHAT IS THE GENERAL LEVEL OF INTERNET EXPERIENCE AMONGST ONLINE DATING USERS?

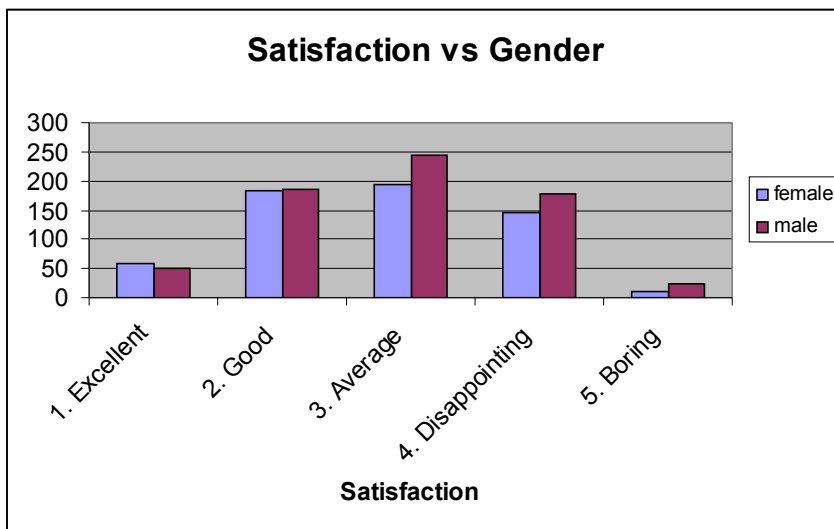
The typical person who does Online Dating has an intermediate (48.2%) level of experience on the Internet. The second biggest level of experience is Expert (35%) followed by Beginner (15.4%). Most of the people who considered themselves Experts had three or more years of experience in Online Dating, while half of the people who rated themselves as Intermediate had less than 6

months experience, and almost 80% of those who rated themselves as Beginners on the Internet in general had less than 6 months experience in Online Dating.



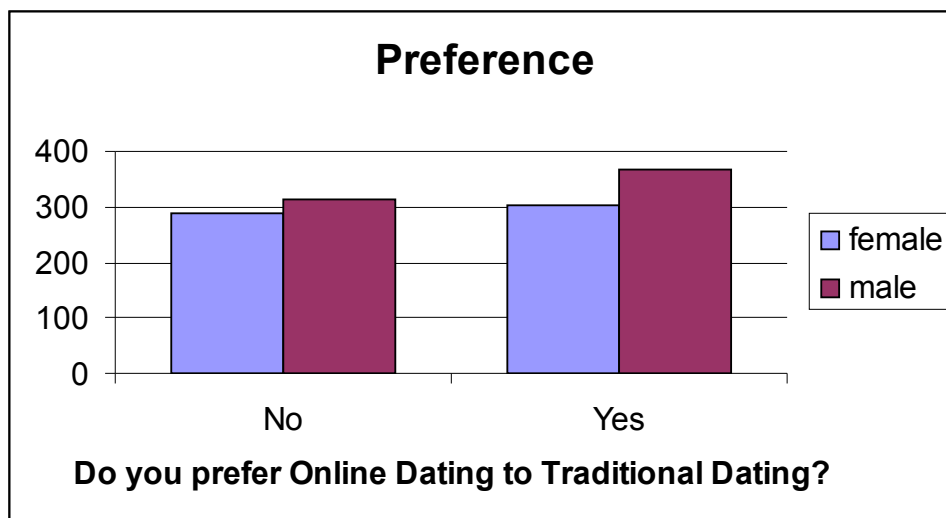
HOW DO OUR RESPONDENTS FIND ONLINE DATING?

The majority of people rated the online dating experience as *Average* (34.3%), however, if one combines those who rated their experience as *Good* or *Excellent* (37.4%); this will form the majority group. There was also a substantial number that rated their experience as *Disappointing* (25.3%) followed by a small group of 2.7% who thought the whole experience was Boring. And while most men and women have the same kind of success rate of either a *Good* or *Excellent* experience, more men (26%) seem to be disappointed with their experience than women (24.5%).



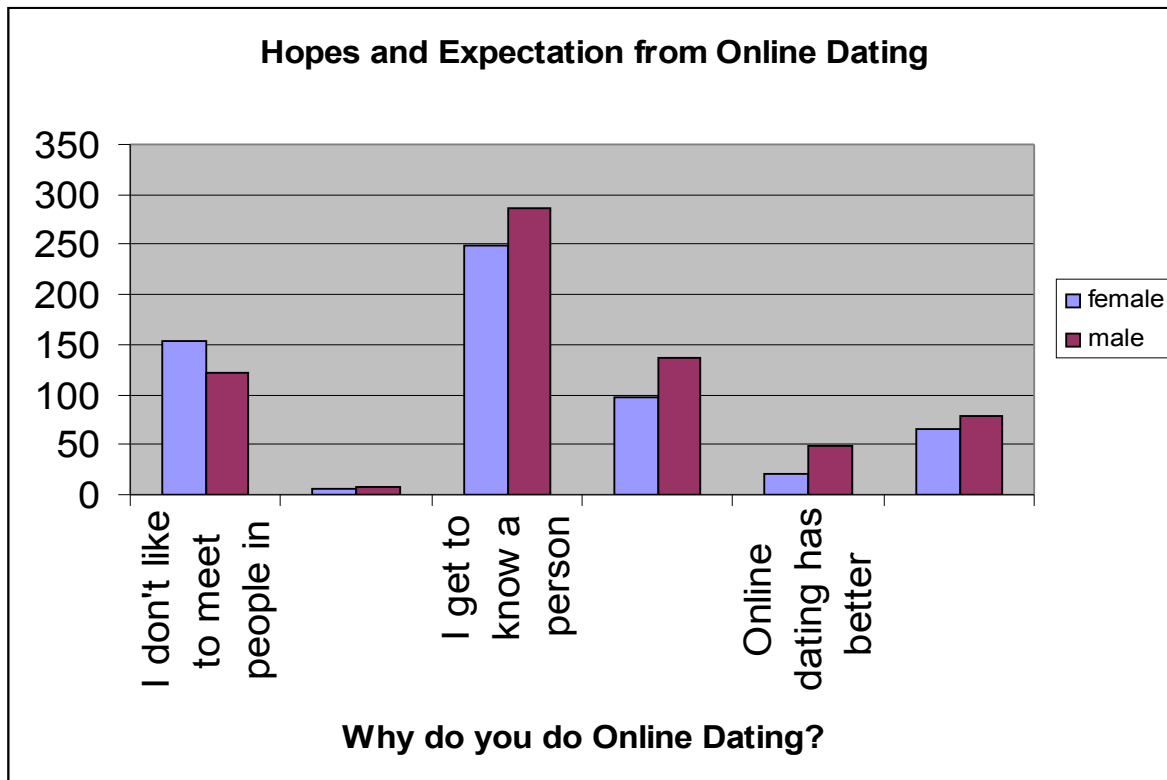
DO YOU PREFER ONLINE DATING TO TRADITIONAL DATING?

There is no major shift towards online dating based on the answers to this question. Slightly more people prefer *online dating* (52.4%) to those who prefer *traditional dating* (47.3%).



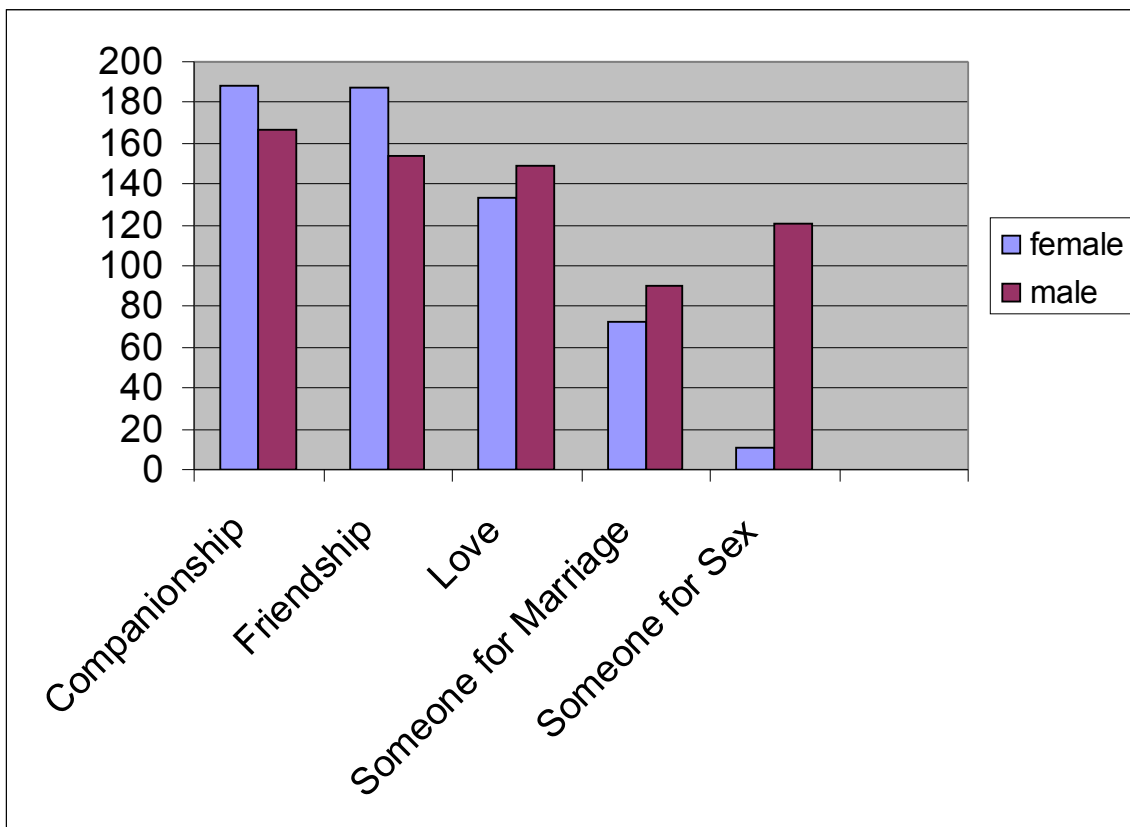
WHY DO PEOPLE USE ONLINE DATING?

Most people who use online dating to meet potential partners like it because they can get to know the other person before they meet them (41.9%) face to face. About half of these people don't like to meet people in bars and clubs (21.6%) and therefore prefer online dating. Not surprisingly, slightly more women (12.1%) don't like to meet people in bars or clubs than men (9.6%). This is followed by the third group who claims they are too busy to meet people otherwise (18.3%), and therefore prefer online dating.



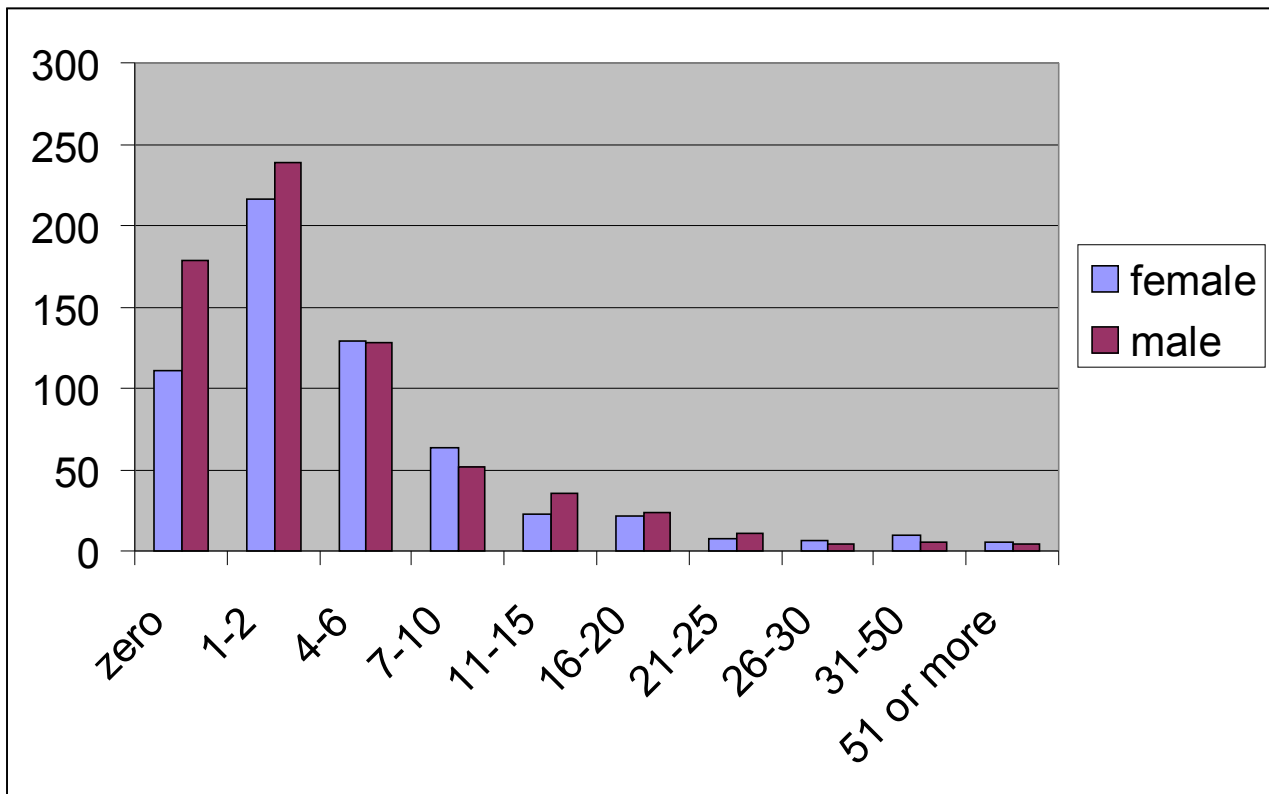
WHAT DO PEOPLE HOPE TO FIND?

It seems the majority of people are looking for either *companionship* (27.8%) or *friendship* (26.7%). Companionship's dictionary definition is similar to friendship and this means more than half (54.5%) of people are NOT directly looking for sex. People have an innate need to connect with other people. The most basic form is generally a friendship or companionship or a form of camaraderie. People are still *looking for love* (22.1%), and some are looking to *get married* (12.8%) using online dating. The final group, those looking purely for *sex* (10.3%) is not really a telling statistic. There are many websites that are dedicated to sex, swinging and are of an adult nature. So people who are purely looking for sex will tend to register with those websites.



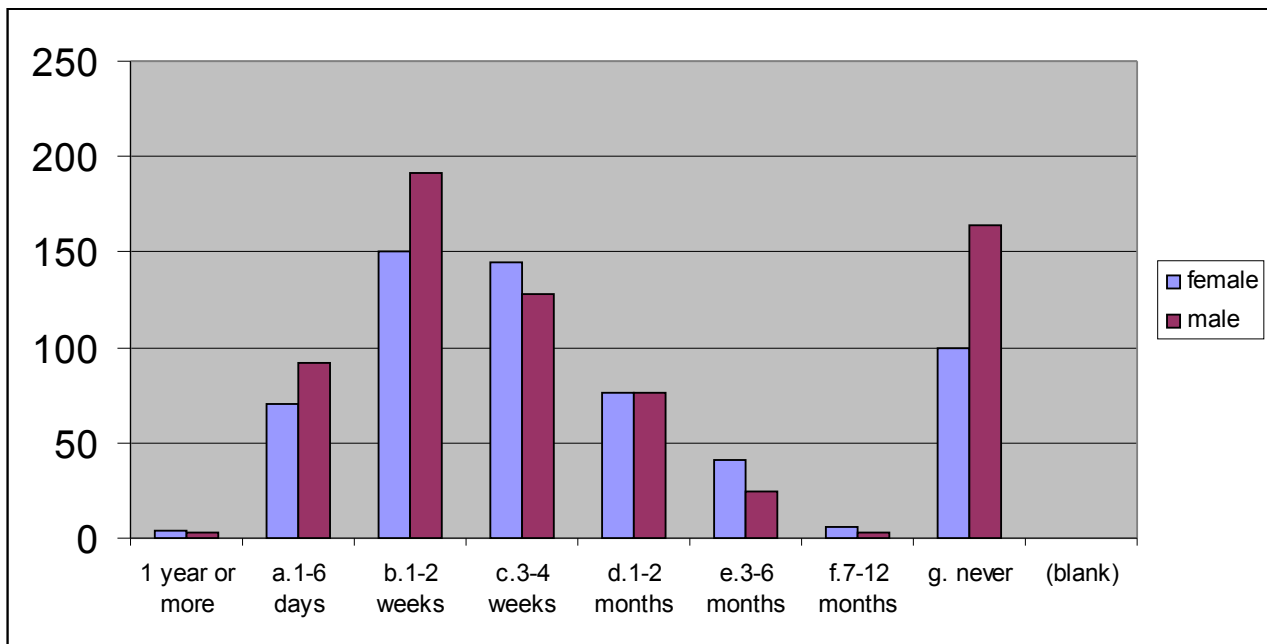
HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE THEY MET IN-PERSON?

Although the majority of people have met between *1 and 2 people* (35.7%) from online dating; a shocking 22.7% of people have *never met anyone* from online dating. The ultimate goal of dating has to be physical interaction whether friendship or companionship. Almost 70% of the people who have never met anyone have only been trying online dating for *less than six months*, which puts it into perspective. As they become more mature they will meet more people in-person to make a final decision if they want to pursue any form of relationship.



HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO MEET PEOPLE IN-PERSON?

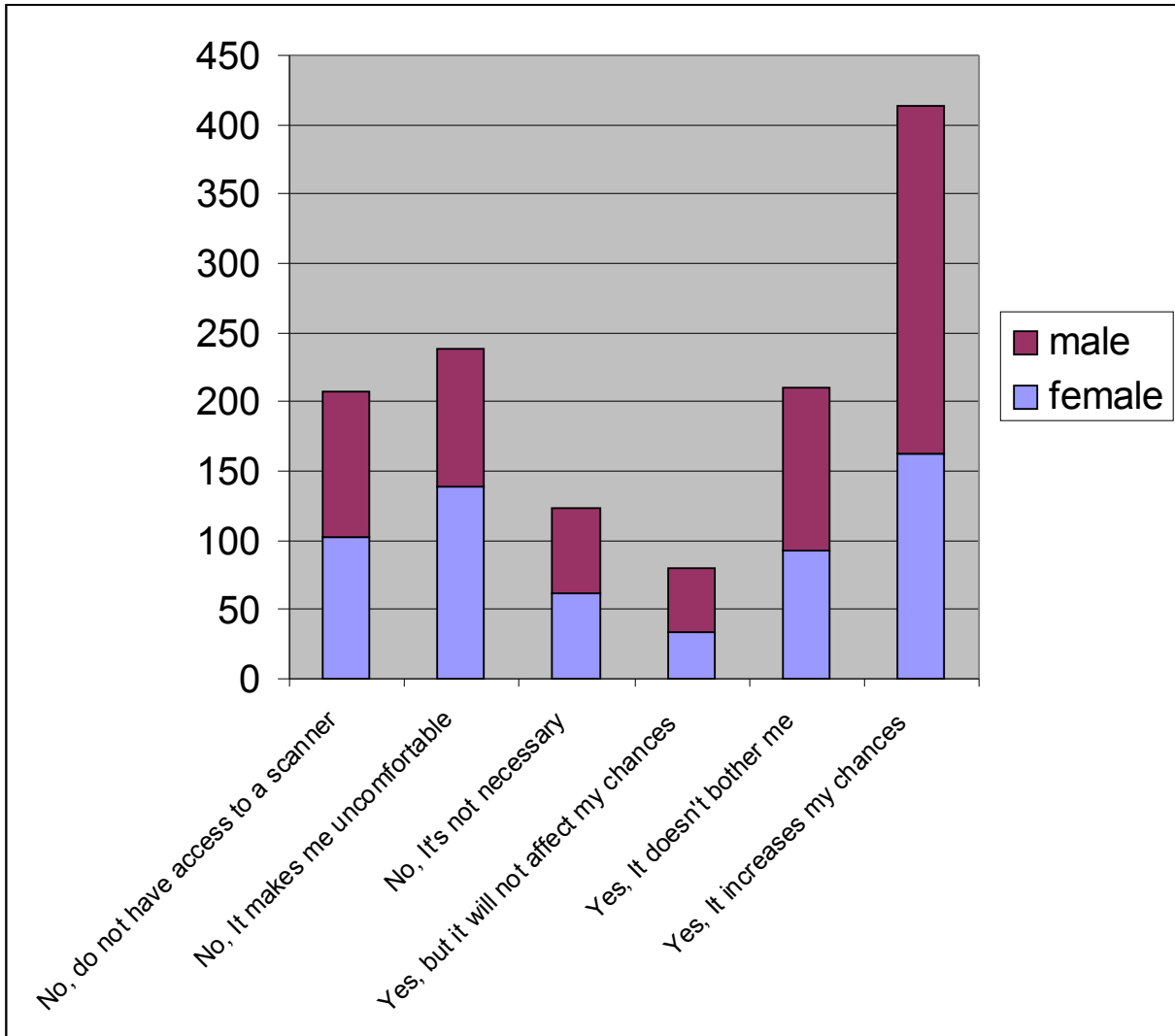
Most people will meet in *1 to 2 weeks* (26.8%) from first making contact on the Internet. This is followed by people waiting for between *3 and 4 weeks* (21.5%) before meeting. Perhaps not so shocking anymore is that about 20.1% *will never meet* face to face.



DO PEOPLE LIKE TO POST THEIR PHOTO ON THE INTERNET FOR ONLINE DATING?

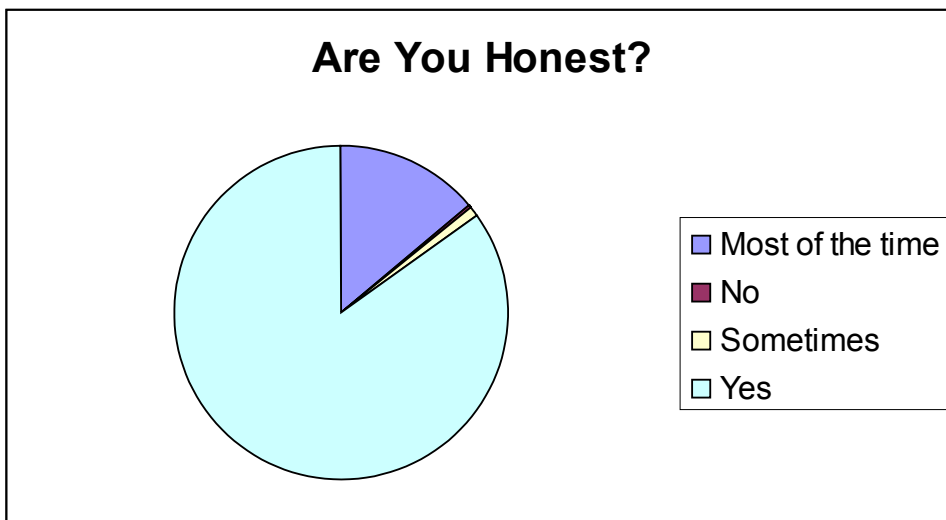
Only 55.3% of online dating users posted their photos on the online dating websites. Perhaps it is predictable, but more men (32.7%) are likely to think photos are important than women (22.6%). The other side of the coin is that more women (23.9%) than men (20.8%) did not post their photos online. We also found this very contradictory as more than 80% of respondents indicated that they based their choices on photos. A small number of people claim not to have access to a scanner (16.3%), however, this is not really a good enough excuse as one can go into any Internet Café with a scanner or even post your photo to companies like DatingBuzz and they will scan them for you. As many as 78.3% of people think that accurate photos are posted most of the time. So there is confidence in the photos posted but yet not enough people are doing it. This is a message that must be demystified to the users of Online Dating and get more participation from them. It is one of the stigmas associated with Online Dating, i.e. that it is optional to post your photo. According to Even Marc Katz, the author of “I Can’t Believe I’m Buying This Book” A Commonsense Guide to Successful Internet Dating, Matchnet, his former employee cited profiles with photos received 8 times more responses; and according to match.com “guys are 14 times more likely to look at a profile with a photo, and women are 8.5 times more likely to look at a profile with a photo.” Online Dating for Dummies suggests using a free service like Yahoo! Photo’s to keep your photo hidden to

a certain extent, but referring to the website with your photo in your initial email and explaining why you don't want to use it in your profile.

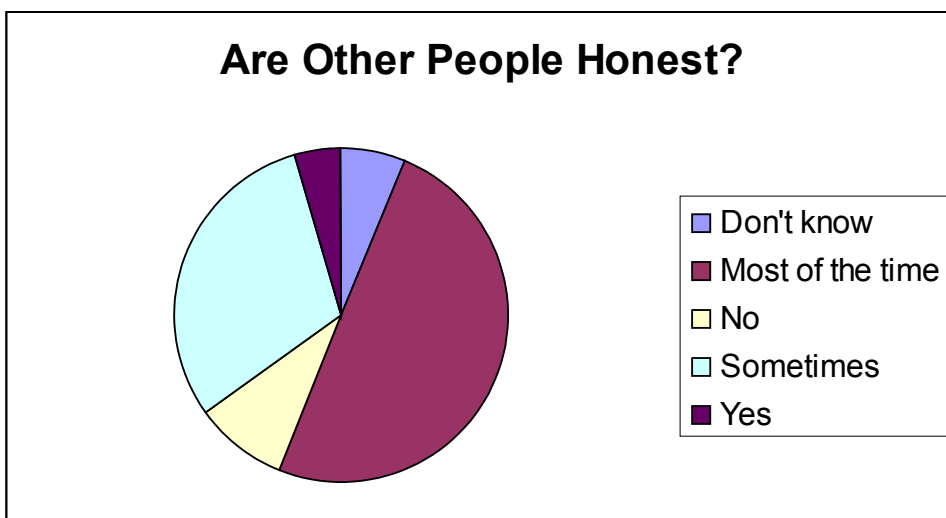


HOW HONEST ARE PEOPLE ON THE INTERNET?

Most people consider themselves honest (84.8%) on online dating websites. A smaller group of people claim they are honest most of the time or at least sometimes (15.1%). This is in line with Dr Andrew Thatcher, who says people tend to be more honest with Internet Dating as there is no point in lying because they will be matched up with the wrong person.

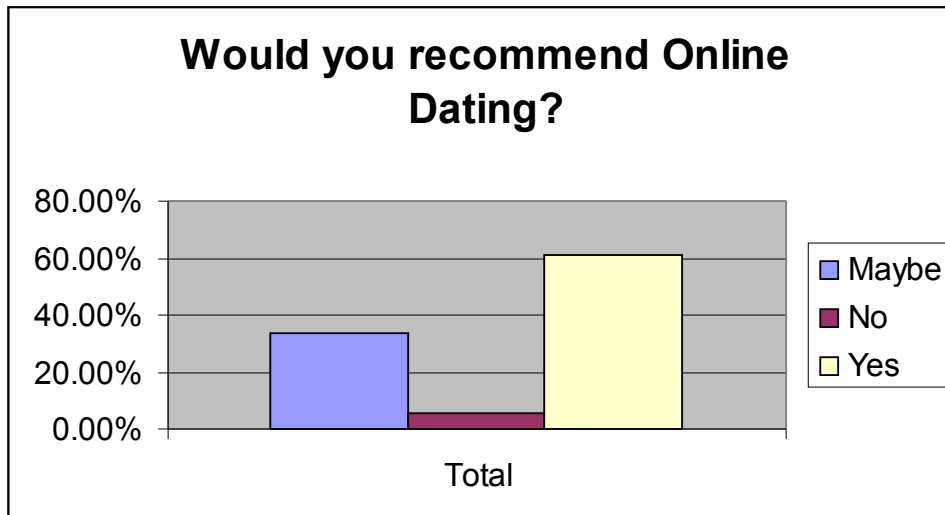


The overwhelming majority of people consider themselves honest, but they seem to be a little on the sceptical side when it comes to *other people*. About 9.3% of people don't think other people are honest in online dating, compared to 4.6% who think *other people* are honest. This means more than double the amount of people think others are dishonest than honest. A much bigger group of people think other people are honest most of the time or at least sometimes (79.7%). According to Even Marc Katz, most people who lie online are off-line liars as well. With online dating you will only find out a bit later if a person is a liar. It is up to the individual to ask the right questions to establish whether the other party is genuine or not.



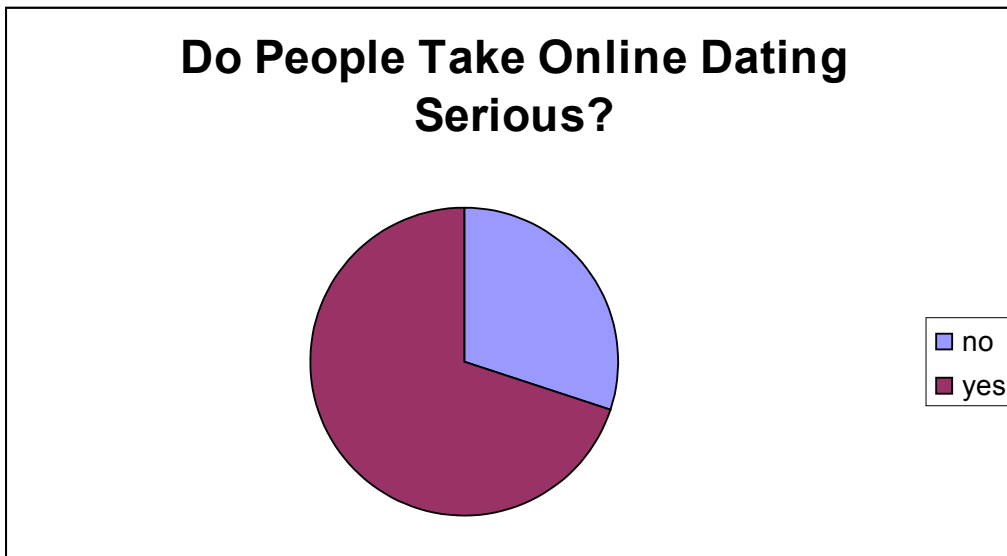
WOULD PEOPLE RECOMMEND ONLINE DATING?

The majority of people would recommend online dating (61.3%) to their friends or family. Another 33.4% felt they would maybe recommend online dating. So overall it seems people have a positive experience if they are willing to recommend it to other people. On the other hand it could be that online dating is still perceived as a novelty by most South Africans.



DO PEOPLE TAKE ONLINE DATING SERIOUSLY IN SOUTH AFRICA?

The majority of people (70%) believe people take online dating seriously in South Africa. This is not convincing but it is hopefully a trend that will continue. If it does not continue, online dating doesn't really have a future in South Africa. However, the rapid pace of technology and life in general in the new millennium will force people to seek out alternatives like Online Dating.



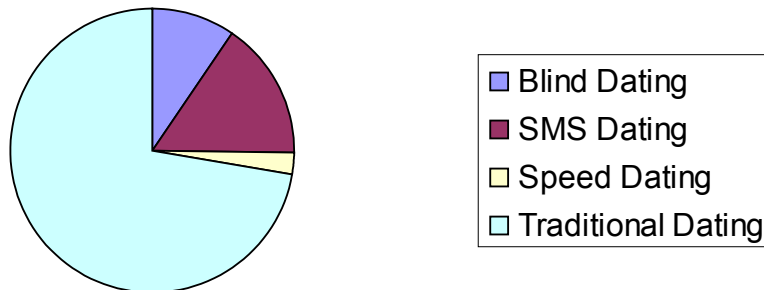
People Who Have Not Tried Online Dating

So what about people who have not tried online dating? There are many questions about them to be asked. We had 432 responses from people who had not tried online dating in our survey in June 2004. The demographics for this group is similar to the group who had tried online dating so we will focus on discussing some key questions posed to them and the results.

WHAT OTHER FORMS OF DATING HAVE YOU TRIED?

The first question we explored was what other forms of dating this group had tried. The majority of them had obviously tried traditional dating (72.3%) but that was followed by SMS Dating (16%) and Blind Dating (9.4%). Speed Dating has not yet caught on in South Africa, even with more media coverage than online dating has received from the South African media. Only 2.4% of respondents had tried speed dating. In

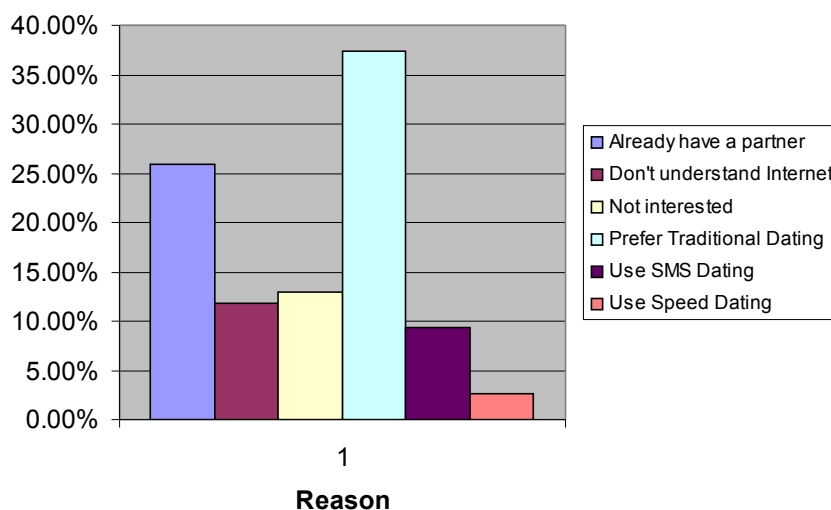
What other forms of dating have you tried?



WHY DO PEOPLE NOT WANT TO TRY ONLINE DATING?

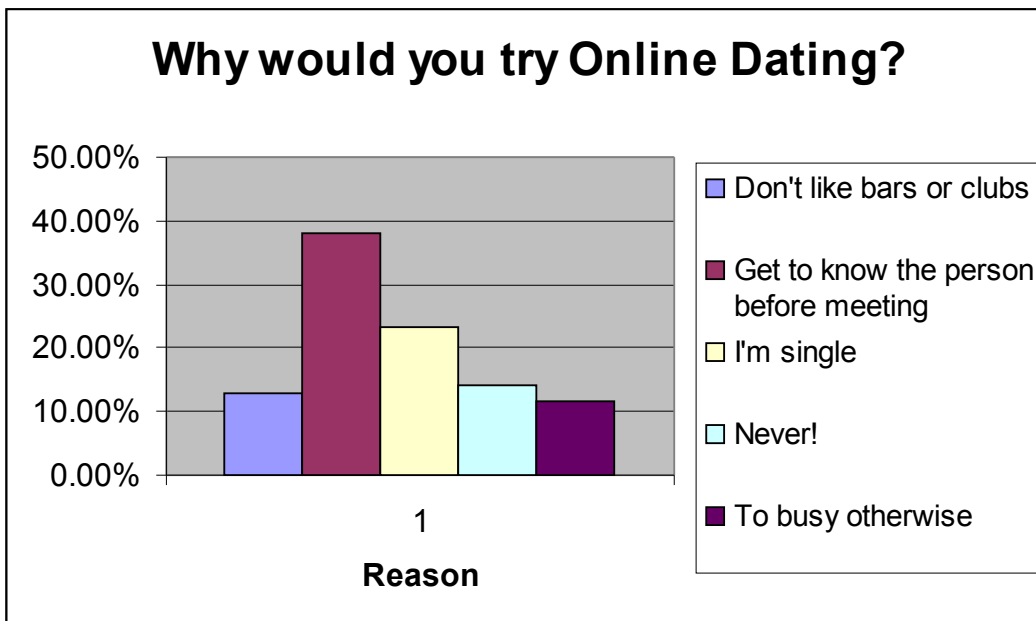
There are several reasons why people may not want to try online dating. The major reason is because they prefer traditional dating (37.4%) but many of them already have a partner (25.9%). Some other people either don't understand the internet or are just not interested in exploring online dating (24.7%). This leaves us with those who prefer SMS dating or speed dating (12%).

Why have you not tried Online Dating?



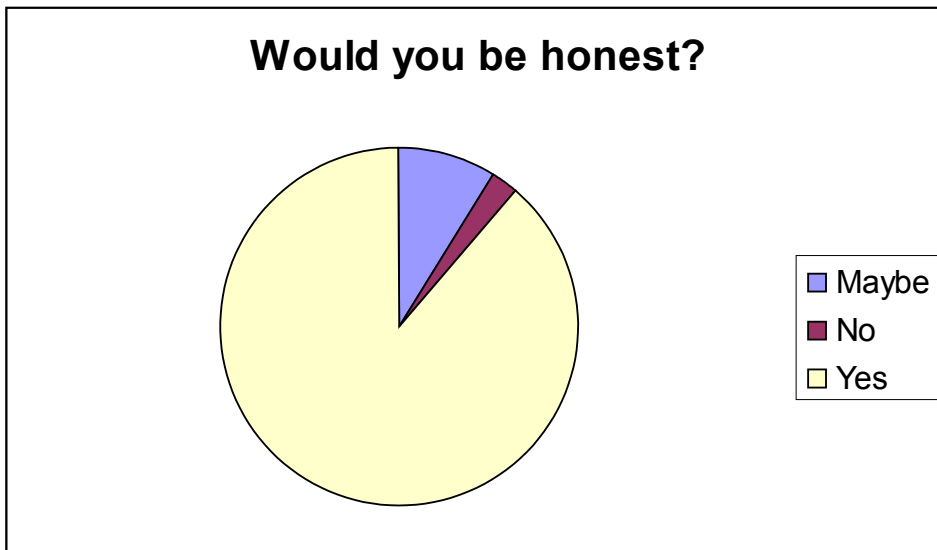
WHY WOULD PEOPLE TRY ONLINE DATING?

We posed some hypothetical questions to our respondents. The first of which is why they would try online dating. The majority of people would do it because they can get to know the potential date before meeting them (38.1%). The next biggest reason is because they are single (23.3%). We think this means that people are open to exploring online dating but just haven't had the guts to try it just yet. As more and more South African start to use online dating it will lose some of the stigma still attached to it. It will also become more acceptable when people speak and discuss their experiences in a more open and less hostile environment. The third biggest group practically "swore" they would never (14.1%) try online dating. We believe an increasing number of people are becoming disillusioned with meeting prospective dates or partners in bars or clubs (12.9%).



HONESTY

Again we posted the question of whether people would be honest when they try online dating. The overwhelming majority of them claimed they would be honest (88.6%) about themselves if they tried online dating. A smaller group said they might (9%) be honest when they tried online dating.



IN ALL SERIOUSNESS

Only 60% of people who have not tried online dating think people in South Africa take online dating serious. Again this is a reminder of the work that still needs to be done by the online dating websites / companies in South Africa to help change the perception that exist from a sceptical one to a more positive and viable alternative. In contrast 70% of those who have tried online dating think people take it serious.



Online Dating vs. Speed Dating

In 2004 “speed dating” was entered into the Oxford dictionary pages as one of the new words. The official definition "*an organised social activity in which people have a series of short conversations with potential partners in order to determine whether there is mutual interest.*"

There are obvious comparisons to be made between online dating and speed dating. Before we actually get into the specifics let's describe speed dating: Speed Dating is an event that brings together about 10 women and men. There are events for the gay and lesbian community. They meet at a predetermined venue and the costs normally include a drink and snack. The organiser explains the rules to all participants while the ladies are all seated. When speed dating starts the organiser rings a bell and the men all choose a table with a woman. They talk and ask questions for about 5 minutes. The organiser rings the bell again and all the men rotate and move to the next date until they've "dated" all the women for a few minutes each. Before hand you are given a form with space to jot down comments about each man or woman. At the end of the evening you have to select those names which you want go on an actual date with. The organisers take all the forms and go away to cross tabulate the results. Those women and men who selected each other will be given their respective contact details. It is then up to them to make contact again and setup a follow-up date. The major advantage to speed dating is that you are guaranteed to meet all the men or all the women at the event. Typically at a bar or club you have not guarantee you'll have the courage or inclination to talk to all the women.

The major difference between speed dating and online dating is that you pay per event and meet a limited amount of people. With online dating you subscribe on a monthly basis and there is no limited to the amount of people you can contact. Now given that you will not meet all the people from online dating face-to-face the process allows you to filter out "unwanted" individuals based on pre-selected criteria. With speed dating even if the person looks and dresses stylish that does not mean you have anything in common or will enjoy an extended or normal date. People will always put their best face forward and perhaps even assume a more outgoing persona to impress during those few minutes of speed dating. With online dating the communication takes place via the website, then email and later telephone. By stretching the communication out over a few weeks you

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

can make sure that you will genuinely enjoy the other person's company when you eventually meet. There will also be great anticipation because you did not rush anything.

A price comparison would show that for the price of one speed dating event you could get a subscription to most online dating websites for at least 3 months or more. Currently there are only a few thousand people who have tried speed dating and online dating has about 250, 000 users in South Africa. The fact that you have to register for most speed dating via their websites limits the potential number of people even more. The major drawback to Speed Dating according to Bodman Dark, author of The Little Book on Speed Dating, there is no "quality control." Just like internet dating, you are meeting total strangers, and common sense should be applied in all cases.

| Cost Per Event | Fast Date | Speed Dater | Dateline |
|----------------|--|--|--|
| | www.fastdate.co.za | www.speeddater.co.za | www.dateline.biz |
| Johannesburg | R200 | R150 | |
| Pretoria | R175 | R150 | |
| Cape Town | R175 | R150 | R175 |
| Durban | R150 | | |
| Average | R175 | R150 | R175 |

Interview with Dr. Andrew Thatcher

Psychologist in the School of Human and Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

July 16, 2004

What kinds of people do Online Dating?

There are two sets of people that are going to be using online dating:

- The people that are doing it purely out of fun, for something to do and
- The people that want to get something out of it.

What is the typical profile of a person who tries Online Dating?

In terms of age the profile most likely is that:

- When a younger person does not take dating that seriously; there are more options available; trying different things and there are a lot more opportunities to explore other relationships.
- As you get older, metaphorically and physically the clock starts to tick. There is a lot more pressure, in a social sense pressure from parents to get married, to have children and to make them grandparents and a biological sense as you get older, chances of complications during childbirth increases as well as genetic conditions that might arise- this is in terms of breeding. When older one has less life left. We will not live forever. As you get older there is less time to spend with the love of your life, the sooner you meet the love of your life the longer you are able to spend with them. Social, biological and psychological pressures are not necessarily distinct from one another; they can be related to one another. As people get older they start to take dating more seriously, as a result they will take online dating more seriously. They will try several things at the same time, from anecdotal evidence friends that have tried online dating at the same time tried speed dating using social networks, religious activities, social activities, cruising (going on cruises) tried a number of different things.

What kind of stigma do you think is attached to Online Dating?

Online is not seen in the same light, we evolved over 300 000 years in social structures of social contact, tribal, brotherhood and racial affinities. Human beings have evolved; online dating is one of them. Contact such as body language, face-to-face interaction and eye contact is important, that is why we are struggling with the digital age. One part of the issue is communication bandwidth; when online, there is less communication bandwidth than face-to-face interaction. You have physical contact, verbal, face to face and tone contact and a broader span of immediate feedback. The online environment uses one communication medium of text photo graphics - sending 1-3 messages a month and it takes five minutes to type out a message.

How does Love at first sight fit in?

Research in general has shown love at first sight happens to very few people. Most lasting relationships share something in common. Hosting a profile means sharing a profile; you are looking for someone to connect with. When online you meet people through common ground, for example educational institutions, sharing a common faith means you share that with them. The thing about love at first sight is that it is purely physical, they may look drop dead gorgeous but when you actually speak to them they have a squeaky voice which is not what you are looking for.

What are the benefits of Online Dating over traditional dating?

Online dating allows you to meet people in a safe environment; you cannot catch STD's or HIV/AIDS through sending a message. Sending an email does not necessarily mean that you are jumping into bed with a person. From that perspective you can sound somebody out in a relatively sober environment. There is no risk of outright rejection. You can send 2-3 messages at the same time to different people and they will not know you are flirting with someone else, you tend to be more honest, and there is no point in lying because you will be matched up with the wrong person. Opposites do not really attract, you cannot be matched with an opposite. We are approaching a more mature side of online dating; we are taking it more seriously.

Does online dating make you do things quicker and faster?

Within two months you will have a date, but how many of them will lead to a more meaningful relationship? There is a danger in assuming that we do things quicker and faster. It all purely depends on your technical sophistication. Online dating allows us to do it outside of normal times, you can get online at three o'clock in the morning, and it widens your scope. If you want to carry on a meaningful relationship you must make time for it. Our environment it seems has accelerated. We have to ask ourselves is the lifestyle we are living conducive to have a meaningful relationship?

What is the risk of people being harassed?

The main danger is the situation of minors, if you are an adult there are certain rules you should follow but not everyone does. People can manipulate the situation particularly with vulnerable groups (people with low self esteem or unstable people). Online is safer because the majority of rapes are perpetrated by people we know. Whatever message you send is electronically recorded

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

so if you divulge personal information it is on record for people to go back to. In an online environment, you are more likely to be sober not only not taking drugs and alcohol as you might if you were at a party but also psychologically as well.

Do you think the experience of online dating allows you to get to know yourself better?

There is a lot of different ways in which we get to know ourselves better, being honest with ourselves, having therapy and being spiritual is some ways. As we get older we have to look at ourselves, if you do not look at yourself retrospectively it will not help us know ourselves better. If you get positive feedback it might encourage you to be more open.

The Couples Team, www.couples.co.za

When and why did you get into online dating?

It basically started off as a fun project about 2 to 3 years ago and up until recently it was to help the community find their ideal match. With the huge increase in numbers now, we have been forced to charge a nominal fee in order to cover general running costs.

Who is your target market?

Single, South Africans

What do you believe is unique about your online dating service?

It is a lot cheaper than most other sites, easy to use, has great features without getting into too much detail and guaranteed anonymity. We decided to charge because there were people that were using it as a free email service.

What do your users/subscribers like most about your website?

They like the auto matching system. This system uses a basis of religion and cultural factors which then creates a profile and using that profile recommends people to you. The system has also been upgraded to block undesirables, so that when a user is being harassed there is an option to block them and give them a reason why they have been blocked. You can also choose to add to your list of favourites when you think you are a potential match with someone on the site. You can then view your favourites at any time and they can also tell you are interested (i.e. a quick glance of all the people you like and who like you)

What precautions do you take to protect the privacy of your users?

There is very little information required (name, telephone number and email address). On the technical side, the servers are protected by firewalls and all private information is encrypted. On the site itself we keep it very clean. If messages contain explicit information, after ten warnings, the users are automatically barred. Updating of photographs is monitored manually. Each image is checked manually because of the possibility of pornography being uploaded.

What kind of joint-ventures or partnerships do you have in place?

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

We do not believe in them. 99% of the time somebody gets bitten. The only business opportunity we can foresee is to either sell to another company and maintain it for them, or sell the database of users as is.

How do you market or promote your online dating service?

Through referrals and banner advertisements.

What kind of stigma do you think is attached to online dating?

People think that people who register are desperate, but it is really not like that. Most people just want to meet someone with like minded ideals.

What do you think of speed dating?

The concept is good, but in South Africa it is a terrible idea. The number of matches is usually very low per session. A person is given a few minutes to make a decision about another person and in that time one can really only base your decision basically on looks. In terms of costing, one pays each time you participate. It can work out quite expensive, whereas with couples.co.za, for R50 you can get three months subscription.

What do you think of SMS dating?

It should be considered, but it compromises confidentiality. We have asked our users if they would be interested using an online poll, but the response was so negative, it was decided that it would not be worth it.

What are the major obstacles to getting more people to use online dating?

If everyone met their perfect match, there would not be a need for us. Besides that, there are no real major obstacles at present.

How does access to the Internet affect the growth of users of your online dating service?

We have about 10 000 people currently on our site. At our current growth rate we expect to grow by about 30 000 to 40 000 over the next few years. There is currently about 45 million people in South Africa. Let us assume that 1 million of them are single. So that means that in 10 to 20 years we will reach the 1 million users mark. By this time there would have been an increase of 10 to

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

30% of users with internet access (and with the current statistics of divorce) that there would be no real affect upon us over the next couple of years.

What new trends do you see emerging in online dating in the next five to ten years?

Hopefully with the advent of cable, ADSL, Wireless and Fibre Optic cables we will be able to eliminate the bandwidth problems in South Africa, and thus hopefully more households with get access to the internet. More people with access mean more people online and increase our numbers and their chances to find a perfect match. There are a couple of new concepts being tried in the UK and USA at present, but by telling we will be giving away trade secrets. Needless to say these concepts are unique and working very well overseas.

How do you believe the Internet has changed dating?

Not everyone has used online dating sites, but almost everyone has heard of them. Meeting people has never been as easy as it is now.

Interview with Mike Hainebach from Dateline SA

www.datelinesa.co.za

When and why did you get into online dating?

It started 4 years ago dealing with IVR (Interactive Voice Response Services). This was when the Internet was coming into its own but IVR was more accessible because most people had telephones, it was basically an Internet based idea, any calls we received we earned more money. A person would phone a telephone number leave their own message through a voice recording, but one was restricted by what one heard, so to support this idea we went online; the website is a supporting service.

Who is your target market?

It ranges, we check that there is no swearing, no vulgar language and the voice recorded segments are verified. We find that it ranges from lonely women to the strong gay community, but the ones that want to seriously connect with others tend to be older.

What is your year on year growth in terms of users?

Our growth is pretty stable unless you market it. We have loyal users; once people are loyal they stick around. But we do not have those statistics; it could be tens of thousands of users.

What is your year on year revenue growth?

Can not tell you that.

What do you believe is unique about your online dating service?

You can hear the voice of your potential partner versus details of them, it is less immediate on the web but from there you receive an SMS notification. On the Internet one uses text writing where there is less of a feeling of what that person is about. You dial in and do a search according to a

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

profile, you review certain voice segments and can leave them a message and they can in turn record a message.

What do your users/subscribers like most about your website?

Loyal subscribers want to get connected, they use it actively. They have a relationship with the people that manage the servers.

What precautions do you take to protect the privacy of your users?

We review their profiles, we do not want the public exposed to vulgarities, other than that messages left for other people are completely confidential, this is protected by the Vodacom infrastructure.

What kind of joint-ventures or partnerships do you have in place?

IOL, Newspapers online, and Vodacom as far as dial in services go.

How do you market or promote your online dating service?

We advertise in Independent News Classifieds and in the personal section on websites.

What other online dating websites do you assume your users use?

Have no idea.

What kind of stigma do you think is attached to online dating?

From my own personal opinion this is not a service I would use. There are two distinct types of users, the ones that are doing it for fun and see it as a way of communicating, and others who see it in a more serious light as a means to connect with someone. The majority of users derive value from it, people who are very lonely, who do not have access to other means of the communicating with the outside world; find it to be a powerful way in which to meet people.

What do you think of speed dating?

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

Speed dating is dealing more with your primal instinct. It is more interactive, a new age form of entertainment. I would actually try it out for fun.

What do you think of SMS dating?

It is entertainment. People enjoy it as it is exciting.

What are the major obstacles to getting more people to use online dating?

It is quite expensive, you are charged at cellular rates and there is no guarantee that you will meet someone. As a user you could get lost in the voice browser, you could find it difficult. We are trying to make it as efficient as possible.

Interview with David Burstein from DatingBuzz

www.datingbuzz.com

What is your year on year growth in terms of users?

110 000 users, like most sites it does everything for free, except send messages.

What is your year on year growth in terms of paying subscribers?

About 10% are subscribers

What precautions do you take to protect the privacy of your users?

Information such as your email address, real name and mobile number, will not be given out. No information will be passed out to any user; it is entirely up to the individual. It is as hack proof as it gets, we are adamant about quality software.

What kind of joint-ventures or partnerships do you have in place?

We have an alliance with the Mail and Guardian, we provide a dating service and they provide a marketing platform, it is a very simple relationship.

How do you market or promote your online dating service?

We run a fair amount of very specifically targeted online advertising. In South Africa will not be doing much advertising because there are so many media partners.

What other online dating websites do you assume your users use?

There is no specific research, globally hundreds of thousands but you would find five key players. In South Africa there are a large amount of users, using other South African services of which Buzz has the largest data base. If I was single, I would be using as many as possible. There is a common

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

data base across all our sites which are a mutually beneficial relationship that gives the user maximum reach. With regards to gay sites the non gay profiles will not be shared, it would be a big problem if it were.

What do you think is the percentage overlap with other online dating websites?

I have no clue.

What kind of stigma do you think is attached to online dating?

I do not think there is any, it is becoming extremely mainstream. There is enough press around the topic; it is not something weird that people have not heard of. If you look at a sample of our profile you will see that there is every age group, every type of person, not just 18-22 year old computer geeks or weirdo's, it includes a cross section of the population.

What do you think of speed dating?

It is a different idea, quite fun. If I understand correctly, in the space of five minutes you decide if the person is right for you, which is based on how they look and what they sound like. We are dealing with very superficial issues here and one where you are actually having a conversation with the person.

What do you think of SMS dating?

On its own it can be very shallow, and problematic. I prefer to call it SMS flirting as opposed to dating. It can, however be fun. By combining the two you will have the depth of Internet profiling and the immediacy of text messaging.

What are the major obstacles to getting more people to use online dating?

Besides computer literacy, the issue of not wanting to be perceived as desperate but I disagree with that. You can set up a profile and no one will know who you are, you can be extremely anonymous,

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

for example you can set up a profile without a photograph. Other than that I can not think of any other reasons not to do it, other than you are not single.

Clive Engelberg, MD www.galaxysingles.com

When and why did you get into online dating?

We got into Online Dating in 1996. The main reason was to help South African singles meet new people using new technology.

Who is your target market?

Single, have internet access with a global range but 80% are South Africans.

What do you believe is unique about your online dating service?

The number of people, people are able to meet and the price. The functionality is similar to all the other sites.

What do your users/subscribers like most about your website?

They like the ease of use.

What precautions do you take to protect the privacy of your users?

The use of firewalls and passwords, the standard options, there has never been a problem with hacking.

What kind of joint ventures or partnerships do you have in place?

We have one or two but I cannot divulge.

How do you market or promote your online dating service?

We do online advertising, newspaper advertising, distributing leaflets and have parties where we encourage users to get together.

What is the stigma attached to online dating?

Definitely one attached for people that have not tried it before. Once it has been tried they do not have a problem with it.

What do you think of speed dating?

It is a novel idea and we have worked with some of them.

What do you think of SMS dating?

Nice idea, bigger market but clumsy to search and register, it is very expensive. One does not getting value for money, with online dating you pay R30 for the entire month, whereas with the SMS each time you send an SMS it will cost you.

What are the major obstacles to getting more people to use online dating?

Cheaper Internet and specifically broadband access like ADSL or MyWireless must become cheaper. One cannot use a modem anymore it is simply too slow. Changing the mindset of people is another obstacle.

How does access to the Internet affect the growth of users of your online dating service?

It is a small percentage, out of the 3.7 million Internet users, how many of them are single, and how many from that would like to do online dating?

Interview with Joe Sokolic from LoveFinda

www.lovefinda.com

When and why did you get into online dating?

Two years ago, after I came back from working overseas and saw that online dating could be improved upon by combining the ideas of different websites.

Who is your target market?

Anyone who wants to date, the parameter I set around myself is that I am not necessarily targeting a younger crowd but trying to target a classier market.

What is your year on year growth in terms of users?

South Africans are very fickle. The majority comes from search engine optimization. My site is on top of Ananzi, South Africa's biggest search engine because of the above mentioned search engine optimisation.

What do you expect for 2004?

There are a couple of things happening; we are still in our first year since launching our site. We foresee dramatic changes. I am waiting to receive feedback from our clients. We are starting from the bottom, but 5000 members would be great at the end of the year.

What is your year on year growth in terms of paying subscribers?

From September last year we have had 2500 members of which 80% are South African, but that is due to our service being free of charge.

What is your year on year revenue growth?

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

In our starting phase, we spent a minimal amount of money, testing word of mouth advertising, which set it up with Social Networking, a product of mine that feeds into Lovefinder. This, essentially, is a cost effective dating system which consists of staffing costs and marketing costs, by cutting down on these costs we leverage social networking. Financially we are generating more space than profits. The free dating service is, however, open to spam. In retrospect it is better to deliver a quality website by means of charging.

What do you believe is unique about your online dating service?

A great deal of functionality that other sites have not thought of, taking old ideas and making them more user friendly. For example there is a number of ways to check who is interacting with you.

What do your users/subscribers like most about your website?

Members are quite happy with what the site has to offer, we have had some good results, and for example I have friends that have people coming from all over the world to see them.

What precautions do you take to protect the privacy of your users?

We have disclaimers, we have our privacy policy, and we also advise people on how to do things for example filtering out personal email addresses until the people have interacted with one another for a while. With regards to user privacy we advise them not to use their name as a username. The information we keep is encrypted, we take it very seriously, we keep email addresses on record, and they are like identity books.

What kind of joint-ventures or partnerships do you have in place?

Career finder which is in house, and we are currently in negotiation with certain web and other media related outside ventures.

How do you market or promote your online dating service?

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

Advertising on the Internet using search engine optimisation which is a whole other form of marketing that does not cost me anything but it takes time. I have also advertised on other sites but that form of advertising is quite expensive. Links are included in search engine optimisation.

What other online dating websites do you assume your users use?

Dating Buzz is stronger, it is a very good website and the business plan is airtight, but on a functionality bases I would say my site is better since I made certain improvements. Most of my users use their sites, most of it is disseminated.

What do you think the percentage overlap with other online dating websites is?

Two or three other websites. It is a catch twenty-two situation if your site is well trafficked you get promoted but to get good traffic it takes a while.

What kind of stigma do you think is attached to online dating?

In South Africa, yes, we have a stigma attached to it. People here have more time to meet others, and there are so many other means of meeting people, but online dating is going to grow onto the Internet population.

What do you think of SMS dating?

It is an add-on to Internet dating. The Internet is the big brother, they have a niche market. It is more expensive and not much competition.

What are the major obstacles to getting more people to use online dating?

Internet access, the budget with regards to a free dating website, are barriers to entry. Different cultures and the cost involved also play a role in this. I need to attract users at the lowest possible cost. The issue of costing might become a problem at a later stage.

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How do you believe the Internet has changed dating?

It will eventually become a way of life. It is so much easier to meet someone through the Internet. We may, however, have to teach Internet Etiquette.

Felix Erken, MD JunkMail speaks about LoveMail:

www.lovemail.co.za

When and why did you get into online dating?

We are a free-advertising paper, personals are a big part of the paper, it is a service we have offered to our readers for the last 12 years. When the Internet came on board, we took a receptive stance to it. Many publishers thought it would take away from their profits. We launched the website, as a part of JunkMail in 1997, the printed version of Lovemail was very restrictive, cumbersome, and expensive; the Internet meant you could have instant response, and has increased the value of the Paper. The early success shown by the web version of LoveMail allowed it to be launched as it's own brand in 1998, and has existed as a separate product since.

Who is your target market?

Currently 75% male and 25% female – although the female ratio is improving.

(Of the most active users, the ratio is currently 66% male to 34% female which is encouraging!)

20 to 30 year old age group currently makes up the largest group of registered users – highest rate of dating, adventurous, more comfortable with the concept of internet dating than older counterparts.

Aged from 30 to 40 years old second highest group – too busy to date, more difficult to meet single people in this age range as most are in committed relationships / married / remarried

Trickles down from older than 45 – already in committed relationships, disillusioned or wary of the concept of internet dating.

What do you believe is unique about your online dating service?

Integration of SMS functionality with web based site, allows you to communicate across two mediums, and does not betray confidentiality. Both these services are quite comprehensive, user friendly and functional. The web keeps a log of all sms's sent to the user cell phone as well as messages sent to the user online. So you can message one another from cell to cell, web to cell, cell to web, or web to web – and have a record of all messages sent and received across either medium

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

on the web. We adapted our base; we have a reasonable understanding of the mentality of our users. It is easy for users to get what they want, when they want it. We offer friendship, romance and ‘more than romance’ type relationships. We proofread all the advertisements, any vulgarities found results in the rejection of the advertisement. In addition, we also proof all photographs uploaded onto the site to ensure that there is no unwanted nudity to which users can be exposed to – adult content can only be sent and received by those who have specifically registered to do so. We are very careful about privacy. We are here to provide a service not moralise. We provide interaction and communication.

What do your users/subscribers like most about your website?

That they meet people; and that other people have met on the site and have gotten married i.e the success stories. Everybody likes the new site because it is more inviting, has options for the different kinds of relationship sought (friendship/romance/flirting) – it allows for good clean fun, with opportunity for a more serious relationship developing.

What precautions do you take to protect the privacy of your users?

We are the only ones that know the contact details of the user. Their personal details are never given out by LoveMail – but at the users own discretion only. When users register, they are asked whether their information can be used for further statistics, and is used ONLY if they agree – we don’t even send them LoveMail news if they haven’t agreed to this. All interaction between users occurs through a nickname chosen by each user – so the person you are messaging doesn’t receive your real name, unless the user chooses to share that info. The sms’s are sent to our messaging number and forwarded from there – so the cell no is not shown to the person receiving the sms.

What kind of joint ventures or partnerships do you have in place?

Tiscali is our biggest partner as the personals content provider.

How do you market or promote your online dating service?

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

Using the print media as well as our sister websites via banners. By educating- we get people to understand SMS and Internet, we use our websites, media and partnerships and make use of banner swaps as well. We do very few promotions, nothing consistent.

What is the stigma attached to online dating?

The stigma still exists but to a lesser extent; less the creepier aspect that was perhaps the perception in the past, possibly still that internet dating is more for 'desperate' people - but perceptions are changing. The type of user that is being attracted now is already educated, has a higher disposable income and is going through an experimentation phase. The perception will change further depending on how the media portrays it; if they can portray it in a positive way, it will help it become more acceptable and 'mainstream'.

What do you think of speed dating?

It is more for a 'let's go for a laugh'. It is safe because you can see the person face to face in a controlled environment, a marvellous way of sharing interaction with people in an acceptable way.

What do you think of SMS dating?

It works, everyone has a cell phone, and it is getting bigger. SMS dating has its place, it is not as serious, and it is fun with a lot of flirting, which sometimes does not amount to any follow through. Dating per se can be dangerous – one doesn't always know the character of the one you are dealing with. The same can be true of sms dating – but by using the site to further check out the details of the person you have been smsing, you can get a clearer picture of the person. In profiles that have photos uploaded you can see the person before you meet as well. SMS dating can become expensive; it is not a community you can control. With the identity of the user being protected by LoveMail, a lot of the danger is removed – as you can choose who has your real name and contact details; you can decide how long to remain anonymous in the relationship; any user can cease interaction immediately should they begin to feel uncomfortable .

What are the major obstacles to getting more people to use online dating?

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

Internet usage is one; two and a half to three million Internet users have to trust the website, have faith in it, and the concept to make it more mainstream. There are still a few negative perceptions about internet dating that education and the increase of successful matches will eradicate over time.

How does access to the Internet affect the growth of users of your online dating service?

Because users can register via their cell phone and chat to other users even while not at their PC, the effect is less than if we were an internet dating site only.

The more access there is to Internet within the population, the greater will be the use of this medium for dating.

What new trends do you see emerging in online dating in the next year?

The SMS and Internet integration is a great business model; the SMS function is evolving considerably where you can also take photographs. A good marriage of Print Internet Mobile is the future.

What new trends do you see emerging in online dating in the next five years?

Print Internet mobile, cross-pollination, anyone that is serious about online dating has to embrace one of these services. You will dominate the market if you have the content.

How do you believe the Internet has changed dating?

The opportunity to 'screen' prospective dates is introduced, rather than just arriving for a 'blind date' with someone that is a stranger in every sense of the word. With online / sms dating, you can get an idea of the values and character, interests and ideas of the person before taking that step to meet. It cuts down on the time that is often spent in meeting with unsuitable matches. In a time when most people have little time to themselves, this is an excellent way to meet maximum number of people while spending least amount of time.

Interview with Ben Sassman from “The Positive Connection”

www.thepositiveconnection.co.za

When and why did you get into online dating?

Two of my male friends who are HIV positive always went out with women on dates, but the minute they disclosed their status the date did not go any further. I advised them to try online dating, but it still left them with the problem of having to disclose their status at a later date. I tried looking for a site that provided a service for HIV positive people but could not find any. This was my opportunity to do something about it. I did not want to be seen as one of those people that are making billions from the millions, so 10% of profits are donated to a charity and is the reason why we have a resource site. It was established 9th September 2002 but relaunched many months later.

Who is your target market?

HIV positive people that want to meet other people without having to disclose their status because the people that register are HIV positive.

What is your year on year growth in terms of users?

After the re-launch we had 86 members registered, 66 South Africans and the rest are from all over the world.

What is your year on year revenue growth?

At this moment it is not generating any money, maybe at the end of this month or the beginning of September we will see a profit. It involves a lot of marketing costs, but I do not mind. I am waiting to see the result.

What do you believe is unique about your online dating service?

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

Dating is very expensive, finding the right person is even more expensive. Two to three women out of 100 are what it comes down to from online dating, which you can not get on the street. It is cheaper, you can search free of charge, sending and receiving is the only cost incurred.

What do your users/subscribers like most about your website?

They like the fact that there is a site like this; I receive positive feedback from members about the site. I refer people to the experts when they want information regarding HIV, I just own the site I am not an expert in this field. People like the idea that they can meet people that are in the same situation.

What precautions do you take to protect the privacy of your users?

People have to sign a non-disclosure claimer, on a personal capacity; we give a promise not to sell the database to any other company. Confidentiality is a big issue, security systems are in place but who is really safe from hackers?

What kind of joint-ventures or partnerships do you have in place?

Q dating service is the biggest gay dating service hosting 18 000 members, it is run by Bruce Lucas & Hayden, but they have a different database. We also work alongside the AIDS Consortium, from which we release information on the website through their database of contacts.

How do you market or promote your online dating service?

I have been on 702, and spoke to Tracy Going of Morning Live. I also market by advertising on other websites.

What other online dating websites do you assume your users use?

I have no idea, other sites do not have a link to my site and they do not want it.

What do you think of speed dating?

The NETucation Report: Online Dating in South Africa, 2004

It is a good concept, unique, a cheap quick way to meet 10 people, one of whom you might like and take it from there.

What do you think of SMS dating?

I believe it is a sick, money making scam; someone is getting rich on this. It does not work. You SMS your name and the name of another person and they tell you if you match, where is the logic in that?

What are the major obstacles to getting more people to use online dating?

Disclosure is a big issue; nothing keeps a negative person from trying to cause trouble by prying and prowling. People's identity is very important. We only advertise spam email to HIV/positive people and organisations. I have 1022 people visiting my site but can not say how many of them are HIV positive, it is a big problem.

More about Ramon Thomas

Ramon Thomas is the Managing Director of NETucation, the first black empowered Internet research company in South Africa. He has a BSc in Computer Science & Statistics (1995) and in 2005 completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Information Management from [University of Johannesburg](#). He is currently working towards a Masters in Information & Knowledge Management at the same university. Currently he serves on the Executive Committee of the [Computer Society of South Africa](#), as well as Non-Executive Director on the board of the [ICDL Foundation](#) in Cape Town, and the [ISETT SETA](#) in Midrand. His interests include Tai Chi Chuan, classical music and art.

Author's Contact Details

Ramon Thomas ramon@netucation.co.za

Tel/Fax (011) 4331034

Mobile +27829407137

<http://www.netucation.co.za>