

FEATURES

Finding love online

9:42am Tuesday 12th February 2013 in Features



Tracy Lamb and Dan Aitken who met after internet dating



Ahead of St Valentine's Day, MAXINE GORDON reports on dating in the digital age

IT'S almost 20 years since dating bible *The Rules* was published, showing a generation of women how to find Mr Right by following one simple guideline: let him do all the chasing.

Fast forward two decades and the dating scene has been transformed almost beyond recognition by the arrival of the internet and social media.

For starters, you don't even have to leave home to look for love – you can simply join one of the many online dating services available.



Alternatively, if there's someone you've met socially you can check them out first on Facebook or Twitter – and even send them a message to pique their interest.

Faced with this revolution, *The Rules* has been updated for our digital times.

In *The New Rules: The Dating Dos and Don'ts for the Digital Generation* (Piatkus, £9.99), authors Sherrie Schneider and Ellen Fein have reworked some of the original commandments from the Nineties, such as:

- Do place an online dating ad but never answer a man's
- After four emails if he hasn't asked you out, forget it
- Be careful what you put out on social media
- Don't text first
- If you are 20, leave it an hour to reply to a text; if you are 50, leave it for four hours.

With the number of singletons on the rise, people are finding it harder to sustain lasting relationships. Does computer technology make it easier or more difficult to find true love? And can Sherrie and Ellen's 'rules' really help us find Mr and Ms Right?

Here, two York couples share their stories of modern romance...

Tracy and Dan

Tracy Lamb is 38 and was single for four years before she met Dan Aitken, 39, just over a year ago through a dating app on her mobile phone. They now live together in York with two of her children, Caitlin, 14, and Taylor, 12

I only went on it for a giggle. But then I saw Dan and thought he looked nice; he seemed a genuine guy and we seemed to hit it off straight away.

He liked the fact that I said I liked action films, motorbikes, cars and football. I checked him out on Facebook and learned a little bit about him before we met.

I checked to see if he was friends with hundreds of girls. Facebook is useful – you can check out whether the person is who they say they are.

We met about two weeks later and really hit it off. He met my family straight away.

Dan, 39, works at Tesco at Clifton Moor. He has a 16-year-old son, Harry, from another relationship

I'd been single around eight months and the site was recommended by a friend. I was only on it for two days when I met Tracy.

"I liked her profile. I could see we had plenty of things in common. I had a snoop on Facebook – I think that is standard practice now. You want to go through their profile photos and see what they look like. I don't think that's too bad – if you were going for a new job, you would do a bit of research before the interview.

Also, it gives you a bit of an insight into their life and what they like and don't like – and gives you something to talk about when you eventually meet.

We are now engaged and saving up for a wedding.

Sarah and Mathew

Sarah-Jane Bell is 36 and lives in Acomb with partner Mathew Weeks. They met three years ago and are getting married in September at York Register Office

I had been single for a while when a friend suggested I join a dating agency. I thought they were all a bunch of idiots then Mathew got in touch and I really liked his message. We messaged for a bit through the dating site, then started on MSN so we could do instant chat. Then we swapped numbers and spoke on the phone for hours.

We did this for about three months before we met. We felt we had got to know each other before the meeting, but we were both nervous.

We went for a coffee and a natter and everything was fine. It was as if I'd known him for years. We started meeting two or three times a week. Mathew was living and working in Scarborough so eventually he moved to York and we started living together.

He proposed to me eight months after meeting – on my birthday. He got down on one knee and got the ring out.

With internet dating, I think it is more difficult to play hard to get but it can help people meet the right person. You can be more selective. It helped me find Mat. I never thought I'd get married because I never thought I'd find someone I'd love that much. But then I met Mathew and he spun my world around.

Mathew Weeks is 33 and was living in Scarborough when he met Sarah online. They now live together in York and he works at Tesco on Low Ousegate

In Scarborough, I used to see the same people all the time and wanted to cast my net a bit wider. I joined an online dating agency and saw Sarah's profile. She looked really pretty so I messaged her and it started from there.

Sometimes, social media can be a hindrance in dating, but if you don't want someone to find you, you can always 'block' them.

But on the whole I think the internet is a good thing; it can help you meet and talk to people that you would not have met face to face. It's a gateway. I'd never have found Sarah without it.

I think things are a lot better for people dating in the digital age. Ten years ago there weren't as many dating sites and you couldn't see photos.

If there is someone you like, you can look at pictures of them on Facebook. If you see pictures of them doing something stupid you can ask yourself: 'Is this someone I want to date?' Or you can build up an impression of them before you go to meet them.

You do make judgements about people on how they appear on the internet. But if they have nothing to hide then there's nothing to worry about.

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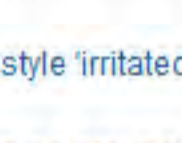


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Updated 3:34pm Wednesday 2nd October 2013

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