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While most of us moan about the summer heat, there's one man floating through these summer months in a blissful haze. Paul is in his late 50s and madly in love. The businessman met his new beau two months ago, through online dating. It's been all go since then – she's received a big tick from his elderly mother and they recently enjoyed their first shared Christmas.

That's the real point about online dating. It works. It's helping men and women to get together, make new friends and for some, find the love of their lives. But it still can be a daunting, bewildering process as I've found out this year giving online dating advice to three women on Wendy Harmer's website [hoopla.com.au](http://hoopla.com.au), and more recently as a private coach.

Peter's story is typical. This gentle, cheerful man had been struggling unsuccessfully with online dating for over two years when I first started working with him. One look at his profile and you could see why. That photo – oh dear, talk about a bad, thinning hair day! And as for the half-head of the blonde woman standing next to him – that's a real no-no. But with a flattering new photo, and a fresh, appealing profile, he was immediately flooded with responses and met his lady love the very next day.

So here's some dos and don'ts to make online dating work for you.

### Pick the right site

Choose your online website carefully, particularly if you are paying big bucks to get involved. If you are a 28-year-old smokin' babe you'll do well on most sites, even the freebies, but older women need to fish in the larger ponds since the numbers are so badly stacked against them. Women looking for a well-educated man living close to home should steer clear of sites which match people on so-called "personality tests". I heard recently from a professional woman living in Perth who sweated for hours over the endless questionnaires and finally received her perfect matches – mainly leather-clad, Sydney bikies. She then found she couldn't get out of her expensive subscription.

### Your billboard

Photos matter. Your pictures are your billboard, the first thing any prospective partner will notice about your profile, and your best chance of grabbing their attention. You need flattering, cheerful shots – including one full-length version. Avoid that startled rabbit look that comes from holding your iPhone at arm's length. Men, be warned that posing with your big bike or flash car may impress your mates but turn off many women. Avoid photos in silly hats, or Mexican hats or Santa costumes – although I did once have a great date with a man who turned up in the dreadful Swiss flag T-shirt he had worn in his profile pic. He was witty and appealing enough to get away with

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# RIGHT CLICK FOR LOVE

A VALENTINE'S DAY ROMANCE MAY BE WAITING ON-LINE – IF YOU  
JUST FOLLOW A FEW SIMPLE RULES

## VALENTINE'S DAY



it. And ladies, it's not a good idea to trot the girls out. Cleavage and saucy negligee shots will attract some but repel many. As for that shot I saw recently of a 60-year-old man in budgie smugglers ... the best photo advice for both genders is keep your clothes on!

### Nail that headline

Set the tone of your profile with a catchy first sentence which plays to your strengths. The Sydney businessman Paul happens to like curvy women so his first line – "No twiggy for me!" – was designed to appeal to the many older women carrying a few extra kilos. Spend time to get it right, jotting down thoughts, asking friends for ideas.

### Walk the walk

Don't boast of a great sense of humour – say something funny instead. "Save me from my cat!" was the headline we used for a woman who complained she was living alone with her cat. Or how about this cheeky line from a male profile – "I have no ulterior motives and don't bite unless asked." Humour is a good way of putting a spin on the negatives. "No Napoleon complex here," worked for a short man who needed to confront stereotypes about his height. You don't have to be brilliantly witty but something original or quirky is always refreshing. And if you are claiming to be well-educated, for heaven's sake watch your grammar and use spell check!

### No shopping lists

Women's profiles are often full of wants and needs – "I want a man who is..." This is hardly likely to appeal to men, particularly divorced males recovering from a failed relationship. Think about not what you want but what you have to offer. So while I understand that many older women who have raised a family are totally over cooking, it doesn't pay to highlight this in your profile. Far better to talk about what you don't mind whipping together – "I cook a great osso bucco." And of course your children come first if you are a single mum – that's a given. But waxing lyrical about your wonderful family might

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well convince a man that he will always be an intruder in your full life. He needs to sense a welcome mat, no matter how crowded your schedule.

### Know your target market

You need to be realistic about who's in your reach. Playing the sugar daddy or sexy cougar might sound like fun but including this fantasy in your profile risks putting off partners you are more likely to attract. It's really tough, particularly for us older women, to come to grips with our declining market value. The woman who spent her youth knocking the boys back, married the cream of the crop – tall, successful, well-heeled – and then hit 50 alone will discover those coveted specimens are now like hen's teeth. One of the Hoopla women was in her late 50s, 1.7m tall and worked in admin yet was determined to find herself a professional man who was over 1.8m. She needed to widen her net.

### Scrub up well

Do make an effort to look good for that first date. Many women complain they put hours into their dating prep – waxing, tanning, polishing, manicure, pedicure – only to find they are greeted by a man in thongs with a two-day growth. And what is it about older divorced men and their terrible teeth? Are their coffers really in such dire straits that they can't afford those new crowns or is it that they are lacking a nagging woman in their life to tell them they just shouldn't appear in public like that.

### No Judge Judy

Don't immediately veto a prospective date because they sound nervous, or say something awkward when you first meet or chat. One of the Hoopla women was surprised that her date responded to her "How are you?" with, "We'll see about that." OK, OK, it was an attempt at a joke which didn't come off but luckily she got that. So

leave Judge Judy at home, lighten up and show tolerance for first time nerves. Dating should be an adventure, a fun opportunity to meet new people not some big ordeal.

### Be kind

It takes courage to put yourself online, to make that first phone-call or turn up for a date, or even send a photo and risk a knock-back. We're all vulnerable when seeking a mate and it's shocking how often people fail to respect that by showing a little courtesy. Good dating manners mean being honest in your profile and not trying to suck people in by fibbing about your age or those extra kilos. It means responding to contacts, showing up for the date – and being on time. Making an effort to be engaging, asking questions, not just holding forth. As for the Sydney woman who brings out a check list and puts her dates through a quick quiz to see if they make the grade: job, car, house, etc – it's hardly surprising she's the one who gets the knock-backs.

### Thick skin

Learning to cope with rejection is part of the game. Men often use a shotgun approach, sending out heaps of messages in the hope of getting a few takers. That's far kinder on the ego than endlessly searching for The One, making contact and hearing nothing. What makes the whole business tougher is even when you do meet someone and start dating, often he or she will still have others on the back burner. Some argue it always pays to have a Plan B for online dating, just in case things don't work out. But this means there are plenty of men and women who constantly keep their options open ... and there are far too many choices. Indeed, online dating can be tough going. You need to remember it's a marathon, perhaps even an ultra-marathon, not a sprint. So don't give up, even if you keep getting kicked to the kerb. There's always more slippery fish in this choppy sea. Eventually you are bound to land one – and one is all you need.



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