

# A match made in computers

**Bill Hall/Lewiston Tribune**

One day years ago, a young woman I worked with reported she had found a computer website where strangers could sort of meet each other and strike up online conversations. It virtually amounted to dating.

The website found people out there in the electronic night and gave them a chance to discover like-minded potential mates. But that was a little tricky. That was mostly before matchmaking companies, who have some safeguards in place, pretty much took control of the process.

So you throw your hook out there into millions of people of the opposite gender trying to catch a likable, lovable counterpart. And now such websites include matchmakers for gay people and matchmaking specifically for Christians, among others.

But it's a little bit tricky, even with posted photos. For all you know the picture is bogus and you are chatting with Bigfoot, although it could be a charming Bigfoot.

One day after my coworker started dating somebody online, she announced she had found a mate. She jumped on a bus and went to Arizona to look him over. She liked what she saw and married him.

Just lucky, I thought. Such dating sounds more like a silly movie plot than reality. So I used to laugh at such nonsense. But there was a need out there among the lonely. I should have known that a matchmaking company with a complex, detailed quiz probably could narrow down and find kindred souls who share the same tastes and aspirations.

It's kind of like buying a new car. But if you were to buy a new car the way people used to find romantic partners, you would go into a large dealership and look at everything on the premises - sedans, mini-buses, pickup trucks, convertibles, spiffy little sports cars, maybe a horse or two.

But of course, most people want to see only the choices of vehicles that fit them and their emotional needs. A hulking pickup fanatic with a missing muffler isn't likely to hook up with someone who drives a quiet little Prius. But vehicle or human date, everybody is inclined to kick the tires.

People looking for love want to stop wasting their time sorting out everybody under the sun. If they are a shrieking holier-than-thou liberal Democrat, they probably won't want to waste their time trying to match up with some stuffy old Tea Party nerd. Or vice versa.

On the other hand, a few couples might have in common some sick enjoyment of masochistic marriage made up of two diverse souls.

But mostly we would all like to find someone on the same wavelength.

I first noticed specialized matchmaking back before household computers started helping us sort each other out and maybe pick a winner. I remember several community social clubs whose interest was in avoiding two common ways to find a mate - hanging out in bars or hanging out in churches. If you aren't a church-goer or a bar fly, where do you mingle? If you don't fancy either approach, what do you do?

Some lonely people around here formed little clubs where single citizens could look each other over without whiskey or praying.

And then, along came computers and the Internet, where people could search for Mister Right or Miss Cuddly with considerable success.

Today, I have several friends and relatives who turned to dating websites where they have a more efficient means of sorting the wheat from the chaff. I am told that you sign up and fill out lengthy questionnaires that sort you into a pile of people with similar interests. For instance, if she loves mud wrestling and you love mud wrestling, that can narrow down your shot at someone as disturbed as you are.

By coincidence, I have had some experience in finding a person who looked like me on the inside, even if I am not as physically ravishing as she is on the outside.

When you write a column of this sort, you tend, in occasional desperation, to mine your own life for stories. Unbeknownst to me, Sharon was reading my columns and recognized a person who marches to the same drummer.

So she pounced.

And I did not try to get away.

I should have known computer dating would work. I was practically the poster child for finding a lifetime mate the easy way.

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