
Finding Amore - and Financial Value - In the Online Dating World

By Brian O'Connell | 07/15/15 - 11:40 AM EDT

NEW YORK ([MainStreet](#)) -- Online dating sites are in their hey day, with nine of ten Americans digitally plugged in to the Internet, according to [Pew Research](#). Compare that to 1995, the year Match.com launched, when the Internet was just getting off the ground with consumers, and only 14% of Americans called themselves "Internet users."

With that growth, more Americans are amenable to online dating, and any stigma attached to web dating is long gone. "Today, almost half of the public knows someone who uses online dating or who has met a spouse or partner via online dating--and their attitudes towards online dating have grown progressively more positive," Pew reports.

That said, most dating sites aren't free, and a few of them are actually expensive. How expensive? A new study from GoBankingRates.com lists eHarmony.com as the priciest dating site on the web, with "nearly \$60 for one month of membership." On the less expensive side, OkCupid.com only charges \$5.00 or less for a six-month subscription. PlentyofFish.com costs \$19.35 a month for two months or \$10.18 per month for an eight-month subscription. Zoosk also clocks in on the affordable side, at \$29.95 per month for one month or \$12.49 per month for six months. As for Match.com, a one-month membership starts at \$44.95 per month, making it one of the more high-cost online data portals.

"There are so very many dating resources online that it's easy to have a first date every day for the rest of your life," says April Masini, founder of the self-help web site AskApril.com. "But I'd ask is that success or purgatory? I'd tell you it's the latter, and most daters will agree after a series of first dates that goes into double digits."

To get into the "success" category, Masini recommends knowing what you want before signing up for an online dating site. "There are filters on most dating sites, and you should use them," she says. "Know the age range you want to date, as well as the race, religion and parental status - like single parent, or single parent without kids."

"You should also be clear on [money issues](#), geography and appearance as well as lifestyle and relationship goals," she added.

Trish McDermott, a member of the startup team at Match.com over 20 years ago, and spokesperson for the site for ten years, has an insider's look at getting the most value from a paid online data site. "If you want to get the best rate, log on to a site and create a profile but don't subscribe right away," she says. "Wait for a sale or special rate. Not all sites offer them, and sites that do offer them may only do so periodically, but if you aren't in a rush and like to get a bargain, it can be worth the wait."

McDermott says most sites offer significant discounts if you join for a longer period of time. She also notes that since most singles joining dating sites join two or more sites, leverage your investment by looking for sites that don't have a high percentage of duplicate members. "This might mean you join one niche site and one larger generic site, or a free site and a paid site, or sites that seem to have two different matching and dating philosophies, like Match and eHarmony," she says.

Also, get to the top of an online dating site's profile list by refreshing your own profile frequently. That doesn't work 100% of the time, but most dating site algorithms tend to reward frequent updaters, she adds.

Still, if you can get on a dating site for free, even for a short-term trials, that may be the best way to go if you're on a budget. "Hands-down, the way to get the best value out of online dating sites is to make sure you can message for free, and see other users' profiles for free," says Em Hammel, an online dating consultant for men. "OkCupid has the most robust offerings for online daters who want good value and the best returns for their time and efforts. OkCupid's basic features are free, their user base is huge, their matching algorithms are excellent and paid upgrades are still available for those who want more features."

Love is fickle, as they say, but that doesn't mean you should pay big bucks to find romance online. As the industry insiders attest, there is value in finding value on love online, too.