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Find LOVE Online

By Tim Alper

Are you tired of being alone, but too afraid of the weirdoes, stalkers and fraudsters that lurk in cyberspace to try Internet dating? Then have no fear, as our idiot-proof guide to digital romance gets to the heart of the matter.

We had Black Day last month, and there was every reason for black moods all around for anyone who was not in a relationship in Korea. After two solid months of lovey-dovey couple-themed holidays, with Valentine's Day in February and White Day in March, people who were not one of the lucky ones had a chance to get together and be glum together.

In Korea, the tradition is to tuck into a bowl of black noodles, jajangmyun, with your single chums and complain about how miserable your life is. However, when the jajangmyun has been cleared away, some people might be thinking about moving on and trying to actually do something about it.

But for all too many people who are not at school or university any more, the traditional paths to finding a partner have become all too narrow. Meeting someone at work is a dangerous idea - what happens if things go wrong? Clubs and bars are for teenagers, or people in their early twenties, and blind dates are often painful and tedious, especially in Korea.

So, can IT offer an answer? Online dating is an unknown territory, a black hole for most. In fact it is an area where many single people, no matter how lonely, fear to tread. There are so many Internet scams - nasty people are out there in their hordes, trying to steal your money, your identity, goodness knows what else.

There are perverts of all descriptions, and the Internet enables a person to lie as much as they wish. If someone tells you they look like George Clooney and have a better bank balance than Bill Gates, how will you ever know - unless you agree to meet them?

But as the Internet never stops evolving, so too do online dating sites. At first, they may

have been a little rough around the edges, but now, more and more people are taking to the net in search of true love.

Jupiter Research say that 2.8 million Europeans pay for online dating, and predict that the number is set to climb, with 6 million people there prepared to fork out for web romance by the year 2011. An estimated 40 Million Americans use online dating services.

Koreans, too are getting involved with digital love. Here, new dating sites spring up like mushrooms in the forest as Asians get into the idea of online matchmaking.

Amanda Tsinonis is a Founding Partner at YesnomayB.com. She says that there is no reason people should feel ashamed or unsure about the idea of going onto the net to look for love. She says, "People shop online and bank online, so what is wrong with dating online?"

Seo explains, "Chat rooms were really popular for a while but some highprofile horror stories have corrupted all that. That is why it's better and safer to use a dating site. You can look in detail at a person's profile to see who they really are, what they do. The frightening anonymity of the chat room is gone now that dating sites are here."

That said, the veil of the Internet allows for some creativity, as it were, with profiles and pictures. Indeed, who is to know if the person in the photo is really the person you are talking to? How are you to know if someone online is telling the truth when they say they are a top exec with Samsung?

The experts have some novel suggestions for people who want to be sure that they are not being duped online. Tsinonis suggests, "You can ask the person to take a picture of themselves with something random. Ask them for a picture of them holding an orange, or a stapler - or something specific that they can't magic out of an archive. Anything like this can help you be sure you know who you are speaking to."

Seo suggests another strategy. He says, "You can call their company and ask if such-and-such works there. That way you can see straight away if you are being lied to without wasting any more time."

Sam Yagan is the CEO of OkCupid, an Internet dating site which, unlike most sites, requires no subscription fee. He warns, "One golden rule is to never send money to anyone that you speak with on an Internet dating site, no matter how nice they may seem. Also, never give out personal information that may allow someone to steal your identity. Be smart with the information you share with other daters, and you should be fine."

Tsinonis agrees, "These scammers are professionals, they'll appeal to your sensitive side with tales of needing money for an operation for their sick mum and the like - you need to be a bit skeptical."

But enough about the dangers and be-carefuls. How about the nitty gritty of finding love?

What do we need to do to stand out from all the other lonely souls out there on the web?

Seo says keep it simple, “Look for people with a similar kind of background on an Internet dating site which, unlike most sites, requires no subscription fee. He warns, “One golden rule is to never send money to anyone that you speak with on an Internet dating site, no matter how nice they may seem. Also, never give out personal information that may allow someone to steal your identity. Be smart with the information you share with other daters, and you should be fine.”

Seo says keep it simple, “Look for people with a similar kind of background to yourself. If you are earning 20,000,000 Won a year, going out with someone who earns five times more than that will mean that you have very little in common.”

Not everyone agrees, however. Yagan thinks that the real beauty of online dating is the fact that it can connect people who might otherwise never have met.

He explains, “Usually, people only meet others who are similar to them in places like the office, their church, or their neighborhood. Online dating allows singles to step outside their comfort zone and meet individuals from other walks of life. So a businessman may not usually come in contact with an artist on the other side of town, but the two may be truly compatible if they were to meet up on an online dating site.”

However, most of the experts seem to agree that the best tools for the online dating job are honesty and photos. After all, people are much more attracted to people than they are to words.

Tsinonis says, “Choosing the right photo for your dating profile is important, and a surprising number of people get it wrong. Things like enlarging smaller images often makes the picture quality poor and creates a bad first impression.”

Yagan agrees that beginners need good recent photos on hand, and adds that honesty is the best policy. “Don’t try to be someone who you’re not. If you are true to yourself it will show both in your online correspondence and if you decide to meet someone in person,” he says.

So there you have it - honesty, photos and a dash of skepticism is all you need for the recipe of digital love. And who knows, it might even taste better than jajangmyun.