

EVIDENCE BASED MEDICINE

Screen name matters in the online dating game

One starting with a letter in top half of the alphabet could make all the difference

[An evidence-based approach to an ancient pursuit: systematic review on converting online contact into a first date Online First doi 10.1136/ebmed-2014-110101]

Choosing a screen name with a letter starting in the top half of the alphabet is as important as an attractive photo and a fluent headline in the online dating game, reveals an analysis of the best ways of finding love in the digital world, and published online in the journal ***Evidence Based Medicine***.

The researchers wanted to find out what approaches would maximise the chances of converting online contact between men and women into that all-important first face to face meeting, using published research on the art of attraction and persuasion.

They therefore carried out an extensive search of relevant studies in the fields of psychology and sociology, as well as computer, behavioural, and neurocognitive sciences.

Out of almost 4000 studies, 86 met their inclusion criteria. The study findings were pooled and synthesised to come up with a list of dos and don'ts for online dating, from creating a profile to making an approach.

They found that the screen name chosen for an online profile is important. The lovelorn should avoid names with negative associations, such as 'Little' or 'Bug', and aim for something more playful, such as 'Fun2bwith' as this type of name is universally attractive.

And would-be daters should take gender into consideration: men are more drawn to names that indicate physical attractiveness, such as 'Blondie' or 'Cutie' while women go for names that signal intelligence, such as 'Cultured.'

But it may be even more important to start a screen name with a letter in the top half of the alphabet, say the researchers. That's because several measures of success, such as educational attainment and income are linked to names higher up the alphabet, added to which search engines sort names alphabetically.

But choose carefully, say the researchers, who recommend looking at the profiles of other people you find attractive and using a similar screen name to theirs.

It goes without saying that an attractive photo is essential. But be sure to include one that features a genuine smile that crinkles up the eyes, and possibly a tilt of the head....And women seeking men should wear red as this is likely to boost the level of interest, the evidence shows.

And don't stop at selfies. Group photos showing other people having a good time in your company, preferably with you right in the middle of the action and touching someone else—but only on the upper arm— will help to convey, respectively, your friendliness, importance, and status.

Incidentally, women find a man more attractive when they see other women smiling at him, say the researchers.

When it comes to the headline message, don't use complex language in the belief that it will make you look more intelligent. It won't. People are naturally drawn to words that are easy to remember and pronounce, and ease of information processing increases likeability, the analysis shows.

"If you can get the potential date to stop and think about your headline message, increasing the exposure time to your primary photo, this will increase their liking [of you]," point out the researchers.

And steer clear of fiction in your profile: apart from anything else, written information could come back to bite you, they warn.

The evidence shows that it's best to provide a 70:30 ratio of who you are, and what you are looking for. And bear in mind that likeability is more attractive than academic achievement, and that a profile that appears genuine is more likely to generate interest.

What traits are most attractive? Men are drawn to physical fitness in women while women prefer bravery and risk-taking rather than kindness and altruism in men.

When it comes to another helpful ingredient, humour, 'show; don't tell,' is the advice. A wittily written profile is likely to be far more successful than just saying that you have a sense of humour, say the researchers.

They go on to provide a list of helpful tips, which, the available evidence suggests, could boost the chances of getting a first date.

Once interest has been piqued:

Do personalise any email invitations to correspond online

Do make it short and sweet

Don't be afraid to use poetry, preferably rhyming with the potential date's headline

Once contact has been made:

Do ask open questions

Do respond promptly: eagerness is not turn-off

Don't write screeds, but enough to indicate generosity with time

Do introduce humour

Do disclose some personal information

Don't sell yourself as a rare commodity that is worth having

If on a webcam:

Do smile

Do mimic body language

Don't slouch

Do pay genuine compliments, but don't flatter

Don't portray yourself as perfect: it arouses suspicion

Do end every conversation on a positive note/with a positive revelation about yourself

And finally, don't leave it too long before arranging a face to face meeting.