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flirting online

In this chapter you will learn:

- about giving online green lights and setting realistic expectations
- that online flirting can move very fast and sometimes very slowly
- about common mistakes and online safety.

Flirting online is another arena, like speed-dating, where the rules of flirting are slightly different because of the circumstances. One thing that you need to remember about flirting online is that the 'natural' rules of flirting are magnified on the internet. The internet is like an amplifier that makes the basic traditional flirting rituals even more powerful. That said, certain other flirting rules are completely broken online. The internet is a new social space where new social rules are developing. There is 'netiquette', but this can change in different parts of the internet. As a starting point, it is best to stick to the traditional rules of flirting; you can test and modify your flirting from there.

Case study

For the UK TV show *The Wright Stuff*, I worked with a man and a woman on their internet profiles. We wrote one good profile for both, and one bad profile for both, to test the difference.

For the man, over a period of two days, the good profile didn't receive any emails. The man's bad profile received three emails.

For the woman over a period of two days, her bad profile received 74 emails. Her good profile received over 250 emails!

The above case study is a perfect illustration of internet magnification. You will remember from the earlier chapters that it is traditionally the man's role to hunt and the woman's role to choose. On internet dating sites, you will find that this traditional flirting behaviour is magnified out of all proportion. If you are a man, you will receive no attention unless you go out and do all the chasing and hunting.

If you are an attractive women, you will be literally bombarded with propositions from men. Unfortunately, this then changes the normal flirting dynamic of the women choosing the men they like and then the men making the move. Women on the internet can be so overwhelmed by attention that they never get the chance to actually do the initial choosing!

If you make basic mistakes in your approach as a man (for example failing to do the hunting) or a woman (for instance failing to give online green lights), you may receive absolutely no attention or success!

Online green light signals

If you are a man, how can you tell that you have a green light signal from a woman? Or, if you are a woman, how can you give a green light signal to a man? Normally, you will find that you can have a list of 'favourites' on most internet dating sites – these are people whose profiles you like and who you are thinking of getting in touch with. Alternatively, you may be able to send a 'wink', which is a way to indicate interest without sending a complete email. On many internet dating websites, you can also see a list of the people who have viewed your profile.

So, if you are a man, check who has put you on their favourites list. Also check who has viewed your profile and, importantly, how many times. If they have returned more than once, that is definitely a green light. If you are on their favourites list, consider this a green light and get in touch; they have already made an initial screening and you are of interest to them so, just like getting a green light signal, it is time to make the move.

If you are a woman, make sure that you put the men that you fancy in your favourites list. Then, if you like them, and the website tracks how many visits you make to people's profiles, make sure you look at their profile more than once. You need to remember that, like in real life, men sometimes won't receive these internet green lights. Often, they don't bother to look at who has put them on their favourites list, or they don't look at who has viewed them more than once. This is the internet equivalent of signal blindness. Because of this, if possible, it is best to send someone you fancy a 'wink' – the flirting equivalent of a green light. If you can't send a 'wink', send a short email, to say hello and that you like their profile. You can leave it up to them to do the chasing from there.

As with flirting in the real world, if you are a woman, you should actively choose the men that you fancy. The temptation with online dating is to sit back and let the men contact you. Remember that you still need to do the choosing and give green lights – that way you are much more likely to find a compatible partner.

Men – it's your job to hunt

As a man, with internet magnification it is even more important that you do the hunting. Look out for the green light signals described above, but you also need to be proactive about

approaching women who you fancy. With internet magnification, some women won't have time to give green light signals, so you have to hunt for them. Simply pick out their profile and send them a short email:

- Keep it short.
- Make it thoughtful and refer to their profile.
- Refer to any common ground you have.

On the internet, dating is a numbers game. You need to email 15–20 women per week. Expect a 10–20 per cent response rate. This is normal, but if it bugs you, use track 2 – zapping rejection – on the CD.

Setting your expectations: thorns and roses

With online flirting, to find the roses you will probably go through a lot of thorns along the way. You will be surprised at the number of knock-backs and disappointments you get. This is partly created by the diversity of choice online. If you are on an online dating website with hundreds of thousands of people to flirt with, then it makes it much easier to move on. This can be a blessing and also a curse.

If you meet someone in a bar, or at a party rather than online, you are likely to spend more time flirting with them. This is partly because there is limited choice; you will probably look around the room, and realize that they are actually a pretty good prospect. You might choose to move on, but chances are you will continue to flirt because you're not missing out on anything else.

Online, if things don't go well straight away, it is easy to do another search and find someone else to flirt with. This means that people tend to invest less time in the flirting process, and are much more fussy. Rather than having fun, if someone doesn't meet their criteria, or things aren't quite going to plan, people are more likely to move on quickly.

What does this mean for you? Well, get ready – you will receive many rejections online. Many people aren't prepared for this. They stick their hand in the rosebush and are shocked when they suddenly get pricked by all the thorns. Rather than still looking for the roses, they tend to pull their hand out and give up.

You need to go into online dating with a gardening glove on. You will come across thorns on the way, and you will get rejections. In some ways this is much easier than in real life because it is not face to face. Yet the sheer number of rejections can make it difficult to accept. You might find hundreds of thorns before you get to your rose.

Be prepared. Whenever you get a rejection online, use track 2 – zapping rejection – on the CD. Using the rejection zapper regularly will keep your rejection levels low and make looking for the rose much easier. Otherwise, the danger is that the rejections will build up and you will decide to stop flirting online. That would be a great shame, because there are roses out there; you just need protection against all the thorns.

Things can move slowly

When you are you flirting on dating websites, things can move slowly. You may find that people take three or four days or sometimes even longer to reply to emails. Frequently, it takes weeks of flirting on a website to actually set up a first date! In many ways, flirting is much easier face to face – you just decide whether you like each other and then exchange details!

Things can move fast

There are times with online flirting when things can move very fast indeed. This is particularly true if you use an instant messaging system or chat room where flirting and conversation runs at a fast pace.

Online flirting seems so anonymous that it can remove many people's inhibitions. Because of the anonymity, you will find that people reveal personal details far more quickly than they ever would face to face. All the information that you see on a person's profile would normally take quite a few dates to elicit – but you get it upfront because you are online.

When you are chatting with people online, will find that they reveal personal details quickly. If you are flirting, things can get very intense very quickly. People will say things online that they would never, ever say face to face. There are advantages and disadvantages to this. You might find moving too fast very off-putting, and moving fast can create a false sense of intimacy.

You may have shared secrets online that you have never told anyone, but when you meet face to face it can be terribly disappointing. However, it can be good to work out whether you like someone quickly, and the internet makes this possible.

Be prepared for this. When you first meet someone online, be cautious about revealing too much too soon. Move at a pace that you are comfortable with. Otherwise, you may end up regretting it.

Common mistakes

The most common mistake you can make when online flirting is to treat the internet like a completely new place where you can do anything you want and where there are no rules. Just like flirting in real life, there are also rules online. The best strategy is to stick to traditional flirting rules and use them online. Below are several case studies to illustrate some common online mistakes.

Case study

Alkesh had set up a profile on an internet dating website. He had been on the website for almost a year and had almost no results. Only a few women had emailed him, and he hadn't been out on any dates. From the emails he sent out to women (which were only a few), he received no responses.

Alkesh had a 'friendly' profile, with a 'friendly' photo, of him looking friendly and smiling. Alkesh was suffering from an online case of 'frienditis'.

I worked with him to cure his online frienditis. First, we changed his profile. Rather than a smiling close-up photo, we used several more 'manly' photos: Alkesh standing in a field, with more masculine body language resting his hands on his hips; and a shot where he looked attractive but was not smiling. We also removed all references to friendship from his profile.

Second, we changed Alkesh's tactics. It is the man's role to hunt. To start with, Alkesh was doing no hunting at all. He was waiting for the women to come to him. We worked on changing this – Alkesh picked 15 women per week to email. He sent them a short but carefully thought out email. He looked at their profile, chose some key areas where they had common interests, commented on those, and asked them an open question.

The results were dramatic. From a zero response rate to his emails, Alkesh started receiving a 45 per cent response rate. Within a week, he had arranged his first ever internet date. After the changes to his profile and his photo, he received six unsolicited emails from women. After two weeks, Alkesh made his online dating profile inactive because he wanted to concentrate on all the dates and women he had already lined up.

Case study

Mandy is a successful businesswoman from Australia. With her online flirting style, she was very upfront. She would choose a man that she liked and then send him a long, quite direct email.

Mandy's results were terrible. She received almost no responses and, from the few responses she did get, the men seemed to lose interest very quickly. Mandy was suffering from 'successitis' and she was also breaking traditional flirting rules by taking on the role of the hunter rather than giving men green light signals and letting them approach her. In addition, in her profile, Mandy mentioned that some men found her quite intimidating.

I made some simple changes to her tactics and approach, working with her. Rather than directly approaching men, she would 'favourite' them and visit their profile several times. Then she would 'wink' at them. We removed the negative references in her profile about her being intimidating.

Mandy's results improved dramatically. For every ten winks she sent, she received two to three replies. Soon she went out on her first date through the internet dating site.

The main issue with both of the above case studies is that both Alkesh and Mandy broke the basic rules of flirting and paid the price. Stick to the basic rules of flirting when you are online – remember that these rules tend to be magnified, which makes them even more important.

Safe online flirting

As with flirting in real life, it is important to take basic safety precautions when you are flirting online. The key is to be able to have the fun without the danger.

To start, you need an online flirting email address. You can get a free email account from companies such as Yahoo or Hotmail. This means that you can send all of your online flirting emails from one address, keeping them separate from your work and any personal email addresses. If, unusually, you do get someone who is abusive or strange, and they are persistent, you can simply stop your online flirting email address and start again.

Then you may want to buy an online flirting mobile phone – this can be the same as your normal flirting mobile. It is relatively cheap to buy a pay-as-you-go mobile phone. A flirting mobile phone means that you can give out a phone number, and also talk to a person you have met online without worrying about them having your home or personal mobile telephone numbers.

Never give out your personal details such as home phone, mobile number, address or, particularly, financial information. The internet is a wonderful place to flirt, but you can never really be sure who you are flirting with! Therefore, if you meet someone from online flirting, make sure that you meet in a public place. During the day is best – always start with a short date, preferably just a coffee, so that you have an excuse to leave early if things don't go so well. Tell a friend what you are doing and if in doubt, ask them to call you during the date – this gives you the perfect excuse to escape from the date if things are going badly.

Online flirting is about having the fun without the danger – take basic precautions and you will be fine.

In summary:

- The internet magnifies, and sometimes warps, traditional flirting rules.
- Give green light signals by putting the person you fancy in your favourites, visiting their profile multiple times or sending them a 'wink'.
- If you are a woman, you may need to be more direct and send a quick email saying hello.
- To find the rose you will be pricked by thorns along the way.
- Be prepared – whenever you get a rejection, use the rejection zapper.
- Be careful about revealing too much too soon online.
- When flirting online, start with the traditional rules of flirting.
- Make sure you take basic safety precautions.

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