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### Open Communication: Instant Message Dating

by Michael C. Sherrin  
 EDGE Style Contributor  
 Monday May 16, 2005



The newest addition to our dating bag of tools is the Instant Messenger. IMing has unique properties making a special tool amid the drama of gay dating.

The games we play in relationships help hide our real, vulnerable feelings. So much of our conversation is loaded with innuendoes and body language instead of openly saying what we want. IMing helps us hide even more. While we all want ways to be more open in our relationships, honest analysis shows there is more fun in the games we play before we are in the relationship. When starting a courtship, a skilled game player tries to find a balance between showing an interest while not appearing desperate or "too" interested: When should I call? Do I wait three days? Was I supposed to call or was he?

In this technological age, we have a variety of choices for communication tools. We can use cell phones, write emails, and send text messages. IMing

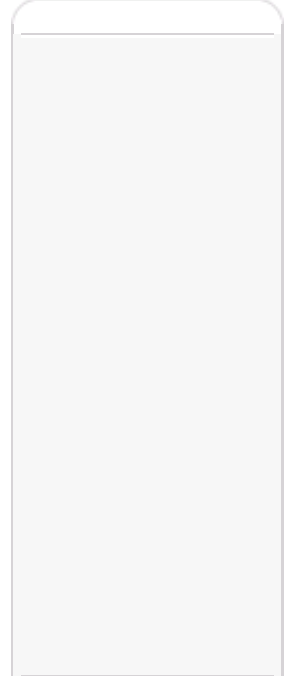
gives you the interactivity of a phone conversation without the required attentiveness. When you talk the phone, you can rarely accomplish anything else. While IMing, you can watch TV, play online, and eat food all while maintaining an emotional conversation. A balance is created. Most importantly, when IMing, you have the ability to revise and perfect what you want to say. No more Freudian slips.

Internet dating has taken advantage of the Instant Messaging method. You can meet new people Tuesday afternoon while watching Golden Girl reruns in your underwear. This keeps the pressure off. This can be wonderfully applied to almost any challenging or uncomfortable dating situation, best-of-all high drama events.

For example, you had a number of dates with a guy but ended up so-called friends. Now you want to get back together with that guy. A phone call puts all your cards on the table. You would have a one-on-one conversation in a sense devoting yourself to your man. I'm a big fan of testing the waters. By IMing your beau-to-be, you can do just that; see how easily the conversation goes; how responsive your prospective man is; and you can even do some tactful flirting that can always be written off to interpretation.

Using Instant Messenger effectively takes practice. There are unfortunate risks when conversing with an inexperienced user. Your witty sarcasm may be mistaken for bluntness. Also, long pauses might be interpreted as lack of interest instead of an honest bathroom break. The best way to avoid misinterpretation is to 1) say if you're stepping away and 2) use smiley faces to signal your sarcastic intent.

It sounds shallow and somewhat coward-like, but in this difficult world of dating and games, we need every tool at our disposal.



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And passing notes in Chemistry just doesn't cut it anymore.

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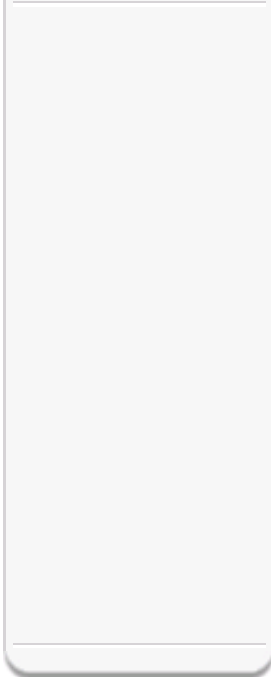
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