

Modern Love

Internet dating is becoming a fast track to the altar. By Alexandra Carlton

Modern love connection or nightclubbing for nerds? Whatever your preconception, internet dating is huge and it's here to stay. RSVP—one of Australia's largest online dating sites—claims to have been the starting point for more than 800 marriages since its launch in 1997, and the Australian version of international dating site Match.com announced its millionth registration in November 2003. Even if it's not wedded bliss you're after, you can still have a bit of harmless fun: a recent survey of online daters showed 65 per cent had a "positive experience." But just like in the real world, love can be elusive.

Cyber Connection

He's written seven books on how men and women relate to one another, but psychologist and sex expert Dr. Janet Hall couldn't put her own advice into practice. At 52, after 10 years of singledom following a divorce, she was about to give up. "I went to singles' parties and nightclubs, and I found them dreadful," she says. "I was looking for the three Cs—chemistry, compatibility and commitment," but had no luck.

Discouraged, Hall had one last hope—the internet—and it was with some trepidation she logged on from her Melbourne home. "I worried about losing my anonymity," she says, and for some time resisted posting a photo on the two sites she registered with, RSVP and Soulmates. But in late 2000 she scanned in a photo with a frank description of herself and her job as a sex therapist. "I didn't want to waste



Janet Hall and John Sinclair on their wedding day on March 21 in Kew, Melbourne. Janet led to the altar by her son, Robin (top). The day was "surreal, ethereal and special," says Hall.

time with men who may have been intimidated by that," she says.

In September 2000, John Sinclair split from his wife and "stumbled across" Soulmates a year later. A professor of media and communications at Footscray's Victoria University, he thought the web would give him a chance to "cross social barriers." Hall's profile immediately attracted him. Hall, who has a daughter, Pam, 23, and son, Robin, 20, from her first marriage, had jokingly outlined her desire for a captain of industry, a pilot or a doctor. "I emailed her," says Sinclair, 60, "and asked, 'Would a professor do?'"

Soon they were on the phone and discovered a mutual interest in scuba diving. Both had also written books

(Hall's *Sex-Life Solutions* is released on April 20), and they made cautious plans to meet. After a series of disastrous dates with women met at singles' parties, Sinclair thought, "I'm due for a fun woman!"

They met for dinner, something Hall wouldn't usually consider "in case it gets boring." But she had a gut feeling about Sinclair, though made no effort to dress up, figuring it probably wouldn't lead anywhere. Sinclair rocked up on his Yamaha Virago motorcycle, which he thought might impress. "It didn't!" jokes Hall. But there was a definite attraction. Shortly after, Sinclair sent Hall a card for Valentine's Day. "I thought, 'Ooh!'" says Hall. "I fancy this guy!"

In June 2003 they decided to marry and a sunrise wedding was held in Melbourne on March 21. As for dating sites, Hall is a true believer. "They say you have to kiss a lot of frogs to meet a prince," she says. "But the pond's pretty small without the internet."