

## More turning to sites with video when looking for love online

By Rachel Konrad

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After exchanging instant messages and digital photos through an online dating site, **Christopher Boykin** flew to Houston to meet what he hoped would be a beautiful soul mate. What he found was a flabby misanthrope with an apparent drinking problem.

"She was a total nut case," said the 35-year-old architect from Venice, Fla. "I'm sure at one time she was very pretty, but she had really let herself go. I decided right then that I needed more information before I'd go on another date with someone I met online."

**Boykin's new policy: He'll only date women who post videos or use Web cameras in virtual chat rooms. Like other "early adopters" of the technology, he insists that videos provide far more information than standard photos, which may be doctored or out of date, snapped before Juliet added another 20 pounds or Romeo lost his hair.**

Some of the largest sites -- including Match.com -- reject videos partly because employees can't monitor thousands of hours of amateur footage for pornography, nudity or other behavior deemed inappropriate. Others warn that videos can elevate acting skills over characteristics that make or break a relationship, such as religion and financial compatibility.

But even skeptics agree that videos are gaining popularity among the estimated 20 million Americans who visit online dating sites each month. Nearly one in four U.S. singles have used online dating services, according to Date.com.

**Only 10 percent of the 2.8 million active users at True.com post videos, but the percentage is rising quickly, and online profiles with video get more hits than those without, said Taylor Cole, senior director of marketing at the Irving-based company, which launched videos last summer.**

**"Once people understand the benefit of actually hearing someone's voice and seeing them in a broader perspective than just a static photo, they'll never want to go back to simple pictures and e-mail," Cole said.**

Lavalife.com added videos for its 700,000 active members last year, catching up to Yahoo Personals, which began to allow video clips in January 2003.

Fran Compagno, a Palo Alto, Calif.-based dating coach, said videos provide data that photos, questionnaires and instant message banter can't. Does he gesticulate wildly? That might be a turnoff.

"One major problem with online dating is that you generally have to date so many people to find one you really like -- online daters go on a lot of first dates but not many seconds," Compagno said. "More information almost always is better."

But videos aren't for everyone, and certainly prudish singles should be warned: Videos and Web cam-aided video chats may deliver far more than viewers anticipate, says relationship adviser Eve Eschner Hogan, author of *Virtual Foreplay: Making Your Online Relationship a Real-Life Success*.

"I can only begin to imagine how raunchy a chat room with live video could become," she said.

Whether videos can steer Cupid's arrows may depend on whether you're looking for a weekend romp or a wedding ring, says Duane Dahl, president and chief executive of Bothel, Wash.-based PerfectMatch.com.