

# Online Dating Challenges: Guest to Member Conversion Tactics

by Michael Jones

Returning from the Internet Dating Conference in Miami, one thing is clear; aside from gaining overall site traffic, the majority of online dating sites feel their primary challenge is perfecting the art of conversion; taking a free membership granted to a guest, and converting that guest membership to an actual paying subscription.

Most online dating visitors judge a prospective online dating website by the photographs displayed on the first few pages of their membership query. Although this is an unfortunate situation, it has become the standard for the dating website homepage. This primary focus does not allow users to ever find the real value of an online dating site, just as in online dating interaction, the site is often judged by the look and feel of its initially displayed members, more than its actual offering to the user.

There are expectations; eHarmony for instance boasts a superior personality based matching system and does not place a member search on the homepage. eHarmony along with other psychology-based dating sites attempt to put more emphasis on the functionality and success rate of personalized matches, than on the physical characteristics of their actual members.

In order to combat this immediate evaluation of a dating websites member base, many sites require users to register or at least sign up for a free guest membership prior to allowing either a more comprehensive search of the member base, or they allow an in-depth search yet restrict actual member contact until the visitor subscribes to the site. This is often successful, but in general this tactic requires a website visitor to actually find a relevant match within a few simple clicks, which is usually unlikely. What this process often creates is a large amount of free visitor-memberships given out in any one day, and a small conversion from guests to actual paying members.

There are new breeds of dating websites that are taking more progressive steps toward a solution to this problem. Here are some of the methods they are using to support guest to member conversion:

## 1. Give Away More Free Lifetime Memberships to Females

The same principle of a good night club now seems to apply to online dating websites: where the women are, the men will join. A handful of online dating websites such as Verona Street ([veronastreet.com](http://veronastreet.com)) have realized that typical online dating websites have a 70/30 ratio of males to females and that with a larger female user base and more female-friendly environment; they can attract a large amount of male subscribers. Although this is not a new concept offline, I see it as a new trend online.



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## Online Dating Challenges: Guest to Member Conversion Tactics continued...

### 2. Support Real Value through Features and Experiences, not Restrictions

In general, most online dating sites go to great lengths to prevent users from revealing their offline information (blocking the display of email address and phone numbers, etc). The theory states that the more control a dating site can exercise over member and guest contact, the more dependent the member or guest becomes on the dating site. This premise has held true for a majority of dating sites. A fresh approach to online dating will not use the website as a method of controlling contact, but a platform to allow users a more intimate and safe online environment.

Providing unique, real-time methods of online communication, such as audio and video chatting, can be a much more effective conversion strategy. Internet dating games and more experience based chat rooms allows users to see value from rich, advanced interaction, opposed to simply paying for contact restriction. The websites that embrace this theory will be providing their members tools that they find has additional value and as a result, feel more comfortable paying for membership.

### 3. Catch Me when I am engaged!

Many new sites have realized the benefits of live communication tools and rich media experiences such as instant messaging, video profiles and chat rooms. One specific advantage, which is easy to realize, is to begin allowing guest users time-limited access to live communication tools. Allow a guest to participate in an instant messaging session, watch a live video profile, or engage in a chat room conversation for a capped amount of time, then redirect the user to a membership conversion page.

Using this method, a dating website can take a user that is actively engaging in a live experience that only your site can provide and ask them at that moment to become a member. Although in the past many dating websites were wary of allowing guest members access to chat services due to cost, the live and active community available through online chat and instant messaging is often one of the most valuable experiences within an online dating website. Without actively participating in these experiences, a website will be judged simply by the first few pages of profile matches, and not the personality and flair of their active online user base.

Overall, the industry is in its infancy. Searching the web you can find a handful of new dating sites being launched every day. With the new competition and more niche-focused environments, there is something out there for everyone.

Hopefully in the near future dating sites will be judged by their ability to provide unique interactive online experiences, not only the handful of arbitrary photos displayed by a visitor's initial search!



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