

Business Recruitment

Falling in love with the dating game

Investors are backing female executives to change the face of matchmaking services, writes **Jane Hamilton**

Money can't buy love, but investors are banking on female executives to help singles fall in love with the dating industry again.

"App fatigue" has resulted in a 16 per cent decline in UK dating app usage since 2024, but dating businesses owned or operated by women are bucking the trend. While female-led dating platforms are less successful at instigating meetings between singles — at about 6 per cent compared with 16.5 per cent on the market leader Tinder — they have a far higher success rate for matching meaningful relationships.

Of the 450-plus UK dating businesses, 90 per cent of personalised match-making agencies are owned by women. But when it comes to apps and dating websites, fewer than 5 per cent are female-owned. This is changing as more women move into the tech that powers the platforms, with venture capital driving the change.

Ashleigh Bishop from the industry body the Online Dating and Discovery Association said: "We're seeing more women launch dating services because they understand first-hand what's been missing from traditional platforms. Dating today is about more than just swipes. People want safety, respect and a real chance of meeting someone who wants the same things they do."

While the UK dating industry is relatively small, with 1.3 million online dating users, about 1,400 apps and a market value of £422 million, it's growing at 8 per cent a year. Finding a formula loved by customers also offers a chance at international success — and a slice of the global dating market, predicted to pass £13 billion by 2030.

Bill Alena, an international dating expert, has worked with many of the world's biggest dating sites and agrees that the shift is global. "We're seeing more women launch dating platforms because women understand the emotional architecture of relationships," he explained.

It's a viewpoint that Stacy Thomson, founder of the UK private members site iamreddi.com, agrees with. With a background in mental health support, she is critical of the "addictive and dopamine-driven" nature of dating apps. "The majority of women who come into this industry are trying to solve the problem, rather than take advantage of the problem," she said.

With figures suggesting 40 per cent of Britons are single, with a fifth of the UK using a dating service, the sector offers a purposeful career. Women are entering the sector as founders, chief executives, chief operating officers and UX specialists, reshaping



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Female customers want answers

Case study

Lorraine Adams is one of the UK's leading experts and the founder of the international dating comparison site and social network **YourSinglesHub.com**. Lorraine, from

southwest London, said: "I found myself single in my mid-30s, so I pioneered the speed dating concept. I've pivoted my businesses several times since 2000 to align with the needs of new generations."

"There are so many offshoots in the industry, with roles in tech, customer acquisition and servicing, event planning,

plus the growth area of dating coaching.

"Female customers want answers and male customers direction, so an effective dating service provides both. Women intuitively understand the challenges and are usually more empathetic to this being an emotive business about more than sales and dollars."

Tips for finding your niche in the dating industry

Match yourself to a new career in the dating industry.

- There isn't a set route into the sector. Whitney Wolfe Herd, the multi-millionaire founder of female-led app Bumble, began her career as a field sales executive.
- Many women enter the sector from backgrounds such as law, recruitment, HR and hospitality. A grounding in psychology or coaching is a bonus.

- Dating is emotional but the business is what matters. Understand liquidity, retention and unit economics before anything else.
- Think beyond the app, platform or dating agency. The strongest dating companies will build ecosystems — digital, human and AI working together.
- Gain experience at an established app agency. Networking is essential, as the dating world is

small and highly interconnected.

- Lean into your lived experience, emotional intelligence and curiosity about people.
- Don't underestimate the value of your intuition. Combined with professional discipline, it's a powerful asset.
- Notice what frustrates you about existing products. That frustration usually contains the clue to solving the problem.

the market and building products.

Rachel MacLynn of the introductions agency MacLynn International believes female leadership is a backlash against AI. "Effective dating services should be delivered by humans and supported by AI, not the other way around. This reflects a broader shift towards valuing emotional intelligence, ethical leadership and psychological insight; areas where women naturally excel," she said.

The dating coach Siobhan Copland feels women female staff alter the corporate dynamic at every level. "Women leaders create environments where people feel heard, understood and taken seriously," she said. "In an industry which deals with vulnerability, rejection and deeply personal decisions, this matters enormously."

Six from the best

Starting as a 16-year-old apprentice at Dungeness A power station, Nigel Cann has spent 45 years in the nuclear sector. He now leads the next major atomic power project as chief executive of Sizewell C, where he employs 1,500 apprentices. Here's his advice on how to power up your career.



- 1 Never lose the appetite to learn:** You are not judged on the qualifications achieved early in your life, but on your ability to continue to learn and adapt to new opportunities.
- 2 Teams deliver more than individuals:** Appreciate and understand your team and colleagues, listen and be inclusive, and try to enhance the dynamics of that team.
- 3 Never overthink things:** After some reflection, trust your judgment. If you overthink, momentum is often lost and opportunities missed.
- 4 Don't live with mistakes or poor decisions:** All of us make mistakes — but it's important to deal with them. Always be clinical with your decisions.
- 5 Embrace positive realism:** Positive energy is needed to drive success but it has to be balanced with realism to get true engagement from the team. Disrupt and challenge norms but make sure you focus on outcomes.
- 6 Be bold:** The only limit to your ability to progress and grow is you; embrace every experience and opportunity and make the most of it.

Appointment of the week

Director of Civil Aviation, Channel Islands

Applications are open for the position of director of civil aviation, Channel Islands. The post undertakes two statutory roles covering both the Bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey. The successful candidate will have responsibility for the licensing and regulating of civil aviation, and monitoring and implementation of aviation safety and security standards.

The appointee will report to the committee for economic development in Guernsey and to the minister for external relations in Jersey, and is subject to governance by an independent civil aviation oversight board. Applicants must establish close working relationships with civil aviation bodies in the UK, France and the EU and should have significant experience in the role of a regulator, plus recent senior-level experience of civil aviation regulation.

Willingness to work flexible hours and travel between the Channel Islands is essential. The appointee must complete a counter-terrorism check. The appointment will be for acting director of civil aviation, subject to a six month in-post review.

Apply by February 23 at appointments.thetimes.com

Working week

Death of the CV foretold

Two in five HR professionals expect to ditch the CV within the next decade, a survey claims. A quarter of recruiters believe that social profiles and a LinkedIn account are the best way to represent candidates' abilities, while a third of Gen Z applicants prefer portfolios or project examples. Kickresume, which conducted the study, said: "Today's CVs are being optimised for applicant tracking systems so already look different."

Romance is still alive

Despite 60 per cent of UK staff admitting to having dated a co-worker, 43 per cent are unsure whether their employer has a policy on the issue. Younger staff are most likely to have an office romance, with 49 per cent confessing to it, Co-space found. The workspace operator said: "The key for employers isn't to try to police relationships but to foster a culture of transparency, clear boundaries, and mutual respect."

Interviews work both ways

Managers risk losing good candidates due to a lack of interview training. Research by the recruiters Robert Walters found 73 per cent of hiring managers have never received formal training on how to conduct interviews. Sixty-four per cent of UK professionals say they've declined a job offer after a poor interview experience, highlighting a disconnect between company practices and job seekers' expectations.

Staff see what's coming

Inquiries about unemployment cover more than doubled last year. The largest jump coincided with the November budget, prompting fears that the jobs market may continue to worsen. People working in IT and financial services were deemed most at risk of redundancy, according to the specialists Best Insurance. Its founder, Kesh Thukaram, said "Employees tend to have a sense of which direction their sector is heading."