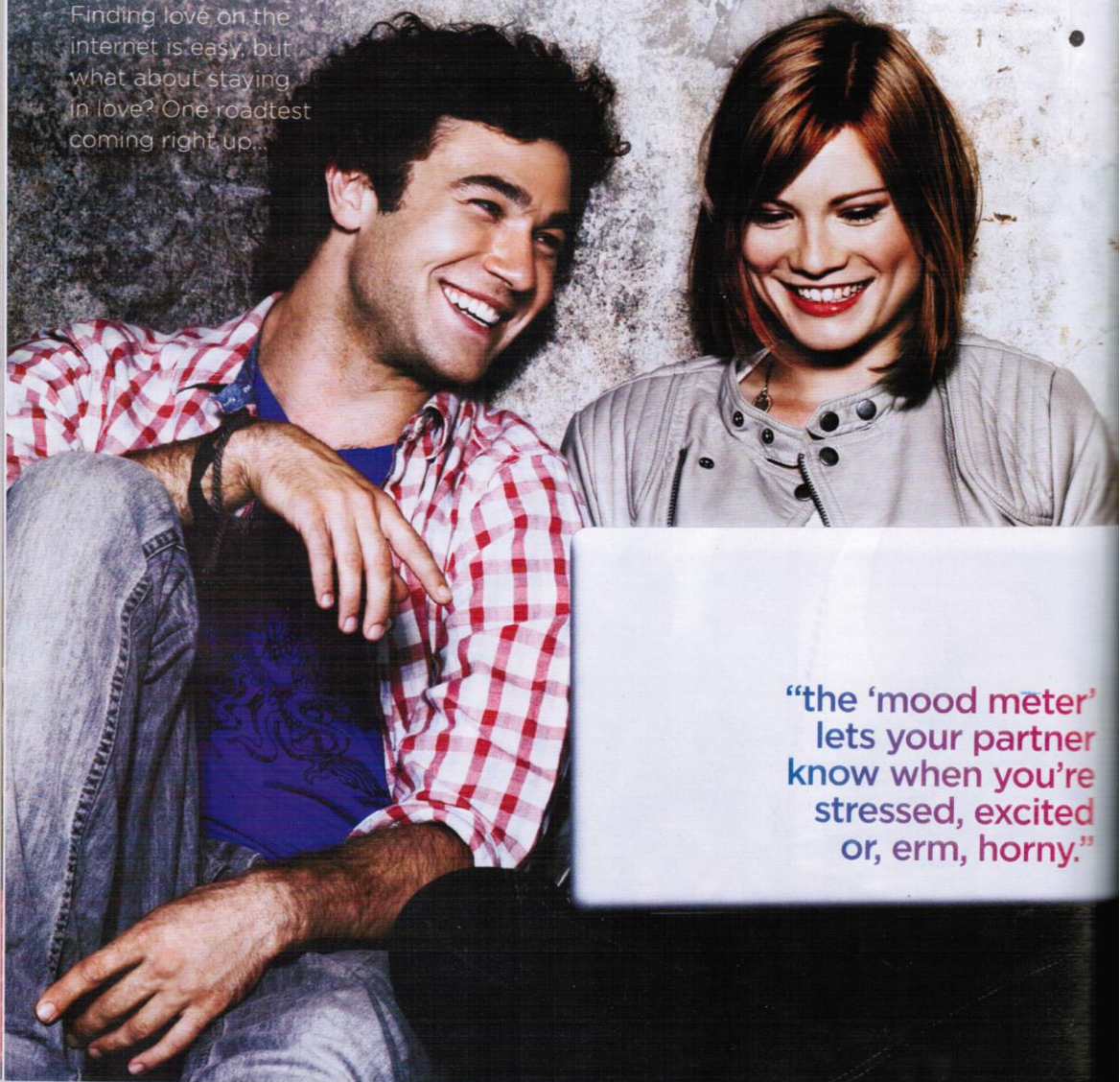


can you solve your relationship problems **online?**

Finding love on the internet is easy, but what about staying in love? One roadtest coming right up..



“the ‘mood meter’ lets your partner know when you’re stressed, excited or, erm, horny.”

Remember how strange the idea of online dating seemed at first? Going out for drinks with some guy you met on the internet was a little bit weird. But fast-forward to today and logging on to rsvp.com.au is just as innocuous as scoping out talent at the pub.

In a world where we can find love via the web, and we're not officially off the market until our Facebook status says so, is working on improving our intimate relationships the next big thing to get a digital makeover?

Yes it is, says Karla Stephens-Tolstoy. She's the founder of online relationship management platform, tokii.com. It's basically social media for couples who want their love to last in these busy times. The idea came to her years ago when she was working crazy hours at the expense of her relationship.

"We had a great relationship, but my husband and I were always working, sacrificing time that could have been used to strengthen our connection," she explains. "Tokii was conceived to help busy couples, who didn't have time to improve their relationships, by making relationship-strengthening activities quick and easily accessible."

Since my boyfriend started a new job as a chef at a busy restaurant, we have totally opposite schedules. So I've decided I'm going to take one for the team (that's you, dear readers) and trial Tokii to see if it can help my boyfriend and I maintain communication. One relationship guinea pig, at your service.

the mood meter

Once we've both signed up, I kick things off by sending my boyfriend an update on the Mood Meter. It's a tool that lets your partner know how you're feeling. You can select anything from 'stressed'

to 'excited' to, erm, 'horny'. But because my man can't check his phone for hours at a time when he's in the kitchen, my mood is likely to be completely different by the time he sees the notification.

Not particularly useful for us, but clinical psychologist Louise Adams from Self Essentials (self.net.au) thinks the Mood Meter has merit. "Often in counselling, I spend time asking couples to identify, then share, how they feel," she explains. "Doing it in a tech-savvy way is non-confrontational. It's good."

let's get quizzical

One of Tokii's main features is the seemingly endless catalogue of quizzes you can take as a couple, all with the singular aim of getting to know one another better. From moral-dilemma scenarios to what your partner really wants in the bedroom, there are almost too many quizzes choose from.

You play by picking your answer, as well as trying to guess what your partner would choose. They then do the same. I actually think it's pretty fun, but the boyfriend is far less enthusiastic. He says he doesn't want to spend our time together trying to guess what I'd do if I scraped another car in the aforementioned moral-dilemma quiz. (For the record, I'm a person of sound character and would absolutely leave my details with the driver. Carry on.)

We end up arguing about doing the quizzes. When I tell Adams, she's not surprised. "It's a very similar issue to what I see in couple's counselling," she says. "We all have to work on our relationship, but we also all get a bit annoyed when we have to work at it," she explains. "Whether you're on a computer or in a counselling session, there's no magic answer. You get out what you put into it."

the verdict

With my boyfriend not being online for most of the day, we discovered that managing our relationship through a website wasn't the right strategy for us. Adams, on the other hand, gives Tokii a tick of approval - with a warning:

"It could be a great starting point to foster communication, but if you have a serious or specific problem - say there's been infidelity - I don't think a website can replace someone who is well-trained," says Adams.

Even more importantly, a counsellor will pick up on the energy between partners, whereas a computer can't. "When I work with couples, I'm aware of the balance between them. Is one person more hurt than the other or is one partner not interested?" Just like Googling your symptoms when you're sick, Tokii is a starting point, but eventually you'll need to see a doctor.

online privacy

Tokii founder Karla Stephens-Tolstoy says the site's security is "military-grade", and while they gather statistics for analytical purposes, no personal information is linked to them. But Adams warns you can never be too careful. "That's one of the things you're guaranteed with couple's counselling - your privacy. It's very sensitive information, so I'd be asking where your information is going. Who's behind the site and what are they using your information for?"

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