

Lockdown lovin': Interview with Sanjay Panchal, founder of elate

“We met on Tinder” is no longer the mark of shame it once was, but online dating isn't easy. In fact, it's a veritable obstacle course. Maddyness spoke to Sanjay Panchal about his new, anti-ghosting dating app.

Nowadays, around a third of couples meet online. Dating websites were once shrouded in stigma – but millennials and Gen-Zers are now avid users of apps like Tinder, Hinge and Bumble. With this, they've redefined online dating as a way to meet people based on personality (and looks, let's be honest) – rather than hometown, mutual friends or education history. Improving social cohesion one one-night-stand at a time, if you like.

That doesn't mean dating apps don't have (fairly sizeable) downsides; you have to do a lot of trawling through people who are nothing like you before you find someone who might be. And after that, it's likely they'll randomly vanish after a couple of messages, or even worse – a couple of dates. Ghosting is a nasty invention of the modern dating landscape – something we all scorn upon, but that we've all done and had done to us.

What's the remedy? With his new app elate, Sanjay Panchal wants to make us into better daters and better people. Maddyness spoke to Sanjay about where most dating apps fall down and dating in the time of lockdown.

[Maddyness] Explain what elate is and how it started in your own words.

[Sanjay] elate is a relationship app on a mission to make dating better. With features like limiting chats to three at a time, private feedback and anti-ghosting notifications to let you know when a date moves on, it encourages more mindful dating.

The idea came about after experiencing how frustrating dating apps can be. I would talk about them with single friends and with dates and hear the same complaints again and again. Stories of people being flaky or rude, constantly matching with people who aren't compatible, and generally feeling like it's too much hard work.

Why are most dating apps so rubbish?

Most apps are too superficial and work via a numbers game rather than carefully picking matches for you. They get you hooked on swiping through profiles and getting matches which keeps you in the apps longer but isn't conducive to creating real connections.

It also makes you behave in ways you wouldn't in real life. When you're shown countless profiles you're less likely to treat each of them with the politeness and respect you would if you were to meet them in person.

Online dating used to be a bit taboo but is now really commonplace amongst young people. Why do you think this is and do you think it's a good thing?

It's mostly a generational thing. Millennials and Generation Z have grown up living their lives online and so it comes naturally for them to extend that to things like dating. It also helps that for younger people, the simpler apps like Tinder and Bumble work well even though they're more superficial. However, millennials are now more likely to want something serious, hence their dissatisfaction with existing dating apps and that presents an opportunity for relationship apps like elate.

Tell us your views on ghosting. Do you genuinely think you can stop it?

Ghosting isn't new. People have been not returning calls or replying to letters long before smartphones were invented. The problem is that it's happening more – because dating apps let us meet more people. Because they tend to be outside of your usual social circle, you're not likely to bump into them and have no friends in common so there are fewer consequences.

Our goal isn't to stop all ghosting; it's to make it less likely. You're less likely to ghost someone if you're only speaking to three people at a time, or you know they will have a chance to feedback to elate if you do it. And if you still get ghosted, we at least let you know when they've moved on so you're not left waiting and wondering.

How do you plan to market yourselves to become the next big thing in dating? I feel like Hinge has done a very good job at overtaking Tinder recently; will you be taking a leaf out of their book?

Our brand is all about making dating better by creating an app with less ghosting, fewer d*ckheads and more dates worth meeting. It's aimed at those frustrated with the crap behaviour on other apps, which we can limit on elate because of features like private feedback at the end of every chat.

How has COVID affected operations for elate? And the dating landscape overall?

It hasn't been too bad for us. I miss being able to get people in a room to have a discussion about product or user feedback but ultimately it's not really had a huge impact. If anything it's been positive in some ways because dating apps have soared in popularity as one of the only ways to meet people during lockdown.

And finally, a more personal question!
We've started asking everyone we interview about their daily routine and the rules they live by. Is it up at 4am for yoga, or something a little more traditional?

I'm a natural procrastinator. It's second nature for me so I have to work really hard to keep myself focused. Lists rule my life; if I don't put something down on a list, it doesn't get done.

I also try to block out my day for specific tasks on my list and keep them in my calendar. This lets me see what I need to do as well as remind me what I have done. The reminders are really important sometimes, as you can be overwhelmed by how much you need to do and need a reminder of everything you've achieved in a week.

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