



BY JONAS MOODY

# Be Still My Beating Bluetooth

Can wireless technology help singles on the go find love in the age of digital dating?

“Finding a decent boyfriend in New York is like winning the lotto,” complains 27-year-old graphic designer Markus Reed. “Your chances are one in a billion.” Reed, like many other big city dwellers, finds it frustrating to be in close proximity to millions of potential catches on a daily basis, but with no reason to approach a perfect stranger, the chances for romance plummet.

With these odds, Reed decided to take matters into his own hands. Literally. He started meeting people through his cell phone using mobile social software, cleverly dubbed “MoSoSo”. Three months later, while at his local grocery store, Reed received a text message that Mr. Future Boyfriend had a crush on him and was at a café nearby, and he ought to drop by and say hello. And so blossoms love in the digital age.

These two star-crossed digerati aren’t alone in their quest to find romance in the modern world. With Internet dating websites numbering in the thousands and Americans alone spending USD 649 million a year on online personals and Internet dating according to research from Jupiter Media, e-dating is hardly a practice on the fringe anymore. In fact, some serious singles go as far as to have professional photographers prepare their user images and consultants design their profiles. With all the money and interest pouring into the industry, no wonder there is so much buzz about software that takes online dating off of the computer screen and into the real world.

## WEARING YOUR HEART ON YOUR SLEEVE

The commonly accepted birthplace of the MoSoSo device, like so much other gadgetry, is Japan. In the late 90s you’d have been hard pressed to find a teen on the streets of Shibuya not packing a *Lovegety* (interland.co.jp), a simple form of wireless dating realized as a keychain with three settings: “talk” “karaoke” and the ambiguous “get2”. Once the mode is selected, the device scans for matches in the area, and the unbridled giggling begins.

Elsewhere in Asia, Korean developer Xenofreaks has released the “PIX” medallion (ilovepix.com/en), a device sporting a simple LED screen with user-

programmed patterns. If the flashing emoticons don’t grab your eye, don’t fret: infrared rays communicate information between the units and alert users of potential icon matches. As the medallion is quite large and literally flashes, the bling-factor might put some off. But like mood rings, this accoutrement claims to convey our innermost thoughts, as long as they fit on a small LED grid.

The downside to both these devices is the limited personalization, making it more of a fashion accessory and less a way to connect with people who have common interests; that is, besides a love of Asian gizmos. If your capacity for human interaction extends beyond chatting and karaoke and your emotions are more complex than a happy and frowny face, then you’ll need to look elsewhere.

## MORE THAN JUST FRIENDSTERS?

Developers in the West are taking a different approach, ditching the gadgetry and gearing their software towards mobile evolutions of online giants like MySpace, Friendster, and Facebook. These social networking sites enable users to create detailed profiles with images and text, link to friends’ profiles, define specific interests, join community groups – essentially they are a tool to digitize your personality. What they don’t do is get your butt out of the chair.

MoSoSo’s edge is its ability to move with you

ILLUSTRATION BY ELIA GUANABSCOTTA



Anytime a match comes within the 15-meter bubble, you are alerted. However, unless you manage to flick your phone off in time, anyone else matching your profile gets your pic and number, including all cretins, sleaze kings, and bimbos.

while alerting you to compatible personalities in the vicinity. To some this may sound like a sci-fi flick gone horribly wrong, but the public’s apparent love of their virtual existence (according to research from hitwise.com, one in 20 Internet hits goes to a social networking site) may mean it’s not such a leap to take your online persona to the streets.

The biggest player in American MoSoSo is Dodgeball (dodgeball.com), which supports its free network through a series of prescribed locations called “venues” and simple user profiles including a pic, links to friends, most recent venues, and a private crush list.

When you arrive at a venue, let’s say the Magnolia Bakery in New York, you “check in”, or send a text message, like “I’m at Magnolia about to eat a dozen cupcakes. Please come and stop me,” to Dodgeball, which forwards the message to any friends nearby. Likewise, anytime you check in, the people you select as crushes are sent your name, location, pic, and your true feelings. You’ll save face if your crush doesn’t rush to find you, but if you’re within eyeshot it’s awkward to watch your digital flirt deleted.

Dodgeball hasn’t only gotten attention from tech-savvy urbanites (available in 22 cities across the US), but from Internet colossus Google as well, which acquired the network in 2005 and is expected to incorporate it into their suite of services. But don’t expect it to happen any time soon. Since acquiring

the network from NYU grad students Dens Crowley and Alex Rainet, its software development seems to have come to a halt.

## DON’T GET LONELY, GET BLUE

Across the pond in Europe, a different kind of service is emerging from French developer Kangourouge. Their MoSoSo, “Proxidating” (proxidating.com), has only one objective: to look for love. For EUR 3 (USD 4), users download the software to their phone, set up their profile, activate their Bluetooth wireless function, and head out. When a match is located, both users get a text message with the other’s pic, number, and a pick-up line, if you prefer.

Besides its wide availability in the US, much of Europe, Australia and Hong Kong, the advantage of Proxidating is that because it uses Bluetooth, users don’t rely on text messages and mobile networks. Anytime a match comes within the 15-meter bubble, you are alerted. However, unless you manage to flick your phone off in time, anyone else matching your profile gets your pic and number, including all cretins, sleaze kings, and bimbos.

Though sexual orientation is specified (making this the first actual *gaydar*), the downside is that the profiles are too simplistic, leading to numerous less-than-desirable matches. The biggest fault right now is that, while the love of your life may be standing right

next to you, unless they have a Bluetooth phone and Proxidating, you’re going to have to rely on serendipity and old-fashioned conversation to make it happen.

Phone manufacturer Nokia has also thrown its hat into the ring with a Bluetooth MoSoSo called “Sensor” (nokia.com/sensor), which is far more customizable than Proxidating, and free for all Nokia owners. User profiles are set up as a mini-website with a pic, profile name, motto, user groups, profession, favorite pastime, etc. Other users can message you for free over Bluetooth or scan your “Collection” where you can post small media files like images, audio, and video.

What Nokia Sensor *doesn’t* do is help you find a date. Because the interface is set up like a social networking site instead of an Internet dating site, there are no fields to specify the kind of relationship you are looking for, sexual orientation, and other basic dating info. Nokia Sensor isn’t going to play matchmaker for you.

Despite all these new innovations in networking and dating, people still don’t seem to be flocking to MoSoSo like analysts expected. Some say it’s because mobile phone technology isn’t up to speed, but perhaps people are simply not ready to let their computers, mobile phones, or keychains do their wooing for them. Some matters still require a human touch. □

