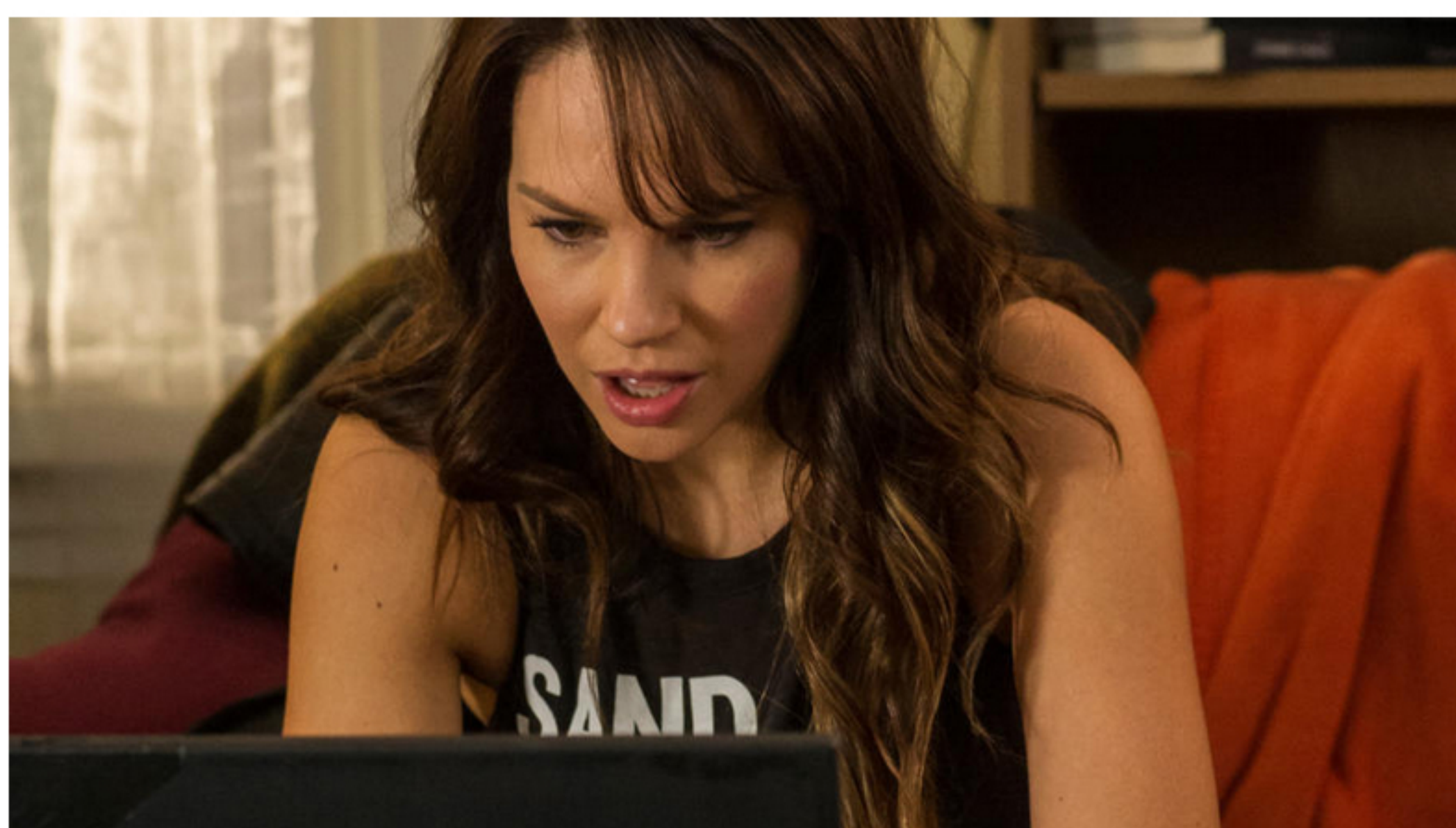


## 8 Easy Background Checks Every Woman Should Do Before a First Date

BY [MARIA RICAPITO](#) AUG 10, 2017

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Ah, that sense of panic when you swipe right to a complete stranger. *Is he normal? What's his deal? Is he a total creep?* In the age of online predators, it's completely normal to want to perform a background check on potential love connections. "Predators know where to find prey," says [Thomas G. Martin](#), private investigator and former federal agent with the U.S. Department of Justice. "To a con artist, dating sites are a huge pool of potential marks putting themselves out there, looking for love [and] sometimes a little too willing to suspend disbelief and common sense."

To combat online predators, many dating apps and sites vet their users by implementing risk algorithms to prevent criminals from using their services. "We analyze every stitch of data the user enters and then compare that information against many millions of publicly available criminal and sex offender data records," says Joseph Penora, CEO and founder of the dating app, Gatsby. The company is also currently working on additional layers of risk verification, which will "always be an evolving process as new technologies and techniques are discovered."

Eve Peters, CEO of the app Whim, says that "before approving a profile into the system, a reviewer analyzes each one to gauge its authenticity." The company reviews post-date feedback to determine if a user profile is ersatz or if someone behaved inappropriately.

But of course, these systems aren't 100 percent foolproof. Check out these simple DIY PI tactics, red flags and don'ts:

**Do your homework** Start by collecting as much vital information as you can find: full name (including original last name in case they took a new last name when marrying, for example), date of birth, cities where they've lived, school attendance, names of parents and siblings. If your future date has a common name, you will need as much as possible to go on.

**Don't overlook the obvious** Begin with the basics. Google, Yahoo and Bing are the top search engines in the U.S. By checking all three, "you can obtain different results, since each engine has different data sets and ways of returning results," Martin says. Put a name in quotes (EX: "Alfred Lindenman") to focus the search. Not all info online is current, but you can cross-reference between results to weed out bad or outdated leads. Martin's company links to some free (and paid) people-finding resources on the website [888usunite.com](#). Penora suggests doing a Google reverse image search to determine if someone's using a fake picture. If they're real, this will help lead you to their social media profiles.

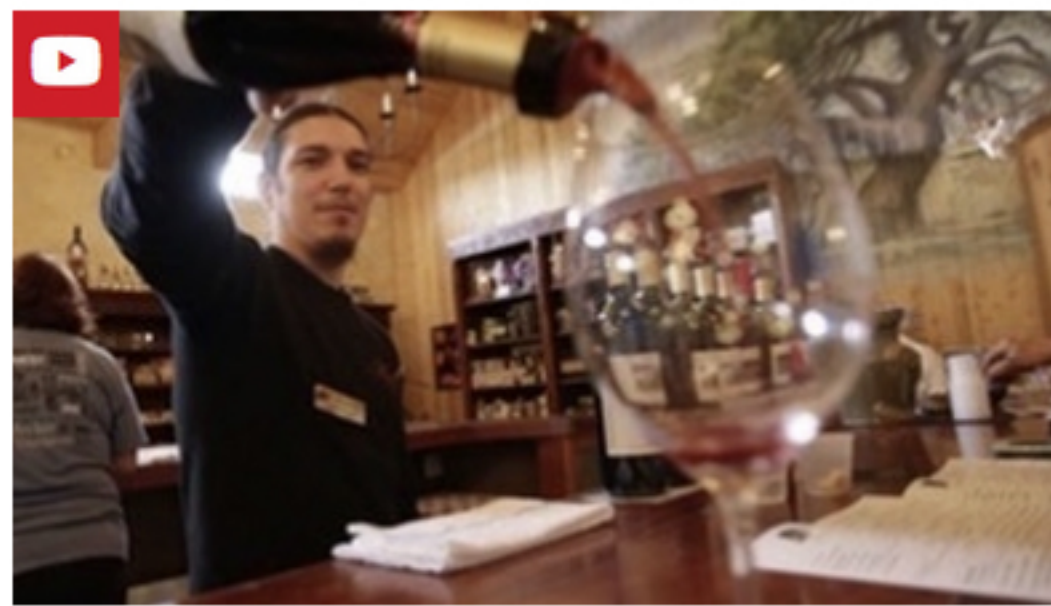
**Be social** Social media sites will tell you a lot about a person—including if he or she really exists. "Start here because most people or businesses have at least one account," Martin says. Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn allow for searches by name. Twitter and Instagram are likely to help you learn about a person's attitudes or beliefs or what they like to do for fun. Look for inconsistencies. "If their bio says they are a homebody who doesn't like to go out, yet every photo is of lavish parties that look like the photos were professionally taken, chances are they're fake," Penora says. He adds that in some instances, Facebook users make their mobile number public. "Enter their mobile number in the search box on Facebook [to find them]," he says. If a dating or social profile has only a single photo, Penora says it's a red flag. "We have recently implemented a four-picture requirement for all new users on Gatsby to help combat fake profiles."

**Set the records straight** Criminal records are often publicly available. However, you do have to know the location where the crime or arrest occurred. For example, you know your future date lives in Phoenix, AZ. You would want to check the records for that city and county. Bear in mind that some states have more info online than others. To search nationally, you'd have to go to a paid service such as Instant Checkmate, BeenVerified or PeopleFinders.com. (Bonus: Some of these sites have a limited-time free trial.) [National Cellular Directory](#) offers a "happy hour" where users can do people searches for free for an hour a day. (Find out times on their [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).)

There are also websites that allow you to search for registered sex offenders in your area, such as [nsopw.gov/en](#).

If you know your dates been previously married (or are trying to find out!) all divorce records in the U.S. are a matter of public record. "It's a big red flag if someone won't tell you in what county or state their divorce was finalized," Martin says. "That's generally because they don't want you to see the official record." You can also check here for drug or abuse allegations.

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**Don't go too far** Literally. "If you're thinking of getting on a plane to go see the person... don't," Martin says. He adds that it's a smart idea to keep your radius small. "There's a reason why all the calls I get are about long-distance relationships," he says. "Let's say you live in the Chicago area—surely you can at least start by dating people in the state of Illinois, whom you can easily meet in person?"

**Don't talk about money** "If someone brings up your finances or says that they are having financial issues, run!" says Penora. "Criminals and scammers often prey on those with big hearts looking for love. If they are being so brash as to give out information like this, chances are they will try to swindle money from you. Never, ever give out your financial information."

**Think of your cell number as your new social security number** Would you give your SSN to anyone who asked? Probably not. Where social security numbers used to be the "key to the kingdom" of info about you, today that's more likely to be your mobile number. It is connected to hundreds of databases—and to a device that's pretty much always with you. For example: You enter your cell phone number when you buy something online—that's now connected to your purchase history and credit card info. "It's increasingly used by private investigators and information brokers as the window to your private information that is maintained by almost all businesses, corporations, financial institutions, and social media," Martin says. "If bad guys get your cell phone number, there are all kind of things they can do."

**Trust your gut** There are news stories every day about unsavory types using dating apps to find victims. "More than 10 percent of registered sex offenders have admitted to using online dating to find their next victim," says Penora. "Whether you are using Gatsby, social media or any other dating platform, nothing can replace common sense or your instincts. If things just don't feel right, move on to the next one."

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