Online dating – using content design to keep people safe

1. User need

As someone considering signing up to an online dating service, I need to get clear, helpful information so that I can avoid the common financial problems and risks associated with using online dating services.

2. Questions for the product team (UX designers, user researchers, other content designers) and suggestions to make the content more user-centred

Questions

- What evidence was collected/analysed to establish that the information given is the information that users actually need?

- How was this form of content (a guidance page) identified as the best format for getting the information across to users?

- Which user groups were involved in the research for developing the content and for testing its effectiveness after publication?

- Are users finding this page and how easy is it to find? (Check any analytics that are available and consider potential user journeys.)

- Was the text analysed using the Hemingway app (https://hemingwayapp.com/)? This reveals that 7/51 sentences may be hard to read and 4/51 sentences may be very hard to read, so it could be worth considering alternatives for these.

- How often is the content updated?

- What additional user research is carried out to make future updates/improvements?

Suggestions for improvement

- The title is potentially misleading – users may assume that the article is about dating safely online (e.g. not giving out personal details, being careful about the kind of content you share, etc.). In fact, the article is about using online dating *services* carefully, so users know what they're signing up for and don't lose money.

  The title could be made clearer by simply adding "Online dating **services**: what to look out for".

- Include alt text for the CMA logo. The logo also looks quite low-quality/non-standard for GOV.UK.

- The use of white space is generally effective in terms of readability, but arguably slightly excessive between the separate sections.

- Front-load key information and use parallel constructions so the most important actions the user needs to take are immediately clear.

- Keep sentences and paragraphs short to reduce cognitive load and make them more readable. E.g:
    - *"if you are planning to sign up to a paid membership, the terms and conditions may require you to agree to services being provided as soon as you have signed up"* → *"for some paid memberships, you may have to agree that services will be provided as soon as you've signed up."*

- Wherever possible/appropriate, use the active voice with an agent rather than the passive voice. E.g:
    - *"You should be provided with…"* → *"The online dating service should provide you with…"*

- The headings work well to break up the text into a logical before/during/after structure, but they could be slightly clearer to help the user scan the text for the information they're looking for. To avoid making them too long and wordy, we don't need to repeat the reference to online dating services in each heading, as this should be made clear in the article title. E.g:
    - "Before signing up for an online dating service" → "Things to consider before signing up"
    - "Once you've signed up" → "Things to look out for once you've signed up"
    - "What to do if something goes wrong" → "What to do if something goes wrong after you've signed up"

- Choose whether contractions should be used or not. For this text, they should be used to create a more friendly, conversational tone, to help make a potentially complex/daunting/anxiety-inducing topic more manageable for the user (e.g. *"as soon as you have signed up"* → *"as soon as you've signed up", "if you are planning"* → *"if you're planning"*). However, as per the GOV.UK style guide, negative contractions should be avoided.

- Where the user is being asked to carry out a specific action or consult a specific piece of legislation, provide details on how they can perform the action or include a link to more information as appropriate. E.g:
    - *"an unfair contract term isn't legally binding – check our <u>advice for business</u> [link to advice for business guidance] to find out more"*
    - *"Consumer Rights Act 2015 (CRA)"*
    - *"Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPR)"*

- The links to Citizens Advice and Get Safe Online, as well as the additional information on the CMA's work on online dating, all take users to the respective pages within the same tab. It may be useful to add the target="_blank" attribute to the HTML link tags so that the links open in a new tab. This means that the user can easily switch tabs in case they want to refer back to the original article, rather than potentially having to click back multiple times from the new page.

3. Style inaccuracies / mistakes

- Contrary to the GOV.UK style guide, the passive voice is used on several occasions. E.g:
    - *"You should be provided with…" → "The service should provide you with…"*

- Contrary to the GOV.UK style guide, some of the bullet points contain more than one sentence. E.g:.
    - *"some dating websites share profiles with other websites to increase the pool of people that you can meet. Check if the one you're using does this and which sites you will appear on. They should seek your permission before sharing your details*
    - *if you are planning to sign up to a paid membership, the terms and conditions may require you to agree to services being provided as soon as you have signed up. If it does, you may not be able to get a full refund if you choose to cancel during the 14 day cooling off period"*

- The following bullet point should be shortened and reworded for grammatical accuracy (esp. agreement of plural 'term**s** and condition**s**' and singular 'if **it** does') and clarity:
    - *"if you are planning to sign up to a paid membership, the terms and conditions may require you to agree to services being provided as soon as you have signed up. If it does, you may not be able to get a full refund if you choose to cancel during the 14 day cooling off period." → "for some paid memberships, you may have to agree that services will be provided as soon as you've signed up. If this is the case, you may not be able to get a full refund if you choose to cancel during the 14 day cooling off period."*

- According to the GOV.UK style guide, bullet points should always have a lead-in line, and the bullets must make sense running on from the lead-in line. This is not the case in the sections *"Once you've signed up"* and *"What to do if something goes wrong"*, where bullets are used without a lead-in line.

- Section 1 ("Before signing up for an online dating service") does use a lead-in line. However, not all the sentences follow on logically from this. E.g:
    - *"Make sure to check: … the dating website you are joining may be operated by another company – this should be made clear to you when you sign up" → "Make sure to check: whether or not the site you are joining is operated by another company (check the terms and conditions when signing up)"*

- According to the GOV.UK style guide, negative contractions like 'can't', 'don't' and 'isn't' should be avoided, as many users find them harder to read or misread them as the opposite of what they say. *"Isn't"* in the sentence *"an unfair contract term isn't legally binding"* should be replaced with *"is not"*.

- It isn't clear why 'in the contract' is in inverted commas in the following sentence – this may confuse users: *"you can challenge a term if you think it is unfair, even if you have signed up to it 'in the contract'"*.