



The Security Risks of Dating Apps:

About Access Authorisation and Data
Protection

Investigation
September 2016



DatingSitesReviewed.com.au

Summary

- ✓ 13 Australian dating apps were tested.
- ✓ Alarmingly, many of the apps that we tested were able to very easily access smartphone data.
- ✓ Apps from online dating agencies were the safest.

Foreword

What exactly do we know about the use of dating apps? Apps are downloaded quickly and deleted again just as fast if we don't like them – but are you aware of what happens to your data?

In our investigation, we have dealt with the subject and have examined the most popular dating apps and their user access permissions.

We therefore wish you an enlightening read that brings insight.

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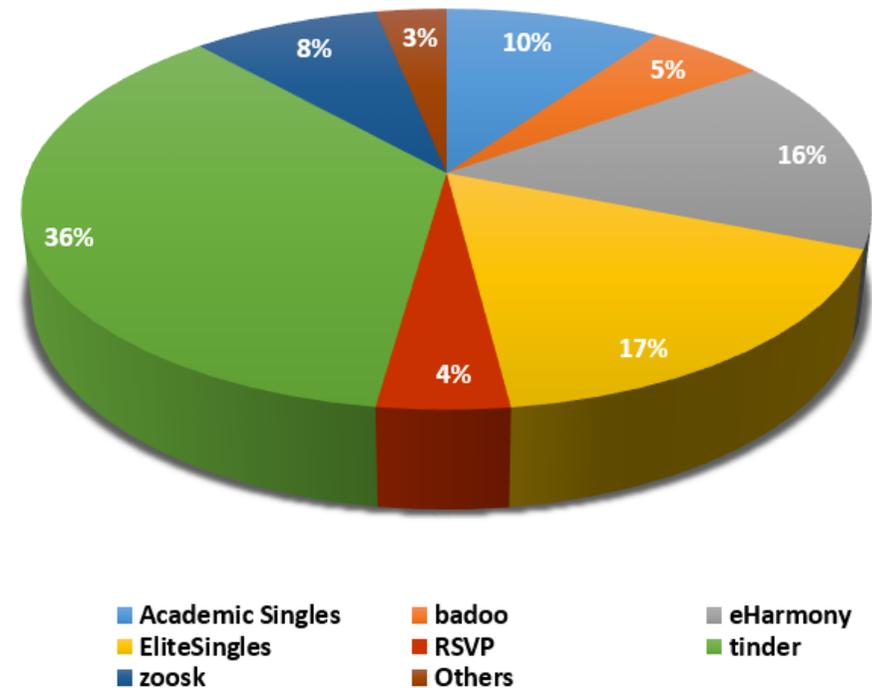
Investigation of the US Dating App Market

At the beginning of February 2016, Flexera investigated the risks that online dating apps exposed the likes of BYOD (Bring Your Own Device). The focus was on US dating apps that ran on the iOS, primarily concentrating on the risk that people posed to themselves while using mobile flirt apps on company devices. Most employers are completely unaware of the security risks themselves. Many use smartphones and tablets for dating and other leisure activities on devices primarily geared towards work and business.

So what does this mean for dating apps in Australia?

DatingSitesReviews.com.au took some time in September 2016 to examine the 13 most popular mobile dating apps for Android systems in Australia. Our aim was to find out just how liberal the access permissions were. The factors we chose to find the most popular include the number of downloads, how many members they had as well as comments and user feedback. In this case, we have left out apps that focus purely on sex.

Percentage distribution of the largest dating apps in Australia



Here Are the Dating Apps We Analysed

AcademicSingles	With one million users, AcademicSingles is a new and fast-growing matchmaking site in Australia.
badoo	More of a social app that focuses on dating, Badoo has connected singles since 2006 and there are 250 million profiles globally.
eHarmony	One of the oldest matchmaking sites, eHarmony has grown in Australia. Over here, there are 1.5 million Australian members and was founded in 2007.
EliteSingles	Beginning in 2009, EliteSingles offers 1.6 million members in Australia and works by matchmaking.
happn	Slowly gaining popularity Australia, Happn enjoys over 10 million users internationally.
Lovoo	Straight out of Germany, Lovoo has five million members worldwide.
match.com	Match.com is US-based with 60 million members and quite popular in Australia as well.
OasisActive	Launched in 2008, OasisActive is an Australian original with 1.6 million members in Australia and 11 million members globally.
POF	Another famous dating platform, PlentyOfFish started in 2003 and now boasts three million members online daily.
RSVP	Another uniquely Australian dating site, RSVP can boast 400,000 singles from all over the country and 1,200 joining every day.
Skout	A speedy and fun dating app that has around 5 million members in 100 countries.
tinder	One of the most famous dating apps, Tinder was founded in 2012 and can boast 3.4 million users in Australia alone.
zoosk	Beginning as an app for Facebook in 2007, Zoosk app now boasts 60 million people worldwide, a big leap from its beginnings!

Criteria We Focused On

With these 13 dating apps we've used the opportunity to examine these access permissions such as the data they demand users hand over in order to use the service, but fail to protect: in-app purchases, location, access to camera and microphone, SMS, photos/media/data, social network, Bluetooth and other miscellaneous factors.

Later on we'll show what other liberties dating apps can take by using these permissions.

Results of the Investigation of Australian Dating Apps

The following infographic shows a summary of which access permissions each of the 13 apps take advantage of:

Access Permissions of Leading Dating Apps

Dating app	In App Purchases	Contact	Location	SMS	Camera Microphone	Photos Media & Data	Storage	Social Network	Bluetooth	Other
 AcademicSingles	▲	▲			▲	▲				▲
 badoo	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
 eHarmony		▲			▲	▲	▲			
 EliteSingles	▲	▲				▲	▲			▲
 happn	▲	▲	▲		▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
 Lovoo	▲	▲	▲			▲	▲	▲		▲
 match	▲	▲	▲			▲	▲	▲		▲
 OasisActive	▲	▲	▲		▲	▲	▲			
 POF		▲	▲		▲		▲			▲
 RSVP			▲		▲	▲	▲			▲
 Skout	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲			▲
 tinder	▲	▲	▲		▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
 zoosk	▲	▲	▲		▲	▲	▲	▲		▲

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The Results of Our Survey

- ✓ 100 percent of all apps that we tested required users to allow access to photos, media and other data.
- ✓ 85 percent of the reviewed dating apps we tested (among them OasisActive, Skout and Badoo) demand access to the smartphone's camera and microphone functions.
- ✓ 78 percent of apps investigated required users to share their location.
- ✓ 23 percent of the apps we test can activate a smartphone's Bluetooth device, therefore sharing information with other devices.
- ✓ 15 percent of apps require access permission to the phone's SMS function, i.e. reading and sending text messages.

We cannot entirely say just how liberal dating apps are with these permissions. It has been noted, however, that those from traditional matchmaking sites like EliteSingles are often far less invasive in comparison to those offered for "free" i.e., Badoo or Tinder.

This list is of course only a current snapshot of dating apps at the moment (09/2016). As new updates come, these apps may either remove or add such access permissions. Whatever measures you may want to use in order to keep yourself and your data safe are explained in our online dating advice.

What Each Permission Means (and Possible Consequences)

1. In-App Purchases

“In-app purchases” are extra special features that users can buy in the app itself: for example, activating new functions like starting up a subscription to the service.

2. Contact

By taking contact, the app can use whatever contacts you have on your device. It can also read and even change these contacts.

3. Location

A downloaded app can take the location of your device and detect where it is. With this access the app can, among other things...

The app you downloaded can find out where your device is location and detect it. Using this access, it can...

- ✓ Find your rough location (based on your network).
- ✓ Find your exact location (through both GPS and network).
- ✓ Switch your GPS access on and off.

4. SMS

SMS and MMS functions on your smartphone may be used by the dating app. Functions can include using text, pictures and video messages. With access, it may also include (among other things):

- ✓ Receiving SMS.
- ✓ Reading SMS/MMS.
- ✓ Receive MMS, for example, pictures and videos.
- ✓ Process your SMS or MMS.
- ✓ Send an SMS, for which you would incur fees.

5. Camera/Microphone

Apps downloaded ask for camera and microphone access to your smartphone. With access, they can among other things:

- ✓ Record pictures and videos.
- ✓ Record sounds.

6. Photos/Media/Data

Data you've saved on your mobile device can also be used by the app. Using this access, among other things it can:

- ✓ Reading your USB content (i.e., your SD card).
- ✓ Changing your USB-saved content or deleting it.
- ✓ Formatting your external storage.
- ✓ Turning your external storage on or off.

7. Storage

If it wants to, this means the app is able to change any saved information kept on your device. Using this access it can:

- ✓ Change or delete the content on your USB storage.
- ✓ Read the content on your USB storage.

8. Social Networking

The app is able to access whatever social network you happen to use (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.) and even share your information on those sites. This can include:

- ✓ Reading your timeline.
- ✓ Posting things to your timeline.

9. Bluetooth

Apps are given the permission to activate your device's Bluetooth feature and hence share your data. It can:

- ✓ Access your Bluetooth freely.
- ✓ Connect with other Bluetooth devices.

10. Other

The dating app receives permission to use your personal settings as it wishes. Among other things, this access may include:

- ✓ Searching for data on the Internet.
- ✓ Calling up network connections.
- ✓ Implement a start.
- ✓ Control the vibrational settings.
- ✓ Deactivate resting mode.
- ✓ Deactivate resting mode.
- ✓ Connect with and separate from wifi connections.
- ✓ Change your network connection activity.

About **DATINGSITESREVIEWS.COM.AU**:

DATINGSITESREVIEWS.COM.AU is a free website that focuses on providing:

- Evaluations and reviews of online dating sites and services.
- Guidance for both beginners and experienced online daters.

Beginning in 2003, more than 5,000,000 singles all over the world have used our comparison review portals as their gateway to memberships in their desired online dating site. Recommendations, interviews, or test report claims have been published in over 1,000 outlets in the press, TV and radio.

About metaflake

Based in UK (London), Germany (Cologne) and Switzerland (Wattwil) the metaflake network has 12 fulltime employees and currently operates online dating review websites in 14 countries.

