



INDUSTRY NEWS

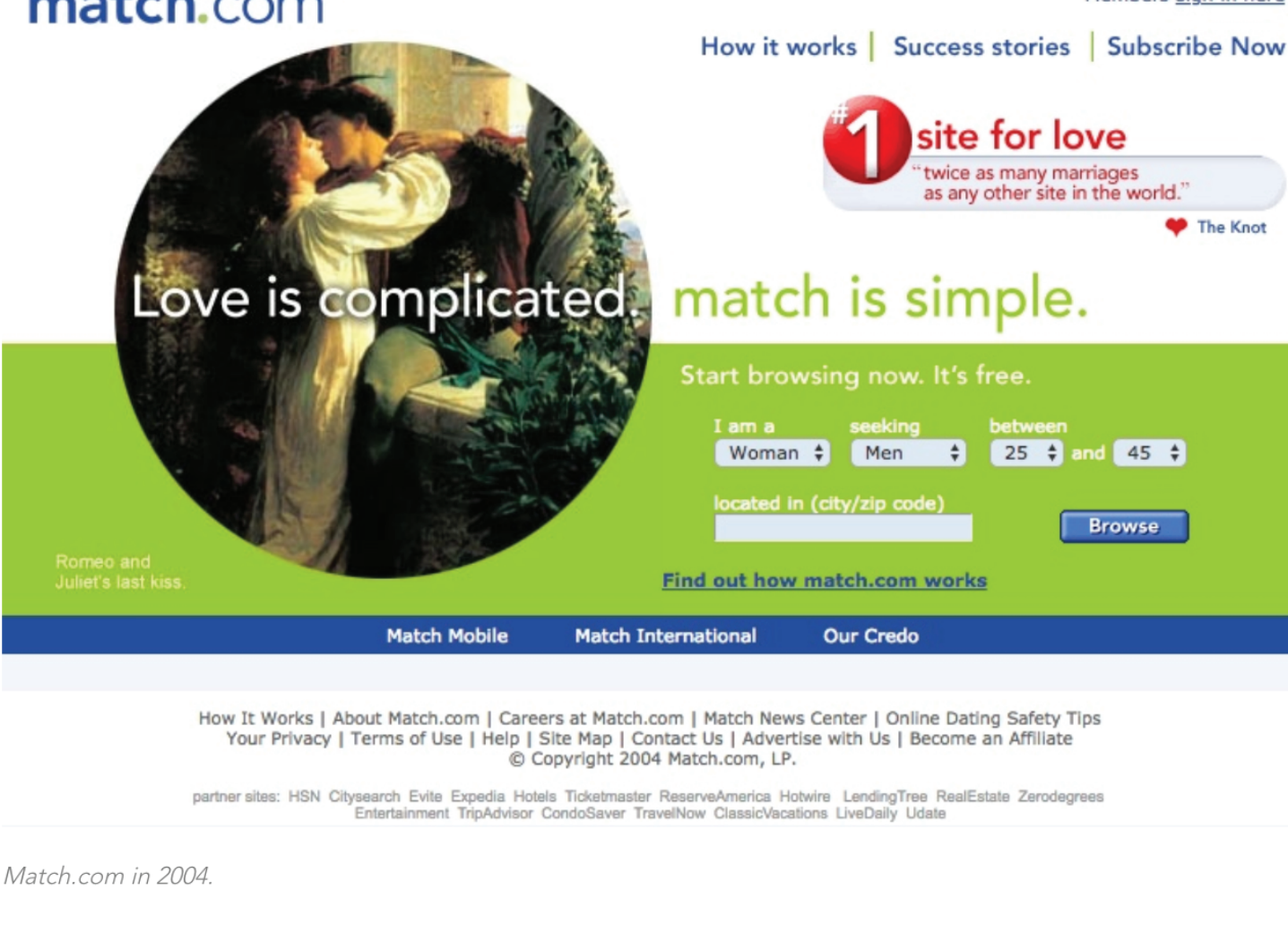
# Ghost in the phone: How the App Store enabled Tinder-loving-care and despair



by Katy Jensen on Sep 11, 2018

After Apple’s inception of the App Store in 2008, it became possible for mobile users to do almost anything with a couple of taps on their iPhone screens. With the App Store, you could now get a ride on demand, read any book you desired, directly on your mobile device, or hire someone to do pretty much any task you could think of—all with a few taps and swipes on your iPhone. There’s one app category, though, where ease of access has bred more than convenience. The ascendance of dating apps in the App Store has not only changed the way we search for love—it’s changed the course of our lives.

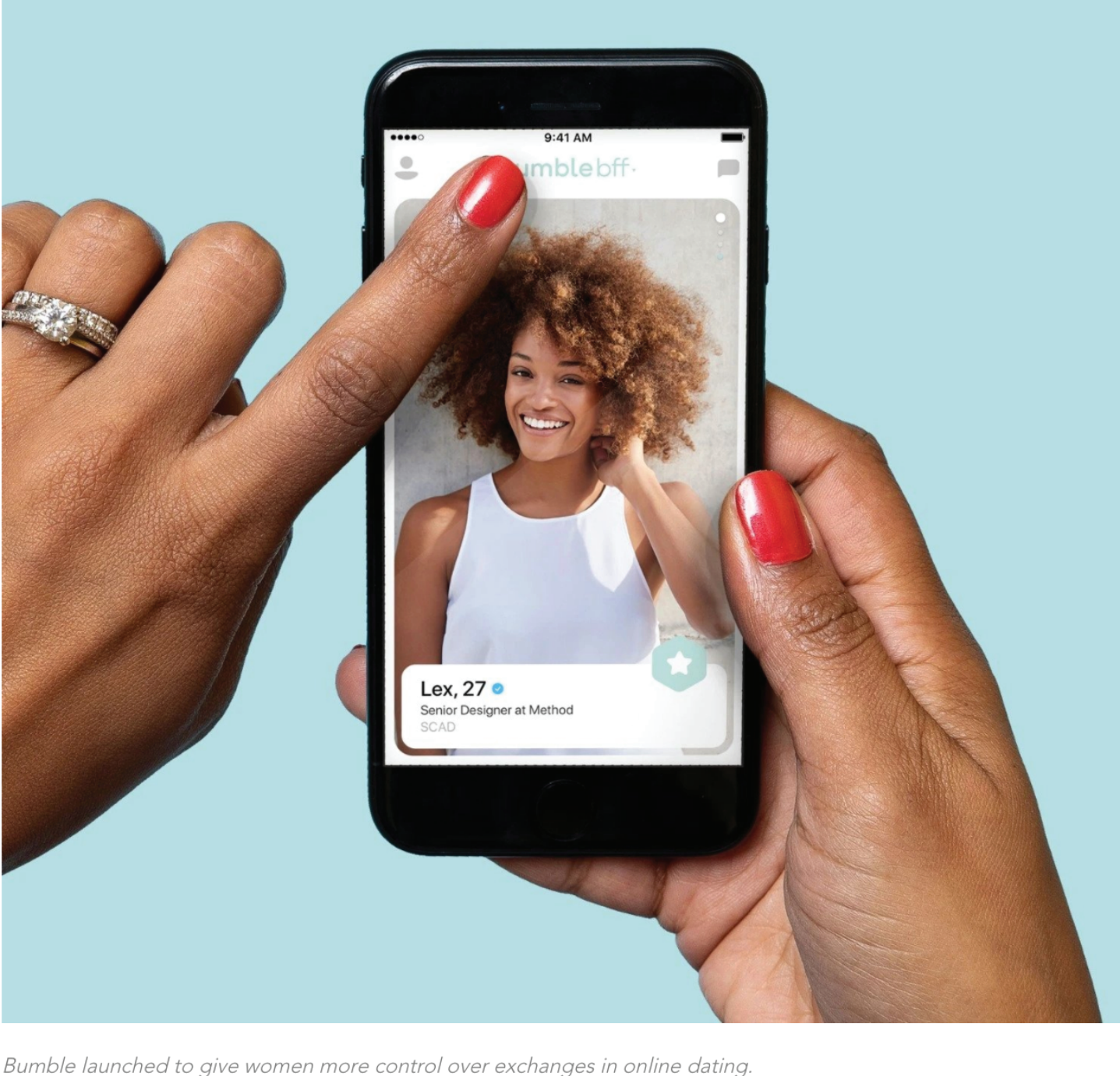
It wasn’t long ago that online dating held the stigma of being something that only lonely and desperate people would resort to. Web-based online dating sites in the ‘90s and early 2000s were well-known, and despite being the subject of many jokes, they succeeded—Match.com was recognized as the largest dating site in 2004 by the Guinness Book of World records, [raking in almost 900,000 new users each month at the time](#). But even so, the prevailing sentiment was that online dating was reserved for those who couldn’t manage to find love in the real world.



Match.com in 2004.

But as most of our day-to-day tasks became more portable with the iPhone, so did finding love. When the App Store launched, dating apps sprang up for every niche. The potential was there, but the matches weren’t. It wasn’t until Tinder launched on September 12, 2012 that the concept of “digital dating” became mainstream. Tinder was actually preceded by Grindr (which launched in 2009) in the location-based dating app game, but it was the first to use the functionality to appeal to a widespread market. With location data, matches became as accessible as the apps they came from.

Proximity to potential matches was not the only factor that led to Tinder’s success. The addition of its swipe feature added to the casual feel of the app, making mobile dating feel like a game. Tinder has more than [50 million users worldwide](#), and as of this writing is the #1 top grossing app in the App Store in the UK, according to [App Annie](#).



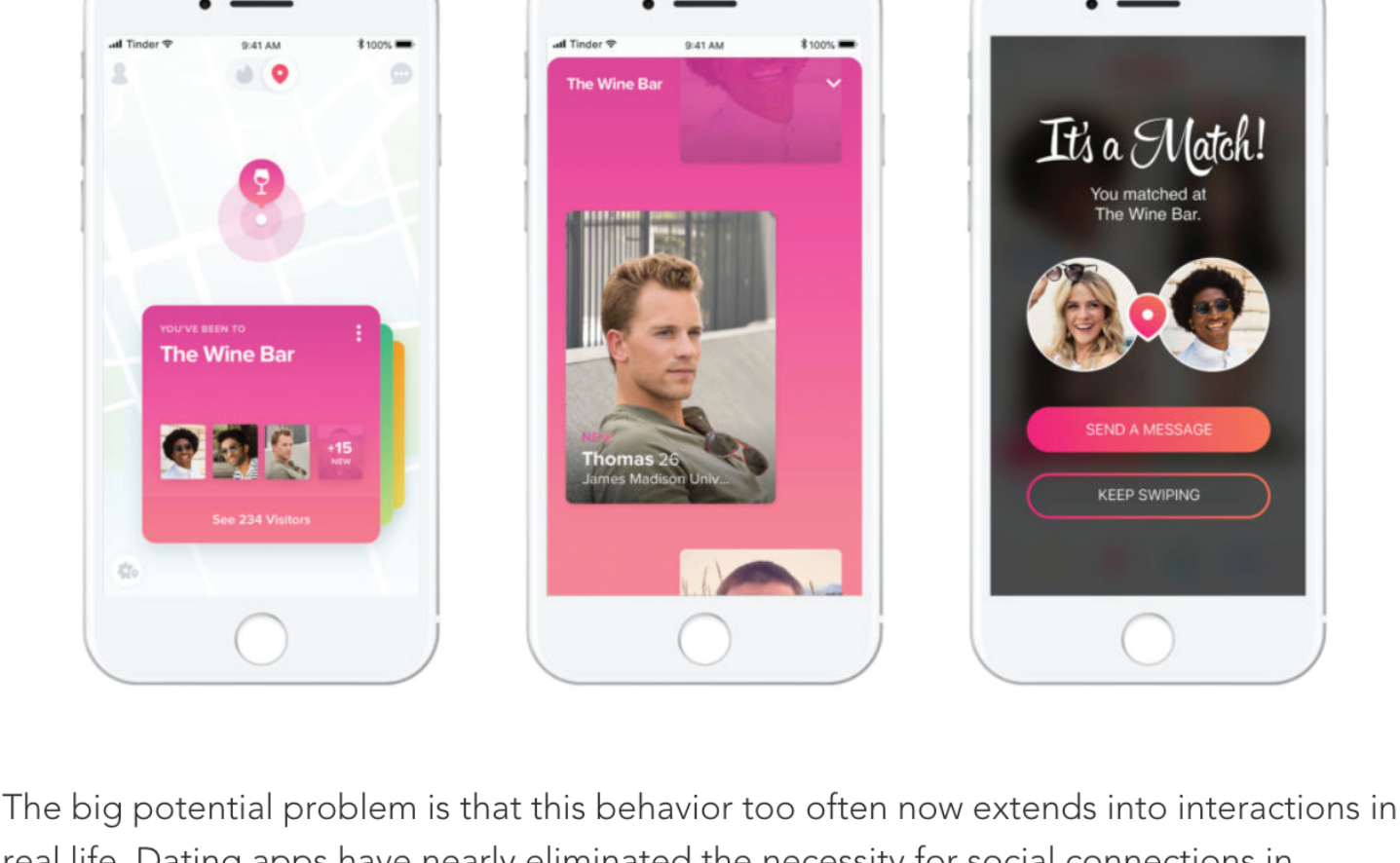
Bumble launched to give women more control over exchanges in online dating.

The gamification of dating apps may have been popularized by Tinder, but it certainly didn’t end there. As swiping became mainstream, new apps sought to put even more of a spin on the format. Bumble was created by Tinder co-founder Whitney Wolfe Herd as an option that would give women more control over exchanges in online dating. The hyper-localized app Happn came about to allow users to connect with people they’ve crossed paths with. In many countries including the UK, dating apps [claimed the #1 spot for consumer app spend in 2017](#), and spending is increasing.

“While niche apps delight some users, the seemingly infinite number of options available perpetuates indecision.”

Though the swipe feature is not used in every popular dating app, its success shows that simplicity is key. Other efforts to gamify dating apps have included Tinder’s addition of its “Super Like” feature, as well as premium paid subscriptions that offer features like unlimited swipes and the ability for users to see who likes them before liking or swiping at all. Devs are even trying out emerging technologies like AR to add a new twist. [FlirtAR](#) has applied the tech to create a geolocation-based AR viewfinder in a dating app (think Happn meets [SkyView](#)).

Of course, there are some downsides to the surge of innovation in dating apps. While niche apps delight some users, the seemingly infinite number of options available perpetuates indecision. More options can be a good thing, and those looking for love now have more than ever. But the popularity of these apps and the number of options available has created a “[swipe culture](#),” where people take less time to get to know each other and conversations are more often ended abruptly and without explanation—yup, dating apps are why “ghosting” is a thing.



The big potential problem is that this behavior too often now extends into interactions in real life. Dating apps have nearly eliminated the necessity for social connections in dating. Previously, more often than not, you would date people with whom you had mutual friends or acquaintances. Now, with the ability to meet people on dating apps without social connections, people are much less incentivized to break off communication politely and with respect—that is, unless they met their date through mutual friends on [Hinge](#).

For better or for worse, the App Store has transformed the way we date. The internet age of the ‘90s may have allowed us to consider finding love online, but the accessibility of the App Store has changed online dating from a deeply stigmatized practice to one that is extremely commonplace. It’s time to recognize the App Store as our very own cupid. Whether you’re looking for a hookup or “the one,” hosting an abundance of apps that need nothing more than an internet connection, it’s got relationships covered.