

# Make Me a Match

Newest technology keeps dating-service businesses buzzing

By Bill Briggs  
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**I**magine all the techno-firepower revved to full throttle every day and most nights, just to find you a squeeze. Start with massive libraries of videotapes and computer banks that can scan miles of profiles to find a matched set (the only two thirtysomething, kid-loving, God-fearing, nonsmoking, tennis-playing druids in Douglas County, for example).

Add to that 2,500 Web sites designed to link keyboard-clicking singles, and hundreds of 1-900-DATE-ME lines on which you can "press 3" to meet a redhead or "4" to bond with a blond.

Humans haven't used this much people-tracking machinery since the spy satellite search for terrorist Osama Bin Laden. Of course, all these

gizmos are humming not to pinpoint an outlaw but to bag you some in-laws — or

maybe just a dinner companion for Saturday night.

"It isn't as trite as it sounds," says Michele Fields, the owner of Bon Jour, Inc., "because if you put two people together, it changes a lot of lives. We're talking about children, in-laws, even pets."

Fields should know. In her 11 years as a matchmaker, her intimate work has spawned 59 marriages (and no divorces, she adds).

The dating service industry is alive and well in Denver, but over the years it has evolved into a weird blend of post-disco-era video clubs that bring the meat market to your VCR, and pre-Depression-style matchmakers who preach courtship and abstinence. Yet it all continues to thrive like a modern-day dot.com venture.

There are services for straight women and gay men, for Jewish people and born-again Christians, even for old guys who long for young Russian babes.

In fact, here are perhaps the two most distant poles of the Denver dating planet:

■ **At Match Made In Heaven**, a Greenwood Village service that urges clients to engage only in kissing and handholding for 12 months, owner Karis Griffin says: "This is for people who are behind the idea of courtship, who want to find a marriage partnership. If you're trying to find a hot woman to have sex with, that's not what my service provides."

■ **At Social Introductions**, an automated, "confidential" system that

uses voice mailboxes to match people, customers use their phone keypads to punch in the precise physical traits and sexual expectations of a prospective sweet-heart. "If you are looking for a date that might develop into a meaningful relationship, press 2," a recording instructs. "If you are looking for a casual, completely physical relationship with no commitment, press 4."

If you happen to be a guy in your mid-30s who presses "4," you'll hear that there are four childless, nonsmoking women in that service who are ready to get physical right now.

Some services are incredibly picky about who they will take. Griffin's business, for example, only caters to educated men who "generally make six figures," and the women "have to be attractive or else my guys won't want to date them."

Others take just about anybody with room on his or her credit card. And if you take them at their word, people in the dating-service industry are making out better than Fonzie at Inspiration Point.

By totaling their membership rosters (some 20,000 members in the Mile High City) and multiplying that by the groups' stated fees (as much as \$2,000 a year per member, plus more in individual match-making charges), we can estimate that local businesses are grossing at least \$25 million a year.

And there's lots more on the horizon if you consider that that America now has 90 million unmarried adults, and the national divorce rate is 45 percent.

That's why those familiar with the industry counsel potential customers to shop carefully when they're looking for love.

For starters, be wary of the fly-by-night nature of the industry. (At least 25 of the dating services listed by the Denver Better Business Bureau have gone under in the past few years). Beyond that, be on guard for over-exaggerated membership numbers, hidden fees and hard sells.

"These cost a lot of money, and I've only known one person who actually got married to somebody she met through a dating service," says Diane, a single Denver woman in her 30s who has met men through



## Best dating-service advice: Be care

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**C**OME AND GET IT, the ad announces. *SVM, early 40s, seeking pretty, trim woman for romance and long walks. I am handsome and well-dressed.*

Don't bet on it, claims a veteran of the Denver personals. "They all exaggerate on the physical stuff," says Diane, a thirtysomething woman who works in the medical field and who has turned to the classifieds for help finding a boyfriend.

Over the past couple of years, she answered three ads placed in Westword dated the men for a while and then wrote off the whole experience as a singular failure.

"I wouldn't do it again," Diane says. "I don't think people are

very truthful in these ads. I think they have this fantasy they would like to come across, how they appear and it just isn't the reality of it."

All three ads said the men were handsome and And the plain truth?

"Completely average and had no clue."

Away from the well-worn worlds of video introductions and one-on-one matchmaking, the personal to flourish, and dinner dates first hatched in Web are becoming a common staple of the singles life.

While Diane has sworn off the personals because her with "a workaholic, a medicated bipolar and who lied about his age and how often he'd been in