

INtake

cover story

February 5, 2004

No time for love

Slow, traditional dating proves problematic for busy young professionals, so some turn to much faster methods of meeting a mate.

By Jody Crossman

jody.crossman@intakeweekly.com

You've tried the online dating sites, video dating, the singles bars and personal ads. You've probably even ventured out on a blind date, for drinks, or maybe even dinner with a perfect stranger. Face it, you've done it all in the name of dating but still haven't found Mr. or Ms. Right.

Don't fret. You're certainly not alone.

Millions of people, both young and old, are suffering together in their quest to find that special someone. Whether it's time, money or just patience they're lacking, many of them are at wit's end with the process.

"Dating can be frustrating," Sundrea Ryan, coordinator of events for Pre-Dating Events speed dating, surmised. "Those days of going out and spending all night trying to meet someone are gone. People just don't have that kind of time anymore."



Ladies' cat wanted: Beth Sawchuk, 28, of Indianapolis, has had some success with Indiana Speed Date. However, her man cannot be allergic to Kennedy, her 7-year-old feline companion. -- Michelle Pemberton / INtake

Ryan is trying to change the way singles look at the process of finding a significant other. She and other would-be matchmakers have pared down the time it takes to find love and are setting up couples in unorthodox ways. No, it's not another personal ad. It's much more interesting.

Take Ryan's business, for example. She runs the Indianapolis office of Pre-Dating Events (www.pre-dating.com), a speed dating company for single professionals that can hook you up with a date in a matter of minutes.

Pre-Dating is unusual in that it guarantees you'll meet at least 12 eligible strangers and date all of them in just six minutes. Crazy? Not really.

"You'd be surprised what you can learn about a person in a short amount of time," said Ryan. "Some other speed dating events do four minutes or even three, but we found that six minutes is just enough time. It's less people, but more quality time with them."

Speed dating works like this: 24 strangers (12 men, 12 women) meet in a designated place (usually a bar or restaurant). The women sit at a numbered table, and the men rotate from table to table. They talk for six minutes, mark their opinions of the other person down on a scorecard and move on. At the end of the night, if they happen to like one another, they'll make a match and then it's up to them to get in touch with one another for whatever comes next -- be it a phone conversation or dinner and a movie.

Jenn Kampmeier has tried Pre-Dating a couple times. The 29-year-old consultant travels nearly four days a week and said dating is hard with her schedule. Speed dating was her ticket out of single woman's boredom.

"It was a safe bet for me," she said. "I've been pretty satisfied with the way things worked out. I went into it with the idea that I wasn't looking for true love. I think that's what you have to walk in with."

That's what Randy Working thought too, when he first attended a speed dating event a few years ago. He enjoyed it so much, he started his own in 2002.

Today, Working runs Indiana Speed Date (www.indianapeeddate.com). His business differs from Pre-Dating in that the dates last a mere four minutes with the possibility of meeting 15 or more people in just under two hours.

Working said the idea has caught on because people want something more than another Internet date.

"I think part of the appeal is that you meet a lot of people in a short amount of time," he said. "It allows you to see if there is a face-to-face spark, and you can tell within a matter of minutes whether you could connect with that person."

Both Indiana Speed Date and Pre-Dating offer parties for different age brackets, so you'll meet someone close to your age.

Beth Sawchuk, 29, said she tried Indiana Speed Date because she wanted to do something other than the bar scene to meet eligible singles.

"I think it's a pretty positive experience," she said. "I don't go in with the expectation of finding the man of my dreams. I'm busy and I don't have a lot of free time. When I do, I spend more time socializing with friends, and I don't want to do the bar scene. Speed dating is more humanistic."

If speed dating isn't your scene, Mark Garback hopes his new dating site will be.

Garback and his business partner Carolyn Perkins have created Stellar Affinity (www.stellaraffinity.com), an online site that matches people based on compatible elements of astrology and psychology.

The formula created by Perkins, an astrologer and psychotherapist, makes a match using a person's birth date, time and location and where the stars were the day they were born. Matches are given a star rating with the highest number of stars designated to the best possible match. It sounds "out there," but both Garback and Perkins say it works.

"It will give you information on a different dimension," said Perkins.

"It sends more information about the other person and it might help you learn more about yourself."

The site was only launched a couple months ago, but already has a database of singles 100 people long.

Tracy Jackson, 38, tried the site recently and said so far he's had results. The Indianapolis man admitted he's a quiet individual who doesn't care much for the rigmarole of the bar scene. He hopes to find someone like-minded.

"I'm a hermit, techno-geek type," he said. "I was looking to find someone more in line with me socially, and even though I've only talked to one person, she seems to be pretty nice."

Jackson said no matter what method you use to find a date, whether through speed dating or astrology, it's never easy.

"I just want to meet people more like myself in this area," he said. "It's so unpredictable. Maybe that's why I don't date more."