

Love, inc.

Single expats, 35 and up, seeking opposite sex soul-mate ... Today's matches aren't just made in heaven but also through personal ads or professional agencies. Here, an inside look at dating by design.



To hear the women tell it, there are more females than males out there. Good men are snapped up pretty quickly and, anyway, men like stick insects, as young as possible ...

Men talk about women who move relationships along too quickly. "I've had several former girlfriends press me towards marriage and a family, more because they didn't want to 'miss out' than because they had deep feelings for me," says a 40ish British businessman.

Even surrounded by networks of family and friends, finding a partner can prove difficult and expats face added hurdles like language barriers.

Some people sally forth undaunted, willing to let the magic happen, while others make a shopping list, detailing the potential partner to such an excruciating degree that chances of finding a match appear slim.

Trea Tijmens, owner of Geneva-based Success Match, says her clients are heart-warming in the qualities they want in potential partners, listing honesty, humour and generosity above superficial considerations.

But at some point the next step has to be taken, and this is where sweet intention comes up, smack-dab, against the tough hide of reality.

Not as advertised

Those who have gone out with people they met through newspaper classifieds or online services agree that it's not for the faint of heart. Expect to put in a lot of screening time. Then, expect the unexpected.

Women say that men often lie about their marital status. They then "forget to take their wedding ring off, or there's a tan line where the ring normally is."

And there's "the polyester-pants comb-over", who was supposed to look like George Clooney. Both men and women report that people "routinely" knock 10 to 20 years off their age.

A divorced American put a bilingual announcement in a local paper and received 60 replies that, she says, added up to one grand zero.

"Of the 15 men I decided to date, there was only one guy I really liked, but he turned out to be around 70, not 50 as he'd indicated, so he didn't interest me as a partner. I would have loved to be just friends, but he said it was bed or nothing."

Communities on and off line

The same woman, a UN professional now retired, found her dream partner online – at 60 – a few years later. Despite the downsides, online dating had the best success rating among people interviewed for this article, with dating services located, like potential soul-mates, anywhere in the world.

Online chat communities help to forge bonds, as does the addictive US-based Craig's List: "I'm having a blast with CL," reports one Zurich woman. "[It's] honest; those who just want sex can state so in anonymity and at no cost."

A speed flirting company organises events in Switzerland's larger cities, and by age group (women up to 50, men up to 55), then posts the dates on their website. A British expat attends in order to meet men, make new friends or, at the very least, practise her French.

The dream incarnate

Die-hard partner hunters know the best offline locales to meet a possible incarnation of their most intimate hopes and dreams.

Self-development workshops? The consensus: "All women." Exercise classes? A definite possibility, but "if you want to meet men, take fencing," says one woman. A man based near Lausanne says: "I do yoga. Except for one other guy, it's all women."

Generally, expat business and networking groups get a thumbs-up. A spokesperson for Winterthur-based networking business Blue Sky, says they "definitely have clients who are single – and come to our training seminars in the hope of meeting others, as it is a safe environment."

Clubs for special interests and sports – while not for singles only – get high marks from everyone. Geneva's International Ski Club is a magnet for singles.

"Being with people who like the same things you do is a no-pressure situation," says retired graphic designer Peter Kacalanos, an avid naturalist who launched both a Pond Club and a Turtle & Tortoise Society in Geneva. "It's an interest market, not a meat market."

What doesn't work?

What gums up the works in relationship building? Male susceptibility to beauty is often mentioned, even by men themselves.

"I think most men look at appearance first and dismiss women who don't fit the

bill," says Kacalanos. "They don't know what they're missing."

Women also recall times when appearances deceived them. Moreover, for both sexes, children of a potential mate can be a stumbling block, along with concerns over lost autonomy or career prospects in a move.

Matchmaking services

Trea Tijmens launched Success Match three months ago, to fill a growing demand among international professionals for a 'safe' meeting ground that offers both screening and discretion.

Although the business is based in Geneva, expansion to Zurich has been rapid and Tijmens says the goal is to go nationwide.

In screening, Tijmens gets a feel for the emotional state of potential clients aged 30 to 60: "Some people, no matter what they say, aren't ready emotionally for partnership." In these cases, she recommends a therapist or coach before proceeding, she says.

Doing it their way

Since requirements for even a mere partner can seem fussy to the observer, what about a soul-mate? "I wouldn't use that word," says one man nearing 40.

"After a while I would say it's more a question of finding somebody compatible and also acceptable in terms of how you can work it out for your career and theirs."

The solution of a Zurich woman, divorced and in her late 40s, is "a platonic relationship with a romantic feel to it."

All in the attitude

Marjorie Du Feu, a divorced financial services executive in her 40s about to open her own coaching business in Geneva, is unabashed to say that she's single and she's looking. To Du Feu, self-esteem is often the problem when successful people can't find a partner.

An American professional in the UN system agrees. "We are constantly bombarded with what is desirable and sexy and we buy into that."

Even the most pessimistic agree that some accepted clichés are a load of hokey.

"It's not true that men are not looking for women in their own age group," says one woman.

And some people defy all the received wisdom on date selection – like

the woman in her 40s, overweight no less, who exhibits such joy in life that men reportedly follow her down the street asking for her phone number.

Never say never

So the search goes on. New York photographer Lawrence Cherney – a widower now in his 80s based in Nyon (Vaud) – seeks a "warm and caring" woman who shares his interests. Not a computer user himself, he relies on family members to place personals online for him, and help him with e-mails.

In two months he has received eight replies – no soul-mate so far – and thinks the low rate of return is largely due to the fact that people his age rarely use computers.

But he perseveres.

By Gail Mangold-Vine



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If you're looking ...

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/expatover40>
– one of about 100 Yahoo groups, for CH
www.craigslist.com – incl. Geneva & Zurich
www.meetup.com
www.swissfriends.ch
www.newfriends4u.com
www.date.com
www.speedflirting.ch
www.successmatch.ch
www.businessnomads.com
www.mybluesky.ch
www.genevaonline.ch
www.sindy.ch
www.businessclubbing.com
www.XpatXchange.ch : expat clubs in CH
– a singles section is coming soon