

Online Dating Service Outsources the Search for Love

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Folks who attempt to find love via online dating may run into a lot of clowns -- except when they specifically want to date one.

That was the dilemma facing a man named, well, we'll call him "Jim."

Jim is a coulrophiliac, the scientific term for someone with a clown fetish. As such, he has a thing for women who either worked as clowns or were willing to dress up as one for his benefit. But, sadly, he had no luck trying to find a lady with a big red nose, giant floppy shoes, an orange-colored wig or a squirting flower.

To make matters worse, Jim's professional career was such that he didn't have time to comb dating sites looking for a woman with a thing for big seltzer bottles or tiny cars.

What to do? What to do?

Eventually, Jim decided to do for his love life what many U.S. businesses are doing to their call centers -- outsource it. But he didn't give the romantic responsibility to somebody in Mumbai or Manila.

Instead, he used a business called Virtual Dating Assistants, an online service that helps busy and picky execs improve their chances for love by doing all the boring data-dating entry: writing online profiles, combing online profiles of prospective partners and sending responses to prospective partners.

Founder and President Scott Valdez admits Jim's request was unusual, but he didn't think his client was a clown for wanting his special someone to wear baggy pants and answer to a name like "Patches" or "Trixie Wixie."



Victor Candia

Scott Valdez realized that some people are too busy to find love, so he started VirtualDatingAssistants.com -- a website that does your online dating search for you.

So he told his staff to stop clowning around and put them to work combing various fetish sites looking for a woman who didn't think Jim's thing for clowns was a joke.

Amazingly, he was able to find three dates who fit the bill, Valdez said. Of course, it helped that Jim lived in Los Angeles, which, along with New York, is one of the two top dating cities in the world.

Jim had good times on all three dates and came away very satisfied.

That was just all in a day's work for Valdez and his company, which has been helping to fix people up with their potential loves for 11 months.

Like many things, necessity was the mother of this invention.

Two years ago, Valdez, 26, was working for a professional translation service in a job that required him to spend a lot of time in both Miami and Buenos Aires, Argentina.

"It was difficult finding dates, and it became repetitious answering ad after ad," Valdez admitted. "It was taking up half my time."

Although Valdez had a personal assistant to help with the drudgery of his real job, he wasn't able to use his helper for his love life. However, he took the same concept and started having someone handle the basics of his dating life.

"It took a while to build a system, but after a while the assistant was setting me up on lots of dates," he said. "After nine months, my friends who had jobs that kept them busy -- like emergency medicine or pharmaceutical sales -- wanted help too."

From that beginning came the business. So far, Valdez is finding lots of suitors willing to pay \$600 a month to have him and his team comb the Internet so they don't have to.

"Online dating is very competitive. Attractive women get 100 e-mails a week, and they may not open up every e-mail," Valdez said. "Our strategy is to write very good e-mails with an interesting subject head. You wouldn't believe how many guys just write 'Hi' or 'Hello' in the subject head -- or nothing at all."

Another common mistake that guys make is being too direct.

"You don't want to ask for the phone number and e-mail on the first contact," he said. "You want to create a little mystery."

Of course, the big mystery for the folks who are intrigued by the messages sent by Valdez and crew on behalf of the clients is who is really writing their online profiles or responses.

Valdez said the company writes all the profiles and the responses, but runs certain phrases or answers by the client to see if it sounds like something they'd say. They also double-check to see if the client is interested in settling down or catting around.

"We will ask them at the beginning how many different dates they want in a month," Valdez said. "That's one way to tell how serious they are about a relationship."

It's not always easy, but Valdez is familiar with all sorts of dating sites that cater to unique tastes. Still, he's surprised at how easy it is sometimes to fill customer requests, such as the client who was looking for women willing to cater to his foot fetish.

He was surprised at how many women he was able to find who also got a kick out of feet, and the client walked away satisfied, as did the Houston businessmen who was looking for an Asian woman who was just as obsessed with anime as he was.

In fact, he fixed the guy up with one woman, and now they are exclusive.

But while Valdez has gone to the extreme of finding female clowns for one client, there are limits to how far customer service will go, such as the potential customer who asked for women in their 20s who were gorgeous, bisexual, intelligent and into bondage. The company declined to take the man on, figuring it wasn't that kind of agency.

Currently, Virtual Dating Assistants is extending into gay dating as well, and Valdez said he is fascinated by the subtleties of same-sex dating.

"To be successful in straight dating, a man needs to be playful and flirtatious," he said. "But gay men don't respond to that. They are more interested in building a rapport based on commonalities."

But the company is also considering using knowledge of online dating in other capacities, according to its in-house publicity director, Catherine Cunningham.

"A current client of ours called and asked if we could put the search for love on hold and help him find a new job," she said. "He wants something that will allow him to work from home and is even willing to take a pay cut."