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## Virtual *Shadchan* Celebrates 500 Married Members

By DAVE GORDON

Very few people can say they've been involved in 250 weddings. The staff at Frumster.com can. The Internet dating site has made 250 (virtual) trips to the chuppah, all across the globe, making it the most successful Jewish dating-for-marriage service on the Internet.

Averaging 18 matched members a month, Frumster.com has proven once and for all that there's no stigma to Internet dating.

To mark the special occasion of the 500th match, Frumster held a gala media event on 15th December at the NYC offices of *Aish HaTorah*. The event was attended by the media and a multitude of Frumster married couples who braved snow and an impending MTA strike to celebrate this milestone.



Jonathan and Rachel

The website, which has garnered much international press, boasts almost 20,000 active worldwide members who are serious about finding their *bashert*.

Derek Saker, the director of marketing, believes that much of Frumster's success can be ascribed to rigorous screening and on-going controls, and a very personalized, hands-on dating service, that help to ensure as genuine a pool of sincere members as possible. He believes that Frumster's uniquely secure and comfortable dating environment empowers singles to take charge of their own dating destiny.

"It started essentially to provide a more secure and modest dating environment with insightful profiles that asked the right questions, relevant to observant Jews," he says, "and to address the growing singles crisis."

The full-time Orthodox staff ensures appropriate standards by screening all members.

When Frumster started out, no real names were used, but now members must supply full names. In North America the Passaic-based staff phones members personally to make sure everything's on the up and up. In addition, immediate investigation and action is taken when complaints are received. Frumster continues to draw sincere singles of all ages and *hashkafas*.

Rachel and Jonathan are just two of those singles who used Frumster.com to find their soulmates.

Rachel, a banker, looked long and hard for her *beshert*, but finding the right guy in her hometown of Basel, Switzerland, proved to be difficult. She tried traditional *shadchanim*, and went out with men in Israel, Great Britain and the United States. As an alternative, she began using Frumster.com, because she knew that this would give her thousands of men to choose from, from all over the world.

Jonathan Strauss, a 28-year-old New Jersey resident, had also become very frustrated with being set up by friends, so he turned to Frumster for another option.

The nursing home consultant began speaking online to people for a couple of years, but nothing ever materialized. Then, like a sign from Hashem, Rachel stumbled upon his profile, on a lark, and became his first Frumster date.

Rachel discovered Jonathan's profile days before taking one of her several trips to the U.S. to meet guys she met on Frumster. The photo he had recently posted on his profile caught her eye. She already had five dates lined up for her visit, but decided to include Jonathan as well. They met "virtually" online on a Monday, and went out for real that Wednesday.

Jonathan was used to a laid-back approach to dating, saying that, "You get to know someone; you go out maybe once a week. Rachel had less patience for wasting time. We went out for long dates, sometimes 10 hours long." Three days later, he had a plane ticket in his hand, and was heading for Switzerland soon after to go on more dates.

Jonathan spent a week in Switzerland taking in the sites with Rachel, and they hit it off right away, proving that true love has no borders. Their first date was on November 1st, and they were engaged three months later.

The two were Frumster Match #175, and were married in Ramat Gan, Israel, on the 17th *Iyar* 5765 (26th of May 2005). Both Jonathan and Rachel had tried other Internet dating sites, but came up with slim pickings, and found, according to Jonathan, that Frumster was "a much better way to meet people these days," and had things to offer that other sites did not.

Though they both knew they could check out each other's references on Frumster, it was an option that they chose to forego. "I wanted to get to know him myself," says Rachel.

The online photos also helped. "I am very relieved it wasn't a blind date," he says, "It makes things a lot easier." It was an added bonus that through Frumster no one else knew that they were dating, and they could keep it private for as long as they wanted. Members can conduct searches and contact potential matches anonymously through the private and discreet Frumster network.

Rachel and Jonathan's match is a perfect example of Frumster's high rate of women initiating email exchanges. Over 53% of all Frumster marriages are the result of women initially contacting men, which is unlike most matches set up through family, friends and *shadchanim*.

"Everyone we knew was laughing and making fun when we were going on Frumster," says Rachel. "But this is the future of dating. Before, no one believed that you could find your *beshert* on the Internet. But now that we've met, our friends and family have posted their profiles!"

Jonathan concurs, "My advice to people going on Frumster is to take it seriously. This is a place where you can meet others looking for a serious relationship. Treat it like it's a place to meet people, where you can chat, ask questions and go out and meet the person you're going to marry." ■