

Frumster.com Offers Marriage Minded Jews Digital Dating

Finding a kosher catch on the World Wide Web



There's a new-fashioned twist on old-fashioned matchmaking. The Jewish matchmakers of the past 34 centuries have been updated for the 21st century – on home computers.

Derek Saker, Director of Marketing at Frumster.com, says that Internet dating has caught on like wildfire amongst the observant single crowd. Frumster.com has become the leader in online dating for observant and marriage-minded Jews.

"Frumster enables members to gauge more of an in-depth perspective of an individual through meaningful communication," he says. The site, with currently over 15,000 members, touts itself as a virtual meeting place for singles that span the religious spectrum.

In three years, over 340 matches resulting in marriage have come from Frumster, crossing all ages, states, and continents. Members include never-married singles, widowers, divorcees – both with and without children.

One such match involved Simcha Fulda, a young chap from England, and his wife Suri, from Israel. "I've always hated singles weekends, and I am very weary of shadchanim [Jewish matchmakers]. I highly recommend trying to meet someone over the Internet," says Suri. "It is much less stressful than blind dating, and it is also a much easier way to meet. This is so much simpler, and the best part is, if you really meet a creepy guy, you can get rid of him with just a click of a mouse!"

How did this previously divorced woman with two children find a mate in an already complex and frustrating dating scene? One of her co-workers nudged her for two months to register on Frumster, and despite Suri's hesitations, she gave it a whirl. "I felt that using the Internet to meet a guy was very sleazy. I lost a lot of trust in men and I wasn't interested in messing up my life with the wrong guy. But, what have I got to lose? And if I really hated it I could just stop," she says.

After chatting online with Simcha, and thoroughly checking him out through 'Jewish geography', she gave him her phone number, and

they hit it off. Simcha and Suri have been married for almost two years and Suri still can't believe how it happened. "I mean, what are the chances of two nice good, frum people meeting over the Internet and actually getting married, especially when they live in two different countries?" In this case, pretty good.

The key to Frumster's success, says Saker, is hands-on support and rigorous screening by a dedicated team based in Passaic, New Jersey. "Users are attracted to the insightful questionnaire and the pool of sincere, marriage-minded singles," he says.

Saker says that many singles have been turned off by other "Jewish" dating sites being Jewish only in name, which allow in Gentiles, or frown on any expression of religious growth. With newly available resources, and in response to this need, Frumster has introduced a new option on the website called "Traditional and Growing," catering to Jews who have a strong Jewish identity, who are sincerely looking to get married, but who do not necessarily keep completely kosher or Shabbat.

The differences between religious and secular online dating are many, says Saker. On other sites, people may be looking for mere friendship, a girl or boyfriend. Religious backgrounds aren't necessarily important. Profilees' photos are 'anything goes'-type of pictures, often the more 'suggestive', the better.

But on Frumster the users are practicing Jews interested in dating for marriage. What weighs heavily are shared religious outlook and observance growth level.

Before meeting his beshert on Frumster, Yitzchok Rifkind, from San Francisco, says that he had been growing in his Judaism for many years, moving towards an Orthodox life. Then came Kineret, a network administrator from Winnipeg, who emailed him after seeing his profile. "I liked what I read, I liked her picture, and I responded. After a few e-mails, phone calls and reference checks, we agreed to meet," he says. Long distance visits couldn't break the bond of the besherts, and the two married in September 2003.



Saker says that it is not uncommon for women to initiate contact; in fact, he says they do it over half the time. Take Laurey and Daniel Hyman. Laurey is a South African who had immigrated to Toronto. Daniel is British and was living in Israel. A friend of Laurey's recommended Frumster, and within a week she emailed Daniel.

"I liked Daniel's profile because he said he was artistic and so am I. He also said that he was good with kids and that he played a lot of sport. I needed someone who felt strongly about his yiddishkeit but was also open and worldly," she says. The two followed up with phone calls, and five weeks later Daniel flew to Toronto to meet Laurey. Three months later they were engaged, marrying last summer.

Saker says he hopes to make it easier for observant and marriage-minded Jews to find their intended. For Jewish singles, finding that perfect mate within the tribe is a challenge. For religious Jews especially -who comprise about ten percent of the Jewish population- the search can become that much more daunting. Despite the challenges, Saker says, "Frumster averages 14 matches every month"



By David Solomon

