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Boot Up to Find Your Bashert, Waiting in the Wings

Dave Gordon

Jewish Exponent Feature

There's a new-fashioned twist on old-fashioned matchmaking. According to Derek Saker, director of marketing for Frumster.com, his Internet dating service has caught on like wildfire among the observant single crowd.

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

In three years, more than 350 matches resulting in marriage have come from Frumster — crossing all ages, states and even continents. Members include never-married singles, widows and widowers, and the divorced, both with and without children.

One such match involved Suri Fulda, from Israel, and her husband, Simcha, from England.

"I've always hated singles weekends," says Suri, "and I am very weary of *shadchanim* [matchmakers]. I highly recommend trying to meet someone over the Internet. It's much less stressful than blind dating. It's 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 her hesitations, Suri finally 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, I thought, what have I got to lose? And if I really hated it, I could just stop."

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 she 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, according to Saker, is a personalized service and rigorous screening by a dedicated team based in Passaic, N.J.

"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 so-called "Jewish" dating sites, since they're only Jewish in name, allowing non-Jews to join.

And sites for the more observant sometimes frown on expressions of reli-



Idith and Eli wound up tying the knot.

gion where members are still "experimenting" with traditional forms of observance. In response to this, Frumster has introduced a new option on its Web site called "Traditional and Growing," catering to Jews who have a strong Jewish identity and are looking to get married, but who do not necessarily keep Shabbat or who aren't completely kosher.

The differences between religious and secular online dating are many, says Saker. On other sites, people may be looking for mere friendship or sexual hook-ups. Profiles' photos are "anything goes"-types of pictures — often the more "suggestive," the better.

But on Frumster, users are practicing Jews interested in dating for mar-

riage. What weighs most heavily among them are a shared religious outlook and their level of observance.

"Sarah," an interior designer from Bala Cynwyd, discovered Frumster about a year ago when discussing online-dating options with a friend who found her *bashert*, or "soulmate," on Frumster.

'Something more substantial'

"I was frustrated with JDate," says the 27-year-old, of Frumster's online dating competitor. "There's a certain level of respect that you feel from Frumster that you don't get anywhere else. You can trust people have values, and are interested in serious relationships. At some of the other sites, they're only interested in looks and more superficial things. Everyone who is contacting me is looking for something more substantial."

She says that she receives up to 100 e-mails a month from prospective males, and has gone on about 25 dates with eight men. She uses Frumster about three times a week.

Saker adds that 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 — who comprise about 10 percent of the Jewish population — the search can become especially daunting.

But despite the challenges, claims Saker, "about one Frumster match happens every other day." ❖