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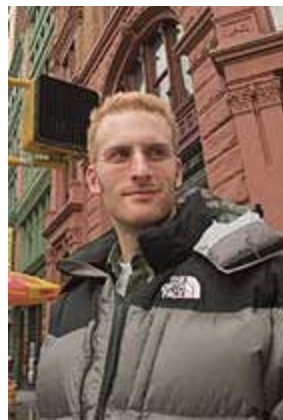
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GET PERSONAL

By ELANA ZEIDE



Matt Atkinson posted his first personal ad at the Web site Nerve.com as a joke, but was pleasantly surprised by the response.
 - NYP: Jennifer Weisbord

March 14, 2002 -- UNTIL recently, looking for a date in the personals was considered the province of the desperate. But not anymore. "It's a perfectly reasonable way to meet eligible people instead of randomly running into someone at a bar who just wants to show you his 'manuscript,'" says Sarah, a 25-year-old who works in publishing.

Fed up with crying into their Cosmopolitans, wondering where all the good men (or women) are, city singles are turning not only to the personals, but also to singles events and matchmakers.

Matchmaker Christie Kelleher says she has seen a big post-Sept. 11 surge at her upscale matchmaking agency, Kelleher & Associates.

And Spring Street Networks, which runs the on-line personals affiliated with hip Web sites like Salon.com, Nerve.com and TheOnion.com, has had "aggressive growth" each month since it opened a year and a half ago, says Brian Battjer, Spring Street Networks' business director.

Dating services are moving into the mainstream because they suit the New York personality: busy, picky and goal-oriented.

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Patty, a sales executive and one of Kelleher's matchmaking clients, says she isn't worried about men finding her attractive - she's a former model - but finding the right man.

"I don't want to waste my time," she says.

Irena, a 28-year-old programmer, says she, too, has no problems getting dates. Her dilemma is more specific.

"I have problems meeting Jewish guys," she says.

She spent a recent Friday night at a Jewish singles party at Lot 61 thrown by LetMyPeopleGo.com. She says she met five guys with potential.

At such singles events, revelers can do two things at once - party and perhaps meet the person of their dreams.

"Lots of people work such long hours that it's almost impossible to have a social life," says Agnele, a language expert. "You settle into a routine and aren't constantly meeting new people."

After learning that her sister got three dates in one night at a "networking" party, the 30-year-old went to a NetParty event - and met her current boyfriend.

New Yorkers, never noted for their patience, have been taking advantage of a new "quick date" service that caters to a busy single's need for speed.

At 8MinuteDate.com, singles rotate through eight random 8-minute mini-interviews with others from categories such as "twentysomething professionals" or "Hispanic singles."

Afterward, participants rate the people they meet on potential for friendship, romance or business. They exchange contact info only if the feeling is mutual.

It's courtship modeled on assembly-line efficiency.

"People here are very goal-oriented," says Darcy, a thirtysomething television producer who moonlights as an event organizer for 8MinuteDating.com.



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"And these services cut to the chase."

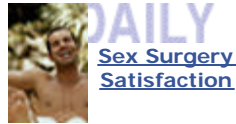
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