

# Globe Style

## Need a valentine? Hire a headhunter

You go to a doctor for your skin and a groomer for your cat. Professional help for your love life makes sense, **ALEXANDRA GILL** writes

To ease the reality of being terminally single, I sometimes compare Valentine's Day to adult acne: It's annoying but temporary, and easy to mask with the right tools. Pink champagne, anyone?

So there I was, shopping on-line for a Valentine's gift for my cat — and wondering why Petunia remains the most significant other in my life — when I received an intriguing e-mail message from Executive Search Dating.

This new Vancouver-based company offers professional matchmaking with a twist. Memberships cost \$1,500 to \$5,000 and provide unlimited access to a databank of video profiles. But once the managers have figured out what you're looking for, they send a team of "matching agents" to social events

and business networking functions to find someone specifically selected for you, just like corporate headhunters.

Hmm. I go to a dermatologist to help with the occasional flare-up. I pay a pet groomer to bathe my cat. Why not enlist professional help in my search for romance?

"Going out on a lot of bad dates is a big waste of time," says president Paddi Rice, a handsome, well-travelled senior sales manager, who started the company after his own disappointing experience with traditional matchmakers.

"I knew what I wanted," he explains. "I didn't understand why they couldn't just go out there and find a compatible person for me."

Like most of Rice's clients, I have already tried on-line dating. And as in the case of most everyone else

(with the exception of exactly one happy couple I know), the thrill wore off after, oh, the 15th coffee date. The New York Times recently reported a slowdown in the industry, after a wimpy 19-per-cent growth last year, compared with a whopping 73 per cent in 2002. The downswing is no doubt fuelled by stats such as the one recently quoted in *The Wall Street Journal*, which said that 30 per cent of dating-site visitors are married.

No wonder cyber-daters are moving back to bars, setups arranged by friends and personalized matchmaking services such as ESD ([www.executivesearchdating.com](http://www.executivesearchdating.com)), Toronto's Perfect Partners ([www.perfectpartners.ca](http://www.perfectpartners.ca)) and the Chicago-based U.S. franchise Selective Search ([www.selective-searchinc.com](http://www.selective-searchinc.com)).

The idea of having a real-life intermediary screen my potential dates seems like a sound one.

My personal assessment begins at a downtown Vancouver office tower. After preliminary introductions, I am handed over to Brenda Aurora, the company's extremely likable director of operations, who leads me through the member registration. We fill out a standard "date preference" questionnaire.

"I can sense you really need to date an 'energetic' person," Aurora says, even though I've only checked "outgoing" on the list of "ideal match indicators." Is there a difference?

After half an hour of chatting, Aurora pats her chest and assures me she knows "right here" what I'm looking for. Intuition seems to count for a lot. But just in case Aur-

ora's intuition is off — or I'm a really good liar — she asks me to fill out a Myers-Briggs personality test.

I'm a little disappointed by the background check, which consists of one personal reference, an on-site video clip, and the presentation of my driver's licence. In lieu of a criminal or credit check, ESD might want to consider interviewing clients in their homes. I mean, how many times have you heard of the perfect date with the "right" address, but no furniture?

I nevertheless leave the hour-long interview feeling hopeful that Aurora will find someone suitable for my first complimentary introduction. I'm even more impressed when she e-mails me the next day with my personality profile. Yes, I'm an ENFP — Myers-Briggs code for "Extroverted, Intuitive, Feeling

and Perceiving" — to the core! I can't believe there's a scientifically based justification for my weakness with routine daily tasks like paying bills on time. Even if I don't sign up with this dating service, I swear that every man I date from now on will have to fill out one of these tests — and read mine.

A few hours later, Aurora sends me a profile for Scott, a 42-year-old CEO with a passion for travel and the same personality type. He certainly has a nice smile — and chest.

Aurora waits until I express interest before asking Scott whether he would like an introduction. He would. And although it's tempting to set up a date for Valentine's, I decide to wait a while. Now that I have professionals on my side, there's no need to look desperate.