

## BUSINESS BC

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LOVE FOR THOSE TOO BUSY TO GO LOOKING

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## Vancouver's 'dating headhunter'

TRENDS | Executive Search Dating treats matchmaking like a business recruiting firm

BY GILLIAN SHAW  
VANCOUVER SUN

Paddi Rice counts his first matchmaking success as the day he was best man at his brother's wedding.

Now Rice has translated that talent into a business, putting a new spin on the executive search business to become a "dating headhunter."

At his company, Executive Search Dating, modern day yentas — or matching agents as they term themselves — prowl business events, social gatherings, art gallery openings and other likely recruiting venues for singles, preferably lonely and too busy to find long-term companionship.

When they spot the very candidate someone on their client list is seeking, they slip them a discreetly folded dating card which invites the person to go on no-obligation, no fee date.

So far the concept is working with more than 120 people signed up for the services of the dating headhunters.

"We refer to ourselves as dating headhunters," said Rice. "We don't sit back and wait for people to come to us. We go out and actively recruit interesting singles. We've modelled this after an executive search recruiting firm."

In a business where customer satisfaction is usually evidenced by the customer's failure to need the services any more, Rice said there have already been success stories. He finds Vancouver isn't the best place for meeting singles. It's not that we don't have a great population of singles though, he says, it's simply that they don't meet well.

"The paradox is that we have more attractive, cool single men and women in Vancouver than in any other city and we have so many people complaining they can't meet some-



WARD PERRIN/VANCOUVER SUN

Paddi Rice of Executive Search Dating offers his service to busy Vancouver professionals.

one who's single and interesting," said Rice, who did his undergrad at the University of B.C., his MBA in Switzerland, and has lived and worked in Asia and Europe. "Women will say there are too many single women [in Vancouver], but there aren't. And men have the perception that women here are hard to approach.

"Men don't approach people in this town. If people aren't approaching other people, how do you meet someone?"

For the company's clients, signing on for the executive dating service is like getting a personal trainer for their love life. Some arrive bemoaning the fact it is impossible to meet single people in this city; others are refugees from the online dating scene where one too many Brad Pitts have

turned out to be simply the pits.

Rice and his matching agents take their recruiting seriously. If you've always longed for a handsome firefighter, they'll get tickets to the ball if they have to. And just like a friend who will put in a good word for you if he thinks he's found your soul mate, the matching agents will tell Dr. Professor, or Ms. Charming QC, that they have just the person to meet.

"We attend a lot of events — art gallery openings, social events, sporting events, we are members of the Board of Trade and we are very active in the business community," said Rice. "The most important thing we do is we're just out there.

"When we meet people who are above average single peo-

ple, who are interesting, engaging and typically quite busy — if they're a good fit for the company, we'll take them on as a client.

Rice says what sets his company apart is that clients aren't limited to the prospective dating list at hand and added to that, his matching agents do the 'heavy lifting,' of dating research. Before likely candidates are sent on a date, references are checked, marital status is confirmed (single only please, no triflers looking for a bit of fun on the side) and interests, priorities and backgrounds are carefully scrutinized.

If impeccable manners are on your list, you won't find yourself out on a date with someone who slurps their coffee or blows their nose on the

table linen. Likewise, if you're a single mom or dad, you won't find yourself face to face across the coffee table from someone who hyperventilates at the prospect of having children — screaming or otherwise — in the same room. And if you're out looking because you've tired of supporting the starving artist-student or just plain indolent romantic interest that has been your destiny to end up with, the matching agents won't send you on a date with someone who has trouble mustering the means for a cup of coffee or a glass of wine.

"We have UBC law professors, lawyers, doctors, we also have students," said Rice.

"We have people who are from 20-somethings to 60-somethings and everything in between.

"We think we are a service for everybody. Ultimately we give people better selection and better choice.

And it's not a meat market. The middle-aged life crisis candidate looking for a buxomly 18-year-old to sport like a trophy will find his criteria rejected pretty quickly.

Brenda Aurora is the person in charge of that. She gave up a career juggling numbers to juggle people, interviewing, videotaping and assessing prospective clients as the company's director of operations.

Topping the list of date preferences among her clients, who are usually about equally split between men and women, are: intellectual connection and an active lifestyle. From Aurora's files, it would appear there are no single couch potatoes in Vancouver or if there are, they're not getting up off the couch long enough to look for a mate.

The biggest turnoff among the dating candidates and the one that will stop a date dead: smoking.