



# PULLING THE RED STRING OF LOVE

by Grace Wong

Despite the increasing popularity of online dating, many traditional matchmaking consultants are still holding their own in a crowded market.

Lawrence Wong, owner of Cinderella, a matchmaking company, has been arranging new cocktail mixing and candle making classes for his members, on top of regular activities, such as dinner and tea party speed dating.

“Though these events are gimmicks, I find that people like to stick to the old type of speed dating,” Mr Wong laughed. “I think it’s the purpose for these events that matters, not the extra frills.”

Mr Wong recalled meeting his ex-girlfriend through speed dating, and he “thinks it really works.” He thus came up with the idea of starting

a matchmaking company after his first year of graduation from the City University of Hong Kong in 2006.

“You don’t need much money to start this business,” he said.

“It’s hard to survive through the first few months, but after you have gained some goodwill and contacts, it is not that hard to run the company,” he said.

Mr Wong said goodwill is built upon the high degree of transparency of the company. To build up trust with customers, there will be a detailed analysis of their information.

Lily Chau, a marriage consultant who has been working at Wonderful Time Singles Club for three years, echoed with that of Mr Wong’s, saying that credibility and trustworthiness are particularly important for modern *yuelao* (the matchmaker god in

Chinese legend), to stand their ground in face of fierce competition.

“Customers look for companies that are credible and have a good reputation. It is essential for us to be trustworthy and provide the best service in order to win them over,” said Ms Chau.

main competitor, said Ms Chau, as their target customers are not those from the younger age range, but professionals in their early 30s.

She added her customers say that they would not put their love life in the hands of an online dating company, as they are “too dangerous”.

**“Don’t expect to break even at first...young people getting into the business may have that ‘fire’ in them, but endurance is more important in this industry.”**

To ensure the reliability of information, the singles are required to provide their ID card, proof of occupation and residence and academic qualification when they apply for membership.

“It is our responsibility to ensure every piece of information we receive is true as we are accountable for our member’s safety,” said Ms Chau.

“The more satisfied they (the members) are, the bigger chance they will bring along their friends to join,” she added.

Online dating companies are not the company’s

Wonder Time Single Club has had over 3,000 members in the past 10 years, and most of the company’s new customers come via recommendations from friends.

The successful match up rate depends on the requirements of particular members, but the Club said it can be as high as 90 percent for female members in their early 30s.

Ms Chau said that the future prospects of this industry look good.

The company arranges photos of its members into two photo albums, sorted by their gender. When one customer shows a particular interest in another member, the company will try to arrange a meeting for them.

And if both of them are willing to meet, the company will help them exchange contacts and compromise an available timeslot with them to meet in the office.

The club charges HK\$100 every time for ordinary members to flip





GRACE WONG



GRACE WONG



GRACE WONG

**“It doesn’t matter that women have higher status now. All women have this urge (of finding a partner) once they step into their 30s.”**

through the albums. If members are willing to dig deeper into their pockets, they can choose to join the VIP scheme at prices ranging from HK\$2,400 to HK\$4,800, of which unlimited photo album access and matchmaking service are available for a certain period of time.

“Our strategy is to provide a comprehensive service. Apart from personal consultation service, we also offer wedding planning assistance. During the wedding, we will slip pamphlets into the souvenir set for guests as an advertisement,” Ms Chau said.

“Single people may be more interested in finding a partner in these occasions particularly. We are talking about hundreds of potential customers,” she added.

Facing the increasing popularity of cross-border marriages, Ms Chau said the club does not place great focus

1. Wonderful Time Single Club arranges photos of its members into two photo albums: male members in blue album and female members in pink. The club charges HK\$100 every time ordinary members flip through the albums.
2. Located in Mong Kok, Jade Butterfly’s interior is painted in orange. Li Ka-fai, director of the matchmaking company, says orange symbolises passion and brings energy.
3. Li Ka-fai says that customers still find it embarrassing to be seen stepping into matchmaking consultants.

getting into the business may have that ‘fire’ in them, but endurance is more important in this industry,” said Ms Chau.

Li Ka-fai, director of Jade Butterfly, said customers still find it embarrassing to be seen stepping into the matchmaking consultants.

“This is especially true for female members. That’s why most of the matchmaking companies are “hidden” in the upper floors of commercial buildings and flats,” he added.

“And of course, the rent is much cheaper,” laughed Mr Li. “It is only a small business and I do not have much capital.”

The rise in social status and independence of women has had no significant impact on matchmaking business, said Kitty Ng, manager of Magic Bingo in a commercial building in Jordan.

“Female customers are always more willing to voice their needs because they know they have that ‘deadline,’” she said. “It doesn’t matter that women have higher status now. All women have this urge once they step into their 30s,” she added.

Apart from local female customers, there are also women,

mostly in their late 20s who come all the way from the mainland to Hong Kong just for the purpose of joining Magic Bingo.

“They read our advertisement through the Internet and came to Hong Kong with the intention of becoming members,” she said.

She continued, “Late 20s is considered a bit late to get married on the mainland, unlike in Hong Kong.”

She said she had many new experiences and had also broadened her horizons through her job as a matchmaker.

“All my customers have different requests and it is a great challenge for me. The job enables me to learn a lot through helping them when they encounter difficulties,” said Ms Ng.

“You need an open and unbiased mind for this business,” Ms Ng said.

She added, “I have trained up my EQ (emotional intelligence) and I feel myself being more patient and observant than before.”

“I see there is a market,” she said. “As far as I know, there are still a lot of single men and women who cannot find their life partners. I would be very happy if I could lend them all a hand,” she concluded. ▣