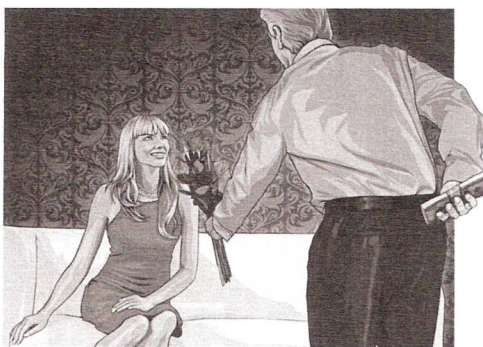


# MANHATTAN



## For Love and Money

Times may be tough in New York City, but not for the people selling the one product you supposedly can't buy | *By Jason Kersten* |

Nearly every New Yorker has experienced pangs of fear over the economic meltdown of the last 18 months, but one select group of professionals thought they had reason to bite their nails particularly hard. They served mostly Wall Street types, the kind of folks who were losing their fortunes and cushy corner offices and even heading to jail. We're not talking about SEC regulators and Albany politicians. We're talking about personal matchmakers, that connective clan that knows more about what you want in a mate than you do. The city's matchmakers worried that in this cynical era, their luxury product—true love—was particularly vulnerable. But something interesting happened.

"Business is booming," says Lisa Clampitt, co-founder of the Manhattan-based Matchmaking Institute, a trade group established to set ethics codes and standards in the industry. "As a whole, we're doing OK, but the New York City matchmakers are doing much better." Clampitt, who also runs her own matchmaking service, VIP Life, headquartered on Fifth Avenue, says her business is up by 40 percent—an increase experienced by many of the roughly 30 personal matchmaking services throughout the city. "I'm up about 38 percent," echoes Janis Spindel of Serious Matchmaking. "It's hard to even keep track, because I'm so busy."

Matchmaking, it turns out, may be the city's most recession-proof industry. Call it a perfect storm of raw demographics and human nature: With half its eligible population unmarried, New York State has the highest singles rate in the country. More than 2 million of them live right here in the city, which was ranked No. 1 on Forbes.com's annual "Best Cities for Singles" list. Take that statistic and add to it the glut of urban millionaires seeking out their soulmates because their professional lives are on shaky ground, and you've got a recipe for, well, love.

"When people see the problems this country is facing, they really want to focus on the stability of love and family," explains Samantha Daniels, an NYC-based, Ivy League-educated matchmaker who started her career as a divorce lawyer. Other boom times were post-September 11 and after the anthrax scares. "Whenever there's a catastrophe, people don't want to be alone," adds Spindel.

High-powered executives who are short on time, bored with the bar scene and often put off by comparatively impersonal online dating services are forking over what's left of their top dollars to Spindel and her pricey competitors. Though business models vary, according to Clampitt the most sought-after matchmakers often charge between \$50,000 and

...THE CITY TRENDS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 62 \$100,000 a year. For that, clients get an unlimited number of dates, personal client screenings, post-date sessions, image consulting and even relationship counseling. Suzanne Fields (all clients' names have been changed), a 32-year-old West Village resident, was given Daniels' services as a gift by her parents, who met the matchmaker in Aspen. Her current boyfriend was the second date Daniels arranged, but the matchmaker's services didn't end with the hookup. "She gets right in there and takes the pulse," Fields says. "She gets in the middle of it, and that's helped us over the bumps."

Joe Martinelli, a divorced entrepreneur who owns an NHL hockey team and a mortgage bank, turned to Spindel to find him a woman who he'd find "intellectually stimulating." It was Spindel's take-no-b.s. approach that won him over. That and the fact that she screens everyone she matches. "She's in-your-face and ballsy. I like that," he says. "I'm not God's gift to women, but I take care of myself, and I want someone who can be sustainable for the next 30 years. I have too much at stake from a family and financial standpoint to take a risk. Janis isn't cheap," he adds, "but neither are my lawyers."

The women Martinelli meets pay nothing, which is pretty much the industry norm. "If you charge both, you feel obligated to match all the clients together, which is not always ideal for matching," explains Clampitt. It also turns out that young, beautiful and educated women looking to marry wealthy men are a dime a dozen, not to mention reluctant to pay for the services of a matchmaker. Spindel claims to have a database of roughly 30,000 women, and she has 25 scouts across the country continually replenishing her stock. Of course, they must meet the basic requirements of her typical male client: "She has to be pretty, skinny, have a brain and everything else that goes along with it," Spindel says. Her male roster, which at any given time includes 200 to 250 men, consists of "not just millionaires but billionaires."

Fleshing out the "male inventory" is where the work comes in. As Martinelli says, just because a man is rich doesn't mean women will be falling at his feet. "Part of my job might be reminding a client that talking about himself for two hours straight is a bad idea," says Clampitt. Some clients need serious coaching, which is why the most successful matchmakers are always on the lookout for easy-to-sell "product," code in the industry for eligible singles. Spindel playfully "hits on" any successful, attractive man she sees. "Years ago I was in a car accident, and I was in a trauma center with a drop-dead-gorgeous doctor," Spindel says. "He asked me where I was in pain, and my answer was, 'Are you single, or are you married?'" If there's one attribute matchmakers have in common, it's tenacious meddling. "I go up to strangers, and in five minutes I'll find out everything about them," says Clampitt.

While most matchmakers cater to men, services for women haven't been left out of the boom. "I'm the busiest I've ever been," says Lisa Ronis of Lisa Ronis Personal Matchmaking, which serves mostly women. Ronis's fees start at \$15,000 for eight dates, along with intensive screening, post-date feedback and counseling. On her Web site, Ronis even lists "Lisa's Picks"—her favorite supportive services in New York, such as waxing (J. Sisters), facial plastic surgeon (Dr. Steven Pearlman) and psychotherapist (Kathy Ganz Miller). Her typical clients are professional women in their late 30s or 40s who are either divorced or, as Ronis puts it, those who "wake up and suddenly realize that the clock has ticked too long." Julie Ames, a blond, blue-eyed 46-year-old, signed on with Ronis almost a year ago. On her eighth date, she met a 50-year-old with three grown children who runs a fashion company. "He was perfect, and Lisa knew it," Ames says. "We haven't spent a night apart since we met." Ames and her amount are discussing plans to marry, and she has no regrets. "I make a lot of money, so it was well worth it for me."

Ain't love grand? 