



FOR: You can reach a large market quickly

AGAINST: There could be anyone out there, and there often is

WHY WOULD YOU?: You could get lucky. Do you feel lucky, punk?

THE Sydney Morning Herald's personals section is tiny. Have all the single people gone online? I put in an ad, cross-referenced to a telephone answer service, but go away on work for five days and forget about it. When I return, I have two messages. The first woman I ring is a scary-sounding doctor of nearly 40 who attacks me for not calling sooner. "I'm obviously a long way down the list," she accuses, grumpily. I try to explain. "I don't like people who lie to me," she says and hangs up. "I'm astonished you're still single," I say to the dead receiver. The other woman never even answers her phone, although I could have misheard the number.

to find the perfect woman. She sees your photo and requests you, then you get her photo and her phone number. "The first three months is the best time," Mylan says. "Around 82 per cent of people find long-term partners in the first three months." She writes down "82 per cent", in case I don't know what it looks like.

For \$1100 they'll perform a weekly search, and for \$700 you get the budget service – a once-a-fortnight search but no photo. They don't want you to buy the budget service.

"I'll do a search and see if we've got any women who match your requirements," Mylan says. They're bound to, since I've given them the widest options I could think of. If there's a psychotic lesbian pensioner in there, she'll get a run.

Mylan hurries in, exclaiming that there are "lots of lovely ladies" who match up. She offers me a \$100 discount if I join there and then. I say I'll think about it. Mylan looks worried. "Is it the money or something else? It's the money, isn't it?"

THE LAST agency I try has a reception area the size of a napkin and a woman, whose name isn't Sarah, behind a tiny desk. Sarah asks for three forms of ID but accepts two. She hands me a form, but I never get around to filling it out. "We deal mainly with people who are married but want something outside the marriage," she says. "Would you be interested in that?"



I explain that I'm single. "Great. Our married clients aren't interested in anything beyond sex." Gulp. The fee structure is refreshingly bullshit-free. For \$2000 for 12 months, you can ruin as many marriages as you like. Women are queuing up, apparently.

"We have 6000 women on our books, of whom 50 per cent are married, and 5000 men, of whom 4000 are married," Sarah says.

I point to her wedding ring. How can she be married and work here? She smiles. "These women are not getting enough sex in their marriage. I make sure I give my husband great sex."

But aren't you helping to break marriages up?

"We're keeping them together."

What happened to marriage vows?

"That's life."

It seems like an awful lot of outlay for not much. Back at work, the **RALPH** Fashion Editor says she'll fix me up with a date if I gave her \$50.

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