

20 | FRIDAY, AUGUST 30, 2013 | CHICAGO SUN-TIMES | CHICAGO SUN-TIMES.COM

chicagogrid.com

grid

All up in your business

▲ **DOW**
16.44 | 14,840.95

▲ **NASDAQ**
26.95 | 3,620.30

Are there enough singles in this town to support pricey matchmakers and free dating apps?

BY MATT LINDNER
Special Contributor

A report shows that more OkCupids are trying to Tinder eternal eHarmony with their perfect Match.com using their smartphones.

Mobile dating is now a \$216 million industry that accounts for more than 12 percent of dating services, according to a June report from market researcher IBISWorld. That's up more than 400 percent from \$43 million four years ago.

Yet those numbers don't have traditional matchmakers looking for the door.

"It is not impacting our business whatsoever," says Barbie Adler, president of Chicago-based Selective Search, where a year of services starts at \$25,000.

That's because, while mobile dating has made dating easier, matchmakers say it's taken away some of the human element. Traditional matchmakers tend to work as dating guides, working in person with singles to find the right matches, whereas online and mobile dating services utilize data in an effort to create personal chemistry.

"A lot of people need a lot more direction than they used to," says Stefanie Safran, owner of matchmaking service Stef and the City. "They realize doing it by themselves is not as easy as they thought."

Not to mention some popular apps are attracting a different crowd than the ones flocking to traditional matchmakers.

"The apps like Tinder, that's for mattress-minded individuals, not marriage-minded individuals," says Adler, who markets her service to older professionals looking for happily ever after. "It's like a hookup central."

That's something Tinder co-founder Justin Mateen says he doesn't necessarily agree with.

"The Tinder experience emulates human interaction in the real world," he says by email. "When you go to a coffee shop the first thing you notice about someone is their physical appearance. You are either drawn to the person or you're not."

Mateen wouldn't say how many people are on Tinder, which extracts data from users' Facebook profiles and generates matches within a specified radius. He did say the year-old app now makes more than 2 million matches per day and has made over 200 million in total.



Stefanie Safran, owner of matchmaking service Stef and the City.

So why would a single person pay thousands of dollars and invest the time to use a matchmaker when they can download an app for free?

"They like the personalized attention, they like hearing if they're doing something right, if they're doing something wrong, should they change anything," Safran says. "It's the same thing with personal trainers. People pay money to have somebody exercise with them even though anyone can go out and exercise with a friend."

While the rise in mobile dating hasn't put traditional matchmakers out of business, it has caused them to evolve.

Jill Jackson of Chicago-based Mingle Around says she's had to adjust her matchmaking strategy because people younger than 35 have become more superficial in their dating habits.

"I've found it more difficult as a matchmaker to set up blind dates," says Jackson, whose matchmaking services start at \$600. "The past year and a half, I've had a very difficult time with the younger crowd agreeing to meet someone whose personality, background, goals and temperament are great matches for them just due to the fact they can't see a photo."

Safran says she's added services in an effort to gain and retain clientele. In addition to the traditional matchmaking service, she also offers coaching (\$700 and up) and a social calendar (\$250) that essentially serves as a do-it-yourself matchmaker.

"People do need a refresher course [on dating] because I think that people are taking it too casually," she says. "That's where people get frustrated. You can't just rely on technology."