



Special



100% PERFECT LIMITED EDITION

YOUR PERFECT MAN IS OUT THERE

And these matchmaking agencies want to help you find him, as HOE I YUNE found out.



PHOTOS MASTERFILE

An annual income of a million dollars, Ivy League qualifications – and great in bed. For some women, that’s their idea of a dream guy. And you thought you had high standards.

But these requirements aren’t as uncommon as you might think, and a few dating agencies here have begun offering bespoke services aimed at helping these super-picky clients find the one.

The creme de la creme of matchmaking

The agencies call them love scouts – people who comb their personal networks and scour the city to find those who tick all the boxes on a client’s checklist.

Dating agency Society W launched this service in the form of an elite membership package in 2013. Founder Wendy Tse noticed a common complaint in the marketplace – that clients were being matched to people who didn’t fit the bill due to constraints in the dating agencies’ databases. It was a gap that needed to be filled.

“Fully relying on market forces to determine who’s in your database results in a lack of super-eligible and high-earning men, and a surplus of older women – because that’s when they realise that dating is an important part of life,” says Wendy.

So for those willing to fork out for customised matchmaking, Society W goes beyond its database and headhunts potential matches who are introduced

to clients only after an extensive interview.

Today, more than 50 per cent of Society W’s clients are on this premium dating service, and demand has doubled in the last year or so.

Among their success stories is Lydia*, a 37-year-old entrepreneur who is proof that going premium pays off. When she first signed up with Society W, she knew marriage was her goal.

Her criteria? Someone who had a stable job, was responsible, had family values similar to her own, and would be committed to a long-term relationship.

“I could headhunt 50 men, and only 15 would fit the criteria.”
Society W’s 34-year-old founder and head matchmaker Wendy Tse was a private banker before becoming a professional Cupid. She tells us what it takes to pair up Singapore’s singles.

“You must have an affinity for these matters. A client isn’t going to be able to pour out their entire life to you, so you must read between the lines when it comes to what people want,” says Wendy.

That’s the first step. But personalised matchmaking is much more labour-intensive than it looks.

It begins with Wendy reaching out within her personal networks. “If I’m looking for a doctor, I’d reach out to industry friends,” she says.

Friends or acquaintances get paid between \$50 and \$300 for an introduction. Good thing, then, that Wendy has a large social network cultivated over the years. There’s also the cold

approach – reaching out to people on Facebook, browsing LinkedIn profiles for people who might be compatible, and trawling dating apps. “It’s time-consuming because most of them are not available, may not respond, or may be married.”

If they respond, Wendy invites them for coffee or to drop by her office for a chat. “It’s to find out what they’re looking for, why they’re single, and whether they’re open to meeting someone through me.

Asking about past relationships and family background also helps us ascertain if this person shares similar values [to the one we want to match them with]. It’s also for them to describe the kind

of girl they’re looking for. What’s challenging is that I could headhunt 50 guys, but only 15 would fit the criteria. And out of the 15, only five might be interested in my client.”

It’s one way of sussing out how honest a potential match is about his intentions. Wendy also searches marital records to make sure the person is indeed single, and conducts Google searches to make sure no red flags show up.

She shows pictures of her friends to clients – to help her get a sense of what they find physically attractive. “One guy didn’t know it, but he was attracted to women with heart-shaped faces. All his exes had heart-shaped faces.”

Not wanting to float in the database and leave things to chance, Lydia signed up for elite membership. Tom*, whom she recently married, was the fifth man she was set up with.

“If not for this service, our paths would never have crossed. Ten years older and Australian, his circle of friends is totally different,” she said.

Clients like Lydia who opt for personalised matchmaking tend to be older, successful professionals in their mid-30s to late-40s who simply have no time to date, or when they were younger, put love on the back-

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burner. It's not uncommon to have surgeons, bankers, lawyers and entrepreneurs signing up.

They're also more likely to be women who know what they want, and want it fast. "They're intelligent, go on vacations with friends, get manicures, and dine at fancy restaurants regularly. The missing piece is a man by their side. They're also a little out of touch or inexperienced with the dating scene," says Wendy.

And these aren't people looking for a fling. The services often come with a higher price tag – Society W's six-month elite membership package starts at \$4,500. Other dating agencies like Lunch Actually and Divine Connect – which recently began offering such services – charge at least \$12,000 and \$1,200 respectively for a year of customised matchmaking.

A needle in the haystack

Even so, most of the women who sign up have straightforward requests when it comes to their dream guy. They're looking for someone they can respect, with similar educational qualifications as themselves, and a stable job. It helps if he's pleasant-looking, taller, and has similar hobbies.

But there are exceptions. Wendy's pickier clients have tasked her to look for a man who's good in bed (impossible for a matchmaker to determine!) or who's never had a girlfriend before (impractical, if you expect him to be suave despite his inexperience).

One of her more memorable requests reads like this: "Although not

fussed about looks, the guy must make over a million dollars a year, come from a rich family, have Ivy League qualifications, share my religion, have an interest in skydiving, and be less than 34 years old. Height is secondary – as long as he's taller than me." It's a tall order. "She's from a wealthy family, and thought she was being reasonable," says Wendy.

It's a similar story for Lunch Actually's Cupids (that's what their matchmakers are called). Some premium clients have requested that they be matched to someone with a particular horoscope or birth year, while in one bizarre instance, the person requested a match whose



"Yup, I'm the guy you've been looking for."

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My stint as a love scout

Features writer HOE I YUNE attempts it at Divine Connect.

Divine Connect's co-founder Cindy Leong suggested two approaches – either I scout matches based on the clients' specific requests, or I introduce single, eligible men as potential matches. I decided it might be easier to go for the latter.

I quickly ran into my first challenge when Cindy indicated that men in their 30s tended to be in high demand. I'm in my mid-20s – which means my social network is filled with men of a similar age, most of whom are uninterested in settling down.

One of the few 30somethings I knew – and asked – turned down my offer to be scouted for a date, because he was already interested in someone else. Desperate to bring in some potential matches, I briefly considered hitting the bars and clubs to suss out suitable men, but Cindy (and, later, other dating

agencies) advised against it, as they felt it was unlikely I would find serious daters there.

I don't have a large personal network, nor am I in a position of influence, so I decided that I had to tap the networks of my most sociable friends.

This took me to 28-year-old Nemo* – civil litigation lawyer and history buff – who was willing to give it a shot. He was a little younger than what Divine Connect was looking for, but he's tall – which Cindy pointed out is a plus point in many women's books.

Once I introduced Nemo to Cindy to be screened, my job was done. During the session, she introduced Enneagram profiling – a personality test Divine Connect uses to help a person understand himself or herself, and how he or she relates to others. Besides that, Nemo was quizzed on his dating history and the type of woman he's looking for.

Now, fingers crossed he's a match for someone.

birthdate included the number two.

Men who sign up for these customised dating services can also be hard to please, throwing up unusual requests seeking women who read *The Economist* or watch Ted Talks, says Violet Lim, co-founder of Lunch Actually.

But dating agencies say they advise clients not to limit their options with a checklist, and instead tap into something more intuitive – like feelings of fulfilment or happiness.

Scouting for love

Playing Cupid is tough, requiring a large network and a thick skin. Rose Wan, a Cupid with Lunch Actually, susses out potential matches at networking events. She also works with non-employees who could act as love scouts on Lunch Actually's behalf. They will receive a scouting fee for bringing in someone who clears a screening session and is selected as a suitable match. Meanwhile, Divine Connect leverages on love scouts with large personal networks, and who are in positions of influence, whether at church or within their community service groups. Love scout Toni* recently paired up a fellow churchgoer with a client, and the couple have now been together for three months.

So far, the strategies seem to have produced results. Society W says it has a 75 per cent success rate (defined as two people being in an exclusive relationship for at least three months), while Divine Connect has a 50 per cent success rate (when two people move on to a second date).

*Names have been changed.