

Online dating service to verify single status of wannabe Romeos

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SAN JOSE, Calif. - It's one of life's biggest letdowns - discovering that Mr. or Ms. Right is already wedded. An online dating service now hopes to help its love seekers avoid the sleazily married by filtering philanderers.

Upstart dating service True.com, which already screens for felons, recently expanded its partnership with database provider Rapsheets.com to review public records and verify a user's single status.

If a wannabe Romeo turns out to be a married Pinocchio, the user is thrown out of the cyber-circle.

"We're trying to provide a wholesome environment for courtship," said Herb Vest, founder and chief executive of Dallas-based True. "And we're interested in making relationships last."

Of course, people seeking extramarital bliss have other options: Yahoo Inc. and Microsoft Corp.'s MSN even have online chat groups dedicated to the "married and flirting."

Surfing for love on the Internet has become a hot business for companies such Match.com, eHarmony.com and America Online Inc.'s Love.com.

True entered the scene in December and appears to be the first dating Web site that tries to weed out felons and now also the married. It's also lobbying state legislators to propose laws requiring that all online dating services do criminal background checks.

True's screening system, which crosschecks "hundreds of millions" of public and proprietary records, isn't foolproof, Vest acknowledged.

Then again, neither is love.