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SCARY STUFF: Can True.com be for real?

If you've been online the last few weeks, you may have noticed the powder blue ads for the dating service (www.true.com) plastered all over the Web, including WSJ.com. "No married people allowed and we screen for felons," and "We prosecute married people," the ads warn.

We're not so sure we want our tax dollars going toward dating-fraud prosecutions, but the campaign is **a brilliant marketing stroke**. After all, by some counts, half the people visiting dating sites are married. And lest you think it's just men lurking about, Newsweek's deliciously silly [cover story](#) last week reminded us that wives cheat too -- and came complete with a list of notable cheaters, real and fictional, from Hester Prynne through Carmela Soprano. (And remember: Some married women meet their illicit lovers *online!*)

True's ads play on the worst-case scenarios -- for most people, there are intermediate steps between meeting someone online and starting to date them, time to get a better read on their character. Despite new services like video and compatibility tests, online dating isn't quite "Logan's Run," where your one-night stand is beamed into the living room. Online dating has boomed without background checks, but presumably some potential online daters do worry about safety and trust. And that's the audience True's campaign addresses.

"I wanted a wholesome environment for courtship," Herb Vest, the founder and CEO of closely held True.com, told us last week. True.com screens for felony convictions through a deal with RapSheets.com -- so far, Mr. Vest says, about 11% of sign-ups were rejected for having felony convictions -- and has users pledge that they aren't married and will put accurate information in their profiles. All photos must be from within the past three years.

The company says the ad campaign has sharply boosted sign-ups, and puts the number of registered users at 550,000, up from about 350,000 a few weeks ago. The site doesn't have a substantial number of paying members, says Mr. Vest.

But what about the threat of prosecution for people who lie on the site? Is True serious? Mr. Vest, who sold his financial-services firm H.D. Vest to Wells Fargo back in 2001, says the site hasn't gone after anyone yet. But, he warns: "If you're married or a criminal, if I catch you, I'm going to prosecute you to the fullest extent of the law." And married criminals better be extra careful.

You seen the ads? Write to realtime@wsj.com, and we'll post selected comments this Thursday. If you want to share your thoughts but don't want your letter published, please make that clear.