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“Could this be true.com love?”

By Alyson Ward

One of the many scary things about online dating sites: You never know exactly who's on the other end of the DSL line. After all, no one lists "convicted rapist" in his profile.

Dating sites can't guarantee you'll find a mate without emotional baggage or a roomful of Star Wars memorabilia. But now you can at least find out whether the person you're pursuing has a spouse or a criminal record.

True.com, which launched last year, has taken up the banner of safe dating; the Dallas-based company, which runs background checks on its users, is even lobbying for legislation that would require all dating sites to offer the same.

The site screens users for criminal histories by searching for felony convictions on rapsheets.com, a criminal database. Those with convictions are automatically blocked from using the service. The site also uses public records to learn whether a user is married.

Is it foolproof? Of course not. There's no national criminal database, so even rapsheets.com can't cover everything. It does search national, county, state and regional records, but remember that not every state has an accessible database. It's possible someone can slip through the cracks, so you still can't take safety for granted.

When you join True.com, you have to promise that you're not a convicted felon, that you're not married, that you'll be truthful and respectful, and that you will post recent pictures.

And once you're a member, you can automatically block responses from people who don't meet your specifications in categories such as age, religion and smoking habits.