

Match made in cyberspace

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Deborah Wolchek is one in 25 million.

The single professional from Parachute is joining more than a quarter of all U.S. singles who use online dating services to find love, according to Nielsen/NetRatings. Wolchek is not hesitant to seek help from eHarmony.com, which relationship expert Dr. Neil Clark Warren founded in 2000.

"They really ask probing questions that require a lot of thought," said Wolchek, who has lived in the valley for six years. "It requires a lot of thought and time."

For Wolchek, who will be 40 this summer, the online relationship service is more desirable than meeting her future husband at a smoke-filled bar.

"When you go to a bar, a lot of times places are polluted with cigarette smoke," she said. "And men tend to lack in manners when they start drinking. They forget their manners."

A former resident of Denver, Wolchek said living in a mountain town can be challenging in the search for love - or just a night out with other single men and women.

"I used to be a member of a singles group in Denver with my church and we would do things as a group, which is safe," she said. "Even just going to a movie with people my age can be hard."

Wolchek said she prefers eHarmony.com because she is a Christian looking for someone with similar values, and the site is dedicated to helping couples develop serious, long-term relationships.

"My No. 1 priority is finding someone who is on the same page as me spiritually," said Wolchek, who has never been married. "I'm also looking for someone who is into music ministry and art. And someone with a smile that makes me weak in the knees."

Of course Wolchek knows that finding a compatible match online requires more than similar religious beliefs and a pretty face. **Like eHarmony, the online dating service true.com uses personality and psychological testing to link couples.**

"If done correctly, compatibility testing is the key to finding long-lasting relationships, as it helps significantly narrow down the playing field to only well-suited individuals," said Dr. Jim Houran, chief psychologist at True. "What's frightening is that millions of online daters could be using compatibility tests that are seriously flawed or without scientific merit."

Because of the anonymous nature of online dating, a major issue of this growing trend is safety. Wolchek said she believes online daters should use "extreme caution because there are a lot of sick people out there."

"Just use wisdom and discernment," Wolchek said. "I would rather be alone for the right reasons than be with someone for the wrong reasons."

To stress the danger of married individuals acting as singles online, True includes the following notice on its Web site:

"If you are married and posing as single, be aware that you could be guilty of fraud and subject to civil and criminal penalties under federal and state law. For each offense, Title 18, Section 1343 of the U.S. Code authorizes fines of up to \$250,000 and jail sentences of up to five years ... If you are married, please close your browser."

Although safety and fraud can be concerns for some, they have not had an impact on cyberspace dating. Internet market research firm Jupiter Communications Inc. reports that consumers **spent \$313 million on U.S.-based dating Web sites in 2003 and forecasts that rate will more than double to \$642 million by 2008.**

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