

Well, I didn't wake up one morning and decide that I'd be a matchmaker.

But I have a degree in psychology and social sciences, so I knew that my strengths lay in understanding others. And I have always had an entrepreneurial spirit.

When I was 23 I moved to Italy for four years and lived in Florence. I had my own business as a language consultant. I set up courses for companies including Giorgio Armani and La Perla to teach their employees English.

When I came back to Sydney in 2004 I needed to start another business. But I love the process of coming up with an idea, assessing its viability, researching the market, then putting the business plan into action and watching it grow.

I was reading an article about a woman who was a matchmaker catering for the high end of New York society. So I thought: There isn't really anything like that here and we don't have the same population as New York, but what about scaling that model down to the professional and executive market? I identified that that was the new trend in dating – to go to an executive recruiter.

I knew there'd be competition from the internet dating industry – which is said to be worth more than \$15 million a year in Australia – but I was up for the challenge.

The thing that I really enjoyed was taking a concept that was traditionally taboo and giving it a fresh image and prestige. I wanted to change the perception of dating agencies being only for the desperate and dateless.

The reaction to our website was almost immediate. I did do a bit of advertising but really it has happened through word of mouth. In 2007 I won the Australian Achiever Award for excellence in customer service and was a state finalist in two categories of the Small Business Champion Awards.

We have five staff; they work in our offices in the Sydney and Melbourne CBDs. We're very selective about who we take on our books. Members range in age from 25 to the late 50s, but there's no limit. There's a balance between the genders.



Why I love my job

TRUDY GILBERT: MANAGING DIRECTOR,
ELITE INTRODUCTIONS

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We have eligible professional and accomplished men and women. In some age groups we have more men than women. That fluctuates but at the moment there are more men in the 40-50 age group. They range from entrepreneurs to the chief executives of some large multinational companies.

I've seen statistics that say less than 1 per cent of the people who meet through internet dating work out and that 30 per cent of men who go on internet sites are married – so they go online to play and their intentions are murky. But we screen everyone.

People apply online and then come in for an interview. More than 1000 people have come to us in four years; 87 per cent have wanted to see their dates again. The average length of the first date is four to five hours. Forty-three per cent of clients have ended up in long-term relationships. I had my first client marriage after just five months [in the business]. They were in their early 40s – he had three children and she had two.

There are many reasons why people come to us. Australians work longer hours than people in any other country in the developed world except Korea. We work in excess of 50 hours per week and that's part of why people aren't able to socialise outside work. Yet they don't want to date someone from work; they want to keep that separate. And members with a high

profile don't want to go online as they value their privacy.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there are now more than 5.8 million single people in Australia – that's about 35 per cent of the adult population, and they account for 24.3 per cent of households. They represent a growing demographic. People aren't as social as they used to be.

In February-March this year we experienced a 40 per cent increase in the number of singles coming to us. Single people are prioritising their lives and they're looking for security and comfort in a partner. As times get tougher they are realising what's most important in their lives, and that's sharing it with someone rather than wasting it. **td**