

GEN Z SWIPE AT DATING APPS

Old-school matchmaking surges despite high costs

Ruby Kraner-Tucci

Young people who are “burnt out” from the brutal world of dating apps are becoming the fastest-growing customer base for traditional matchmakers who are charging thousands of dollars to help Aussies find true love.

Relationship experts say they have seen a significant rise in demand from gen Z clients, despite matchmaking typically appealing to wealthy and older white-collar professionals and divorcees looking to get back into the dating world.

But ditching online dating comes with a hefty price tag, with some matchmakers charging up to \$50,000 for their services.

Of the 18 matchmaking agencies that spoke to this masthead, there was a broad range of fees for services.

At the lower end was a simple \$65 fee each time there is a mutual match, while the most expensive was a minimum of \$48,000 for packages that give you access to high-net-worth singles in Australia and abroad.

Matchmaker Brianne Tillyer, who runs Brisbane-based agencies You & I Introductions and Intentional Dating, said gen Z clients were sick of hook-up culture and wanted to find genuine connections.

“Most come to us because they are exhausted by the disposable nature of dating apps,” said Ms Tillyer, who has more than three decades of matchmaking experience and charges up to \$7500 for her services.

“For years, swipe culture has been a drain on our mental health, leaving people burnt out and disconnected.

“Online dating isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be ... people are sick of it

Viola Steed

Solutions Matchmaking

“Despite being digital natives, gen Z is the generation leading the charge back to traditional matchmaking.

“Online dating pulled that focus (on marriage and family) away for many years, but the pendulum is swinging back and people are reclaiming that deeper meaning and purpose.”

Matchmaker Viola Steed has also experienced rising demand from younger clients.

Ms Steed said she used to cater exclusively to singles aged 50 and above when she first started her West Australian-based agency Solutions Matchmaking in 1995 – today, she attracts young people “without even trying”.

She said dating apps had

made finding a match “disingenuous” and “very brutal”.

“Online dating isn’t all that it’s cracked up to be ... young people are sick of it,” Ms Steed said.

“Dating platforms have become akin to people sitting at slot machines.

“It’s a repetition almost like gambling and people end up getting addicted to the likes and treat it like a game.

“If you want to meet someone, it doesn’t have to be a demeaning process.”

Solutions Matchmaking’s services start from \$980 for “a dip your toe in membership” that includes three matches over three months, and climb to \$8800 for an active file with unlimited matches.



Connection is the name of the game



ASHLEY AND BELINDA GRANT

Ruby Kraner-Tucci

‘CHOOSE DATE SETTINGS THAT ALLOW YOU TO RELAX’ – ASHLEY AND BELINDA GRANT, ENCOUNTER DATING

Ashley Grant loves when he matches couples who wouldn’t have chosen each other on dating apps.

He recalled one match between total opposites: the man was structured and career-focused, the woman was creative and spontaneous – but they shared a love for the water.

The couple went kayaking for their first date, which Mr Grant said helped ease their nerves, and they are now happily married.

“The activity broke down any awkwardness, and they clicked in a really natural way, proving that shared energy matters more than identical lifestyles,” Mr Grant said.

Through his agency Encounter Dating – which he runs together with his wife, Belinda – Mr Grant sees clients across Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth.

Most are aged in their 30s to 50s, and are typically successful professionals with limited “time or patience” for online dating.

“They value quality over quantity, and are genuinely ready for a meaningful relationship,” Mr Grant said.

“They usually come to me feeling frustrated with dating apps, either from lack of quality matches or connections that don’t go anywhere.”

Unlike other agencies, Encounter Dating does not have joining fees or ongoing subscriptions.

Instead, clients are charged a matchmaker fee of \$65 per person once a mutual match has been

made and both parties are excited to meet.

Mr Grant said he tells clients to not focus solely on being matched with their “type”, and to take inspiration from his favourite love story by choosing relaxed settings or activities for dates like kayaking.

“Stay open to people who might not tick every box on paper,” he said.

“A real connection often comes from shared values and how someone makes you feel, not just surface-level similarities.

“Also, choose date settings that allow you to relax and be yourself.

“Sometimes doing an activity together can be far more revealing than sitting across a table a restaurant.”

‘FOCUS ON VALUES BEFORE LOOKS’ – ROBYN NIND, BLUE LABEL LIFE

Matchmaking is like “meeting someone through a friend”, said Robyn Nind.

Through her agency Blue Label Life, Ms Nind has facilitated countless love stories.

She said a standout was a couple in their 50s who were both divorced and looking for love again. The woman told her match about her favourite book, which featured a beautiful bridge in Paris, and as a surprise, he took her to that bridge to propose.

“They just fell in love straight away, it was really beautiful,” Ms Nind said.

Ms Nind takes clients aged in their mid-20s up to 85, who



ROBYN NIND



AMANDA HARRIGAN

are mostly professionals. She works across Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra and charges between \$3000 and \$6000, depending on the services engaged.

She said about half of her clients had tried online dating and either couldn't find a match or didn't like the experience. The other half lead more private lives and are looking for a discreet approach to dating.

Some have lived overseas and do not have strong connections in Australia, while others are too focused on work to prioritise looking for a relationship.

"I think what everyone has in common is they are genuinely looking for a long-term connection – they know what they want and they're committed," she said.

"It's very hard to do our own filtering when we're meeting people because our emotions get involved and it can cloud our judgment, so they like me to do all the groundwork."

Ms Nind said she flipped the traditional dating script on its head, telling clients to focus on values before looks.

"What we normally do in life is we go for attraction first and then we work out if we're suited," she said.

"Sometimes you can waste years with someone, you can even marry someone and then realise that your values are completely different.

"I do it the other way around – I introduce people who have similar values, intellect, priorities and goals in life. Then it's just a matter of getting the right attraction and connection."

'DON'T FOCUS TOO HEAVILY ON YOUR CHECKLIST' – AMANDA HARRIGAN, HYTCH

Amanda Harrigan has a five-date rule when it comes to working out if a match is compatible.

The matchmaker founded her agency Hytch in 2020, and said couples who invest time in getting to know each other get the best results.

"We live in such a disposable, disconnected society that we need our first dates to be totally perfect," Ms Harrigan said.

"But things don't always start with fireworks. People can be very nervous and relationships take time.

"By date four or five you've got a pretty good idea of whether you feel a connection with the person."

Hytch focuses on matching men, with women acting as the "complementary candidates".

Clients are typically professionals, including business owners, executives, doctors and lawyers, who tend to lead private lives and not be on dating apps. They live in Melbourne, Perth, Sydney and Brisbane and range from their mid-30s to their 70s, with Ms Harrigan even matching a 79-year-old.

Membership fees begin at \$13,000 and increase depending on the complexity of the search and Ms Harrigan's involvement.

"They're all looking for a genuine, meaningful relationship," she said. "They are accomplished in their fields, they've got full social lives, they are fit, healthy, active, and they're really looking to find somebody they can share their life with."

Ms Harrigan's favourite love story from her 13 years as a matchmaker is helping not only a businessman find a match, but also his two daughters.

Her advice is to focus on "compatibility over chemistry".

"Don't focus too heavily on your checklist – it's all about having a connection with somebody," she said.

"I think a lot of people have this thing about chemistry and feeling the spark. "That fantasy does not exist because nobody is perfect. First and foremost focus on compatibility over chemistry, because chemistry can grow."



Matchmaker Dimitra ended up accidentally finding a match herself – through her family's dating agency.

Love match blindsided me

Ruby Kraner-Tucci

'THE MATCHMAKER HAS FOUND HER MATCH' – DIMITRA, 36

Matchmaker Dimitra has helped hundreds of Australian singles find love – but she never thought she would one day become a client herself.

When the 36-year-old split from her long-term partner, she threw herself headfirst into helping run her family matchmaking agency, Mirabela Executive Dating.

"When you are with someone from a very young age – I was 17 when we met – you either grow together or grow apart," said Dimitra, who is based in Sydney.

"Over the 15 years that we were together, I had progressed into such a different person and I wanted something very different out of my life.

"I never lost hope of love for me, though. I've seen and felt it through my family – I've got grandparents and aunts who have had 40 or even 60-year commitments."

When a new client reached out to seek her matchmaking services, Dimitra followed regular processes. The pair met in person for a standard consultation, where Dimitra interviewed him to learn more about his background, values and interests.

Satisfied that he was there to "intentionally date" and was not looking for "something casual", he became a client of Mirabela Executive Dating.

"It was interesting because it felt just like two friends catching up," Dimitra said.

"We were quite fascinated by each other, we spoke about both being Greek and our heritage.

"He became another client that I really wanted to help – I was his matchmaker and we also became really close friends."

But after a few matches and going on a date, Dimitra said he struggled to feel a romantic connection and asked the agency to put his profile on hold – he was no longer open to meeting prospective partners.

"My intentions weren't anything other than me really trying as a matchmaker to help him find his person," Dimitra said. "It just happened – we both weren't looking for each other and it absolutely blindsided me when there

“It took me by surprise – it was like magic”

Dimitra Matchmaker

was so much alignment, that it blossomed into this gorgeous friendship and then it became more.

"It took me by surprise – it was like magic."

After two years together, her partner proposed to Dimitra in the Hunter Valley last month.

She said the proposal was a "statement" involving a helicopter ride, hundreds of roses, a violinist playing their favourite song, and a camera crew ready to capture the "very romantic" moment.

The pair are currently buying their first home together and are in the early stages of planning their wedding next year.

"In the past two years, I've done so much more in my life for me than ever before," Dimitra said.

"We've travelled to all parts of the world – before that, I had never really travelled anywhere because work, the family business and being a good daughter had always taken priority.

"Then I met this guy and he challenged me to get out of the boardroom and try new things."

Dimitra said her relationship with her fiancé remained professional at all times that he engaged with Mirabela Executive Dating, and that their romantic relationship was "completely unexpected".

She said she remembered feeling "a spark" when they first met, but could not have imagined it would turn into anything more serious.

"I remember speaking to my mum and sister and asking if I was reading into things with him," Dimitra said.

"For me to put myself back out there after my 15-year commitment, it really needed to be with someone that I was going to feel this magical, unconditional love with. That's what I was looking for and I found it.

"My clients have always asked me, have you matched yourself? Does the process work? Can I find real love?"

"I suppose my answer now is yes – the matchmaker has found her match."