

Technology

CUPID has undergone a digital upgrade, with online dating sites becoming the norm among singles looking for their next epic love story. **HEDIRMAN SUPIAN** (hedirman@mediacorp.com.sg) sets his sights on three dating sites that aim to set lonely hearts aflutter with romance come Valentine's.



HITCHOO'S main aim is to get you dates. Its Hit-List feature functions much like an eBay for dates — you post single or group dates and interested singles bid for those dates.

To raise your date-worthiness, you can set “free dates” on the Hit-List and offer to foot the bill. You can also view the profiles of those who bid for your dates — perfect for those who have been on too many blind dates that have gone wrong.

In addition, you can apply for dates in other countries if you plan to head there for a holiday or a business trip.

As part of its Valentine's Day promotion, Hitchoo is giving away US\$100 (\$142) if you can't get a date via its Hit-List.

PRICE: Free (with limitations), US\$11.20 per month (six-month plan)
NO OF MEMBERS: 1,500
AGE RANGE: 25 to 33



WORKAHOLICS, rejoice. Now, you can squeeze in some romance between breaks.

By filling up a questionnaire when you sign up, Who Works Around You maps out other singles who work nearby and who match your personality and working hours. You can

even note down your lunch or coffee breaks or when you're free for a chat. You can then flirt with these singles by sending private messages or asking them out on a date.

The clockwork precision with which this site lets you get your next date — while working it around your schedule and location — might get the thumbs-up from busy professionals. Members also get a love concierge service, which helps them send flowers and book restaurants or limousines.

Staying true to the *modus operandi* of other conventional dating sites, Who Works Around You also organises events for its members. If you're used to cutting business deals over lunch or dinner at the nearest place for a cuppa, you might want to try your hand at giving romance the proximity approach as well.

PRICE: \$5 per month (12-month plan)
NO OF MEMBERS: 520
AGE RANGE: 21 to 45



IF YOU find it hard to break the ice, Eteract lets you take baby steps doing it online.

The site allows singles to easily take part in activities such as virtual 3D chats, online games and online speed-dating events. After each activity, you can request to exchange profile details with those you fancy. Details are only exchanged if the feelings of both parties are mutual.

It doesn't stop there.

The site organises up to three events a month so members can choose to meet face-to-face. These range from gatherings at boardgames cafes to dining events.

According to the site, members frequently organise their own events at least once a week, too.

Membership for Eteract is free, but you will have to get credits to buy virtual

gifts or to spruce up your virtual avatar.

Sending virtual drinks, for example, will cost you two credits and buying a virtual pet could cost around eight credits.

PRICE: Free membership. \$10 for 100 credits
NO OF MEMBERS: 2,000
AGE RANGE: 21 to 58

OUR PICK: HITCHOO

Call us old-fashioned, but we prefer to stick our necks out and go for as many face-to-face dates as possible. Online chemistry can barely be a litmus test for personal interaction, we say. And Hitchoo multiplies the opportunities of how we can get to non-intimidating social events tailored to our liking. The site is fun to use and its web interface is clean and user-friendly. And you have to admit that a chance at a date in another country is utterly enticing and romantic — in a sort-of-escapist way.

DIVE INTO THIS ONLINE MOSH PIT

NEW Singapore-based website Club Mosh is giving music fans a virtual meeting place to get connected to bands and musicians, and to buy music digitally.

“Club Mosh was developed to showcase music from independent musicians and to make it easier for fans to discover them,” said Ms Sheila Francois, senior manager of Cellcity, the mobile content company that owns Club Mosh. “Our aim is to be an international digital label for independent artists. By cutting out the middleman (record companies), we split revenues 50-50 with the bands.”

Launched last month, the website's current repertoire is mostly taken up by local acts such as Allura and Monofone and regional ones such as Lipgloss (Indonesia) and Couple (Malaysia). There are also select international acts from Switzerland, Canada and the United Kingdom.

“The site sells music for relatively-unknown bands,” said Ms Francois. “It's not because these independent bands aren't good — I've seen their dedicated fan base. Unfortunately, their music's not reaching the masses. So, we can't look at just the Singapore market; we're look-



ing at it from a global scale.”

Fans can stream music for free or buy it from the website. Occasionally, some artists give songs away for free. Prices for the digital downloads, which come with digital rights management software, or digital locks, are priced from US\$0.20 (28 cents) to US\$1.

In comparison, songs from Soundbuzz, an online digital music website recently acquired by mobile handset maker Motorola, cost \$1.99 each. Club Mosh also sells mobile ringtones and wallpapers from its artists.

Music connoisseurs, dubbed Mosh Gods, have been appointed to review and recommend new bands worldwide. These include the likes of Bee Futon from Thai-based band Futon and local music veterans Patrick Chng and X'Ho.

“Club Mosh is a really good idea,” said X'Ho. “It would help to instill a genuine pride in locally-produced music because, like charity, real interest begins at home.”

The site plans to give visitors an interactive and dynamic experience. “Fans will have their profile pages and tagboards to leave messages for bands,” Ms Francois said. “Bands will have their own fan-created pages. We're also thinking of letting fans jam with the bands in the future. And we plan to record concerts and let fans watch these video streams for free.”

The website releases a weekly podcast hosted by DJ Jeremy Ratnam that showcases up-and-coming bands from the Club Mosh catalogue. “We can be a channel in Asia to distribute songs and content from international independent artists,” Ms Francois said.

Club Mosh is planning an online band competition in which fans will get to vote for their favourite band, *American Idol*-style, in July. The winning band will walk away with US\$5,000. It also plans to showcase bands at international music festivals in Jakarta and Sydney in the latter half of the year. — HEDIRMAN SUPIAN