

When Hymie met Sarah

Confused about all those Jewish dating sites promising a bashert? Read *Afterword's* guide to virtual soul-searching.



By Dave Gordon

Once upon a time, using the Internet to find a date held a stigma akin to taking out a cheesy personal ad. But today, more and more people are using chat-rooms and emoticons to find a match, and with this popular phenomenon has come a plethora of online dating sites catering to the Jewish market.

There's the ever-popular JDate.com, a harbinger among Jewish dating Web sites, which opens its membership to all stripes of Jews. But it also attracts non-Jews who are interested in dating Jewishly. Then there is Frumster.com out of Passaic, New Jersey, which has gained popularity over the past two years by pushing itself as a site for serious Jewish daters, focusing on the more observant crowd. But what's out there for people who don't fit in to the religious crowd and who want a site catering to Jews only? How can the neophyte to online dating choose among the dozens of sites available?

"All dating sites have roughly the same features today," said 25-year-old Gad Albilá, who runs UrbanTraditional.com (UT), a Jewish dating Website based in Montreal.

"In my opinion, the real distinction between online dating services lies in their ability to attract different segments of the dating population,"

he said.

Unique among most dating sites, UT markets toward Jews who are not religious or secular, but fall somewhere in-between. Not all members practise kashrut or observe Shabbat, but they are looking for Jews to date who have a very strong Jewish identity.

Albilá, a computer engineering graduate of McGill University, began working on UT two years ago. He started the site not only to make it easier for Jewish singles to find their bashert (soulmate), but also to keep Jewish Generation Y dating within the tribe.

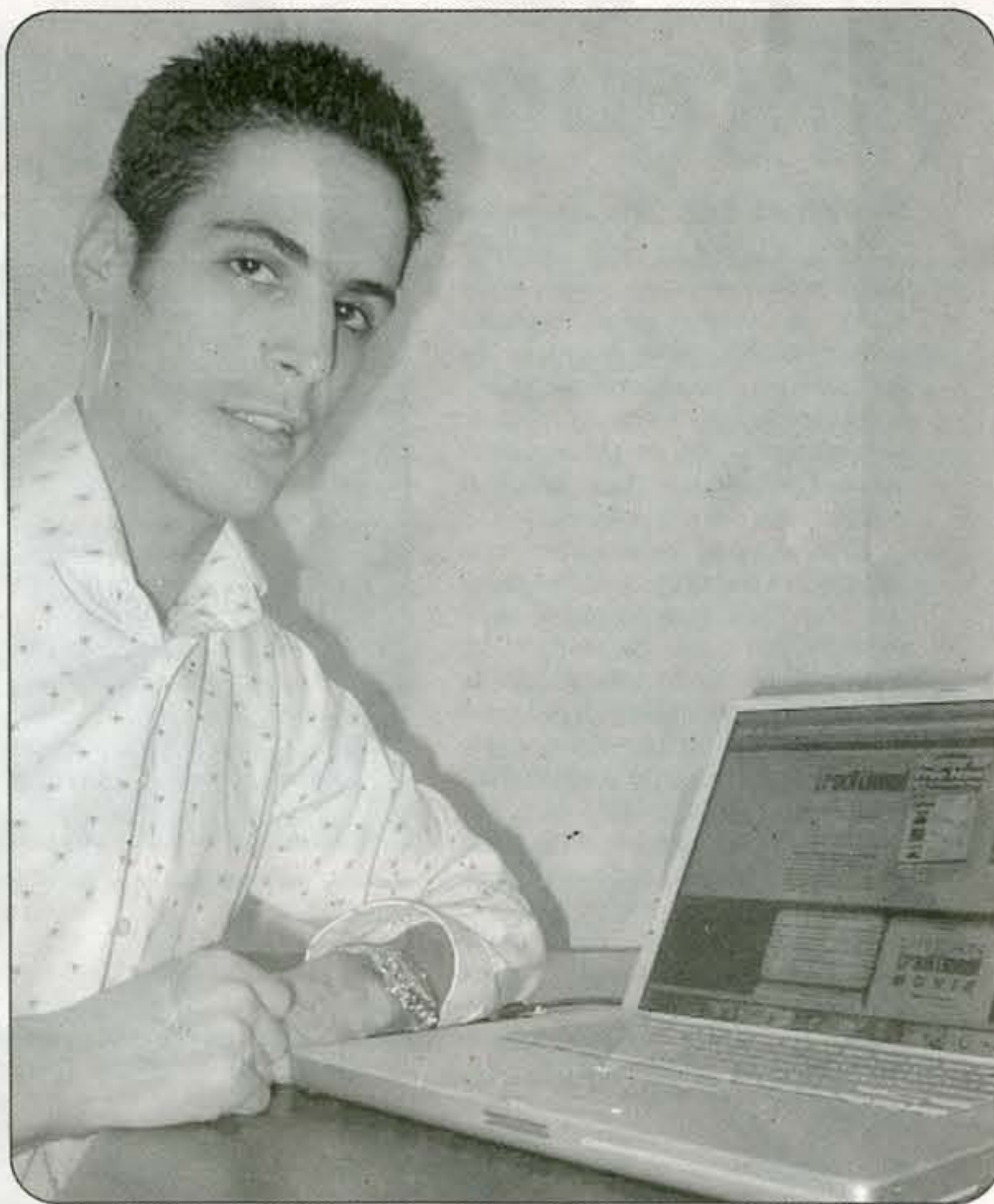
"I feel that the big Jewish dating sites out there have a secular feel to them. I want UT to be a warm site that is comprised of Jewish singles who love Jewish traditions and Jewish life. More importantly, the rate of intermarriage is rising. UT is my way of trying to slow it down."

Albilá wants his site to attract the modern Jew with "traditional" Jewish values.

"UT reminds us that Jewish values and traditions do not conflict with modern urban lifestyles," he said.

"Karen," one of 750 worldwide members of UT, has been "messed" many times on the site.

"Well, it's a little funny the way it happened. I was very skeptical at first



Gab Abilia, the webmaster of Urban Traditional.

about online dating. My friends pushed me to sign up. After receiving so many messages, I started getting into it," said the 27-year-old dental assistant from Montreal.

Karen has gone out on a few dates since the summer as a result of UT. "I'm a busy person and am very particular about the guys I date. Urban Traditional is an easy way of

getting in contact with many people. Also, Urban Traditional is a very easy site to use."

What also seems to be a big distinguishing factor between dating sites is the cost.

UT's service is free for the time being and stands out among many other dating sites whose

focus is on the business bottom line. Frumster.com is free to use for now but has plans to charge for to-be-announced premium services. JDate has charged for its services for several years but is getting even stricter now. You used to be able to check your messages and see who "teased" you for free but now you cannot access these items unless you are a registered (paying) member.

"JDate is able to be strict due to their big customer base," said Albilá. "In my opinion, a big customer base is like a double-edged sword. Reducing once-free options, like reading received messages, does increase revenue. But that may not be compatible with the original customer base that started off for free."

Albilá currently runs everything on his site, from Web development and programming to content and promotion. In contrast to his own site, he believes that the bigger dating sites are losing their personal touch. That personal touch (or lack thereof) may be evident in trying to contact an administrator. JDate was contacted for this article to address the criticism of allowing open

Continued on Pg. 17

Looking for love on-line

Continued from Pg. 16

membership to non-Jews, among other questions. They sent a generic e-mail non-response and a JDate spokesperson could not be reached via their toll-free helpline. Urban Traditional and Frumster responded to questions within about a day.

Despite more than 11,000 worldwide members, Frumster administrators are still able to weed through the undesirables and give a few the boot after discovering certain members didn't fall under the strict religious guidelines. One owner of Frumster, Derek Saker, said that keeping tabs on the two-year-old site's clientele helps keep things in check and keeps out pranksters who post phony profiles. They also rely on other members to alert them.

"I like knowing that things are done with care and that things are checked out by the people who

run the site," said 31-year-old Yehudi Ben Simon, a Torontonian who uses Frumster. "I don't like getting lost in the shuffle. I enjoy knowing that I can contact an administrator if something goes wrong and get a response really soon. That, to me, is a very important factor."

Many singles complain that, when going to Jewish events, they keep meeting the same people and their dating circle is limited, especially in smaller communities. But with the Internet, you can find your mate in an adjacent city or discover someone in the same city you've never met before.

Indeed, through the World Wide Web, you can find a bocher in Burnaby or a maidele from Montreal, without going to a single singles shindig.

Email us at afterwordmag@hotmail.com



Jewish Dating Sites

- JDate.com costs about \$40 a month and services include sending mail to others, reading and replying to e-mails sent to you, instant messaging members, and chat rooms. Non-Jews are allowed in. It is free to post a profile and get notices of JDate parties.
- Frumster.com is for the Orthodox single and is free to use.
- Jewishcafe.com costs about \$40 a month but has a two week free trial. The clientele is worldwide and they are very specific in the sign-in note that it is for Jewish singles only.
- Jewsearch.com has a list of dozens of Internet dating sites - beware of all the pop-ups.
- Jewishmatch.com has a free profile posting but does not list their



When the dates aren't kosher

By Shlomit Kriger

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