



Sofi Papamarko has found it difficult to maintain a consistent roster of eligible men to match with her female clients at her Toronto firm, Friend of a Friend Matchmaking Inc.

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This article was published more than 4 years ago. Some information in it may no longer be current.

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Each week, we seek expert advice to help a small or medium-sized business overcome a key issue.

Sofi Papamarko is looking for a few good men. Ideally, more than a few.

In the two years since the former relationship columnist launched Friend of a Friend Matchmaking Inc., her Toronto-based company, she has found it difficult to maintain a consistent roster of eligible men to match with her female clients.

"Right now I have a ratio of two women to one man," Ms. Papamarko says.

Like most matchmakers, the 34-year-old offers her clients anywhere between one to five matches for an annual fee. Women pay \$299 a year; men pay \$249. She says she originally marketed to "younger, artsy, urban types" thinking the lower price point would appeal, but she now services "every demographic under the sun."

Though she has a steady client list of about 400 singles, and has averaged one successful matchup a month since she launched in May of 2013, the difficulty of attracting enough men has meant Ms. Papamarko often closes registration to new women until the numbers even out. "If I don't have a boyfriend for you, I'm not going to take your money," she says.

This decision, while meant to preserve the integrity of her business, is ultimately wreaking havoc on her revenue.

"I was closed off to women for seven months last year. That's 50 per cent of my income gone," she says. "I opened it up to women in November and I had my best month ever: I made \$14,000." She gets inquiries from women every day, she adds.

To understand the problem, Ms. Papamarko draws on her sociological observations of dating in a big city.

"I think the main factor why men don't come to me is the money, because they can find relationship-minded women on Tinder, whereas women are not as likely to find the same.

The intake process also is a factor. Women are generally more inclined to answer personal questions about themselves, she says. Men may not feel comfortable being so forthright, even if the information will help her more effectively match them with the right partner.

To reach a male clientele, Ms. Papamarko has engaged in marketing campaigns. "I've tried advertising, LinkedIn with targeted gender and age."

She has also circulated business cards at pubs, gyms, barbershops and gentleman's expos. She has even offered a finder's fee for anyone who brings a new male client into the fold. But so far the results have proven uneven.

"I don't really know what else to do. At this point I'm tapped out," she says. "I have to be open to women and I can't be open to women if I don't have enough men to balance it."

THE CHALLENGE: How can a matchmaker attract reluctant male clients to a business model that ultimately favours women?

THE EXPERTS WEIGH IN

Karyn Gordon, chief executive officer of DKB Coaching and Wellness Studio, a career and relationship therapy center, Toronto

Part of the problem is that her website is very women-focused, down to the colours and font she uses. If the barrier is attracting men, change the front page and make it much more masculine-focused. Get videos up of men who were reluctant. It helps to hear stories from other men around what their barriers were for joining and how this service actually helped. You have to know your audience and know what their concerns are, and you raise them and challenge them even before they ask.

In addition I'd recommend a more significant price difference. Women want it more. It's all about market value.

Keith Jasper, founder of Bounce Ideas, a gender-based marketing agency, Toronto

Ms. Papamarko needs to use her journalistic background and create more content. A blog on her website would be the perfect forum for her to create stories and espouse her ideology. Since a blog is keyword-optimized, she can create articles that educate and talk to the male/female differences. Write about why a man needs a matchmaker versus trying to do it themselves, etc.

I see that her website has meta tags, but her page descriptions need work. Improving these would help in search engine optimization. Speaking of which, she may also want to consider coupons, contests and live events to help boost SEO.

Finally, one thing we recommend when creating content is creating a "story funnel." This is basically creating a relevant story and repurposing it across many platforms, which builds back "link authority," the effectiveness or value of a link based on how the site ranks in its respective industry or market.

Ruth Claramunt, matchmaker and CEO of Hearts Canada, Toronto

I ran into the same problem at first, just getting well known and out there. People know who I am now, but you need time. I've been doing this for 30 years and there are times even now when it goes up and down. It's part of the business.