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Austin matchmaking business was built upon its owner's intuition

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At Austin-based company Something More, a computer program called Matchmaking Pro catalogs love-seeking singles and tracks the details of their dates, down to where they meet, what they wear and -- most important -- whether they want to meet again. A high-tech dating database and a tasteful suite of offices just off of Loop 360: this is modern-day matchmaking.

But even sophisticated software designed specifically for the love connection industry can't predict chemistry between two people, which is where Something More founder Julia McCurley's intuition comes in.

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"There's no computer matching and no personality tests — just instinct," the professional matchmaker said. "We have the software but we do the matching by hand."

McCurley said she's long recognized her knack for pairing family and friends and points to her sister's 16-year marriage as proof. With thorough research and professionalism undergirding her intuitive nature as the guiding force of her business, she's found success.

Before launching Something More in July 2009, McCurley recruited candidates for information technology jobs, keeping her focus on the right matches for a company's culture.

"Now instead of being a headhunter for high tech, I'm a headhunter for the heart," she said.

McCurley's early research of the Austin market turned up no other locally owned and operated provider of private matchmaking services. So she enrolled in training through New York City's Matchmaking Institute to earn a certification as a professional matchmaker and started meeting clients at coffee shops across town. She knew things were taking off when she returned from a vacation to find countless voicemails and emails from single Austinites requesting her help.

"That's when I got the office," she said.

She reports that her business is flourishing despite the tough economy, explaining that "people want love no matter what the unemployment rate is."

What makes two people fall in love is hard to pin down, but McCurley has taken every possible step to streamline the process of matching a couple who will click. She's developed strict policies on the clients she'll accept and how she makes matches; she conducts extensive interviews and runs background checks to confirm marriage and divorce records; and she's constantly updating and analyzing her research with help from her staff of two.

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But the business of love, of course, isn't all business.

"The only way to determine chemistry is in person," McCurley said. "You can't create it. If I could create chemistry, I'd be richer than Mark Zuckerberg."

Beyond her talent for spotting potential, McCurley draws on her own experiences to guide her clients. She calls herself a former serial dater who married, had two children and later divorced. Today, she's remarried to a man she first thought was not her type.

"He has a custom closet for all his cowboy boots," she said. "I've gone places with him I never thought I'd go: I went to the Indy 500 and I've gone hunting with him."

The lesson she shares with clients is that couples connect over something deeper than hobbies and that love might not come in the form they think they want. While not everyone she works with ends up with a ring on their finger, they do say that they benefit from her coaching and encouragement.

"People who haven't found a special someone through us have said they know themselves better," she said. "And they're better at making first impressions and getting out of the friend zone."

Something More's matching process is based on initial consultations that last several hours, during which McCurley does the legwork of vetting everyone who might be matched for a date.

"My clients are people that value time over money," she said. "If they're selling a home, they hire a real estate agent. If they're making investments, they hire a stock market expert. I do the screening and ask all the awkward questions. You can't just go up to someone and ask, 'What's your religion?' and 'Do you want to have children?'"

First dates are scheduled only after the consultations, plus a session of tips on polishing one's image to make a positive impression.

"No cargo shorts or flip-flops on men," she advises.

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McCurley recommends that introductory meetings take place on weekday evenings and last only about an hour. She's found that Friday and Saturday nights signal too much pressure. And though the first few months of the new year, when resolutions are in the air, are known as a matchmaker's busy season, no dates will be scheduled for this Tuesday, Valentine's Day, for the same reason.

Another policy: only first names are used on first dates, and no contact information is exchanged. McCurley handles all post-date feedback and communication about a second date.

The personal involvement she requires is what sets her approach apart from online dating sites, she said.

"If someone wants to randomly date, they can go online," she said. "But with online dating, less than one in 10 couples date more than a month, and less than 1 percent get married."

Living up to Something More's tagline — "Creating relationships that matter" — this matchmaker's goal is to spark connections that can lead to long-term relationships or marriage.

"Anyone can get a date," she said. "I'm in the last first-date business."