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## **Love is not always blind DateSmart brings reason to romance**



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It's a story heard often these days: A couple meets online, a flirtation starts and a romance blossoms. Then it turns out that one of the parties bears little resemblance to their given physical description, is not who they said they are, or has lied about their past.

Before airplane reservations are made or feelings become too deep, Carmen Naimish wants a call.

Since 1997, the Santa Barbara resident has been heading up DateSmart, a private investigation service that conducts confidential background checks on people's love interests.

Naimish said the majority of her clients are professionals between the ages of 35 and 75, with 65 percent being women. About 80 percent find out that at least part of their suspicions are true.

"This service exists to remind people that it's important to check out a date, just like you would be prudent in a business decision," Naimish said. "People want to be in love and be happy; therefore, they might close their eyes to red flags."

Naimish said her background checks, which start at \$300, have become a necessity as online dating has gained in popularity and many people meet through services like speed dating.

There are some clear red flags that should raise some suspicions, Naimish said. She said predators find ways to elicit sympathy or elude questions about their past or present situations.

While each case is individual, Naimish collects standard information about the love interest from the client, including full name, date of birth, address and previous residences. Naimish will then search for marriage, divorce and criminal records and will research any specific concerns the client has.

Naimish said she's discovered it all, from criminals who have been convicted of assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill to women who have been more than twice the weight they said they were. She also prevented a 69-year-old woman from marrying a man who was living in a shabby hotel, had no telephone and was generally "not a good character," she said.

Naimish has been in the field of private investigations since 1989, working for other investigators while maintaining a job for a data communications and networking systems company in Santa Barbara.

She got in a relationship that made her realize that having a service like DateSmart would be a wise, relatively inexpensive investment in the future.

"If I would have conducted a background check, I would have learned things that would have led me to make different decisions. So I decided to start DateSmart.com," she said.

Naimish doesn't do too much marketing, occasionally sending out press releases that get picked up by national media organizations. She has appeared in People and Cosmopolitan magazines and on the Fox television network. Naimish said that after the national exposure, she gets a peak in business but that she gets a pretty steady flow of customers from people who come across her Web site, DateSmart.com.

Naimish estimates that she juggles 20 to 25 cases at any one time. "The most difficult thing for me is time," she said. "Sometimes I feel I need another 24 hours in each day. Each case is individual and takes personal attention."

Only 10 percent of Naimish's business is local, so if she has to view court filings out of state, she will outsource some of the work to the network of investigators she has built up across the country.

Occasionally, Naimish will also do surveillance, staking out a location to discover if a client's loved one is in another relationship.

Although services like DateSmart have proliferated, Naimish said the demand for the business has also increased. Naimish said part of the growth comes from the increased popularity of online dating services like Match.com. Trish McDermott, whose position is "VP of romance" for Richardson, Texas-based Match.com, said online dating is not necessarily more dangerous than other ways of meeting people, such as in bars or nightclubs.

"We don't do background checks on anyone, but have dating safety advice on the site, and we try to help people know how to transition to dating in the outside world," McDermott said. "In some ways online dating allows you to know more about someone than if you meet in a bar or a cocktail party."

Originally, about 85 percent of Naimish's investigations involved online dating relationships. That percentage has decreased as people have become more aware that they need to have their antennas raised in most dating situations and as more people are dating at all ages.