

December 2008

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COCO MOON

IF YOU'RE A **SINGLE PROFESSIONAL WHO'S SICK OF MASS ONLINE DATING AND THREE-MINUTE SPEED DATES, COCO MOON** COULD BE THE **ANSWER TO YOUR PRAYERS. KAREN WILSON** MEETS THE ENTREPRENEUR BEHIND A **NEW MATCHMAKING SERVICE WITH A DIFFERENCE.**

TWO years ago Sharon Kell was a global sales and customer service manager for Orange, travelling around the world and managing 3,000 people. But now she's found her niche as a matchmaker for time-starved professional people.

Sharon's new upmarket dating business Coco Moon was launched at the start of October and within a month she'd already signed up 20 clients.

"It's very different to anything on the market in the North East," says Sharon, 43. "Unlike mass online dating, it's bespoke and very exclusive."

Having already established a business coaching company, Sharon had come across lots of successful yet single self-starters. A huge proportion had broken marriages, like herself, and many escaped their predicament by immersing themselves in their work.

"As you grow up friends relocate and take different routes," says Sharon, who now lives with second husband Stephen and daughter Victoria, eight. "You're left thinking where can I go to meet someone and who do I go with?"

"There are lots of genuine people out there whose paths are crossing every so often – like the film *Sliding Doors* – and there could be someone who's perfect for you not far from your nose.

"I've gone through it, thinking 'what am I doing in this pub on a Friday night.' You revert back to what you did when you were single and it makes you miserable."

As a result Coco Moon was born. The business has two sides; Coco Moon Hub, where clients

can attend social events and a bespoke matchmaking service combined with the optional extra of relationship coaching.

The social events are a great way to ease yourself onto the dating scene without too much pressure. For instance Sharon might book a table for 10 in a city restaurant and hand pick the clients she thinks will get on together. Or she may book a couple of tables at a charity ball. You could find lasting love with another Coco Moon client, or even someone at a completely different table!

Says Sharon: "If they're a bit nervous the first time, we'll meet them from their taxi and introduce them to other members."

When it comes to matchmaking, Sharon claims her service is a far cry from the "sheep dip" approach as she meets each client face to face giving a personal service – much like the old fashioned matchmakers of days gone by.

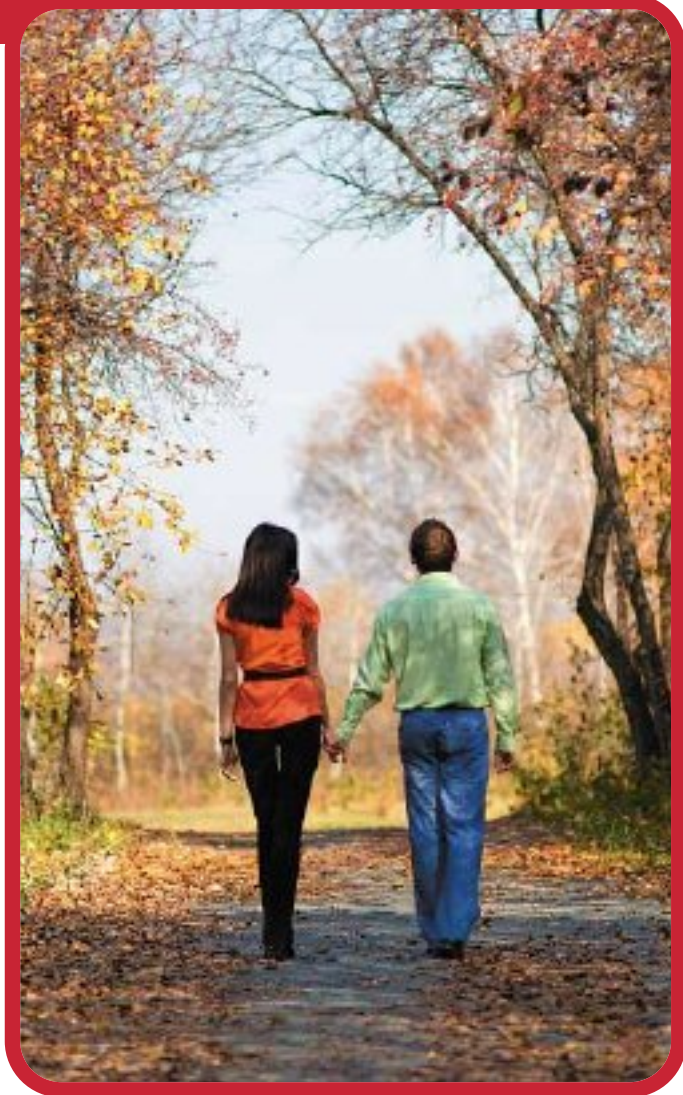
"Most have tried other types of dating but it hasn't worked for them and they've ended up more deflated than ever," she says.

"With a conventional dating service they match you on data such as age and hobbies. But I look deeper, asking what do you want out of life and what's important to you. I ask questions in a different way."

What you won't get is a high volume of possible dates. "We won't give you the details of everyone on our books – that cheapens it," she explains.

And Sharon is also selective – but not on the basis of looks or confidence. "We do have

standards. I have turned people away when they aren't who they say they are," she explains, referring to the odd married



client who has tried to slip through the net.

"Whether you're an extrovert or an introvert, we don't judge. You just need to be a professional person with a genuine commitment."

Sharon can market you passively (where you see selected members' profiles and do the choosing) or actively (where your profile is circulated to selected people) but everything is done at the client's own pace.

And when a couple are "matched" on a date, their profiles are temporarily taken out of circulation.

Although Coco Moon was only officially launched in October, Sharon spent 12 months testing the concept with market research and

getting advice from her many contacts.

But it seems the hard work is paying off already. "People are ringing up every day," she says. "The plan now is to grow the business at the right pace, retaining the quality!"

There's no doubt that Sharon is in her element putting people together and often has a gut instinct when clients are going to click.

"I'm not a fluffy person," she says. "But as corny as it sounds I love being around people. "Part of my role in business was to coach and mentor people so this is the perfect career for me."

● **For more information visit www.cocomoon.co.uk or call (0800) 085-6956.**



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