

Elizabeth Biondi wants to be a matchmaker. After a devastating breakup with a boyfriend last summer, the Detroit social worker decided to channel her romantic energy into something constructive. She had always enjoyed setting friends up on dates--why not strangers? So late last month Biondi, 25, hopped on a plane to New York City and enrolled in matchmaking school.

Biondi is in good company. Dating services have blossomed over the past few years to become a billion-dollar industry. Though the Internet fueled that explosion, real-life matchmakers with names like Great Expectations and It's Just Lunch are popping up around the country like valentines in J. Lo's mailbox. The Matchmaking Institute, which offers the nation's first certification course for would-be Cupids, opened in October and is attracting students from as far away as Singapore. It helps that the modern-day yenta looks less like Sylvia Miles in *Crossing Delancey* and more like Alicia Silverstone in NBC's *Miss Match*: young, attractive and a long way from loserdom--just like her clients. Hey, even Paula Abdul is rumored to have met her boyfriend through a matchmaker through Beverly Hills mother-daughter matchmakers Amber Kelleher-Andrews and Jill Kelleher of Kelleher and Associates [aGreatMatch.com](http://aGreatMatch.com).

The Internet is playing a double role in matchmaking's revival. On the one hand, the ubiquity of online dating--1 in 10 Web surfers uses those sites, which get 40 million hits a month--has eased Americans' hang-ups about paying a third party to set up dates. On the other, Web-dating singles have grown increasingly weary of the attending aggravations--the overly flattering photos, the fibbing bios, the less-than-honorable intentions, the inevitable letdown of that first date.

Online-dating sites are responding by trying to be more like real-life matchmakers. The fastest growing site, [eHarmony.com](http://eHarmony.com) draws 10,000 new users a day with a 436-question screen. [Match.com](http://Match.com) the largest of the services, recently added its own test as well as an advice site manned by live therapists. "We can get into the nuances of chemistry and attraction too, but on a mass scale," says Trish McDermott, vice president of romance for [Match.com](http://Match.com)

But many singles seem to crave the human touch. "People like to think matchmakers are in it not just for money but because they have a sixth sense," says Darren Star, creator of *Miss Match*. "A matchmaker is part psychologist, part psychic."