



Primed and timed for love

Local matchmakers say it takes a mere 210 seconds to size up a potential partner

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By JENNIFER PACKER / The Dallas Morning News

It doesn't take much more than three minutes for two people to figure out if they're interested in dating each other, say the founders of First Glance Dating. The Dallas-based company has taken speed dating to a new level of brevity, slashing recently heralded eight-minute encounters to exactly 210 seconds.

"That's all you need as a starting point to know if there's chemistry," says Andrew Kasten, a University of Texas at Austin graduate who runs the company with business partner Chad Dubrul. "It's designed to be an initial first step. You don't have to determine whether that person's right for you for the rest of your life."

Besides sensing a potential spark, daters can quickly find out things that matter to them, Mr. Dubrul says. "You can ask – 'Do you have kids? Do you like to run?' You can see if they share any similar interests with you. It's like a date interview."

The technique of speed dating involves bringing together equal numbers of men and women for several one-on-one timed mini-dates. Each participant has a sheet of paper on which they circle a "yes" or "no" to indicate which people they'd like to see again. Afterward, organizers give contact information to those who've expressed mutual interest in each other. A match is only a match when both daters choose each other.

The musical chairs/blind-dating trend was spawned five years ago by an Orthodox rabbi from Los Angeles looking to help stem intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews. The rabbi's company, SpeedDating, allots seven minutes per date and guarantees at least seven introductions. Spin-off companies that have since come onto the scene typically give participants seven or eight minutes for each introduction.

Mr. Kasten and Mr. Dubrul decided First Glance Dating would go by a different clock, at first assigning three minutes per date. But as other three-minute speed-dating services sprang up across the country – Chicago-based FastDater, Ohio-based ProgressiveDaters – they added a half-minute to distinguish themselves from the growing pack. New York-based HurryDate,

which guarantees 25 three-minute introductions per event, has a Dallas branch in the works.

For \$30 – paid online at firstglancedating.com – participants are guaranteed at least 10 introductions at each event. The parties are age-specific, grouping together people within a 10- to 15-year age span. The locations for the parties vary, but usually are held at a Starbucks or Humperdinks sports bar.

Women are assigned their own tables. The men seat themselves with one of the women and each pair has 3½ minutes before the sound of the "date terminator" signals the men to move on to the next table. By the end of the night – usually a two-hour affair – each woman has met each man. During intermission, the participants are free to mingle.

Daters are identified only by nametags with their first name and a number. If they're short a man, Mr. Kasten, 29, who is single, steps in. When they're down a woman, First Glance party coordinator Julie Miller, also unattached, takes a seat.

"There are always a few people that are going to chicken out," Ms. Miller says during a First Glance Dating session this month at The Beagle on Greenville Avenue. Next to her, a handful of pre-written name labels remained untouched.

Mr. Dubrul, who has a girlfriend, stays out of the mix.

Once, when they still needed another woman to keep the numbers equal, Mr. Dubrul's mother, visiting from California, sat in and gave advice to men when they rotated to her table. The impromptu plan worked so well that Mr. Dubrul and Mr. Kasten are considering creating a therapist slot as a permanent feature at their events.

Making a connection

At the end of the night – usually a two-hour affair – the daters turn in their dating sheets. Within two days, Mr. Kasten and Mr. Dubrul notify the participants about whether they've made any matches. Those who are successful are supplied e-mail addresses to contact their matches. Those who don't make any connections get to attend another First Glance party for free.

The company's per-date time allotment gives pause to relationship experts such as **Nina Atwood**.

"There's no way that is enough time to know a person and determine whether or not there is a love match," says Ms. Atwood, a Dallas therapist and author of *Soul Talk: Powerful, Positive Communication for a Loving Partnership* (Sourcebooks; \$14.95) and *Be Your Own Dating Service* (Henry Holt; \$12.95). "However, it is enough time to rule out those

who are obviously not suitable, such as someone that you are totally turned off by.

"The trick is to use a large enough filter so that you don't eliminate too many people. The person you feel ho-hum about in those first three minutes might be the person you could fall in love with in a more relaxed one-to-one situation."

Ms. Atwood also warns, "Don't expect to feel a rush of emotion and the feeling that you've found 'the one.' Look instead for the feeling that this could be an interesting person to get to know."

The framework of speed-dating, regardless of the time limit, isn't for everyone, Ms. Atwood says.

"It is potentially damaging to the self-esteem of a less confident person if the result of an evening ... is that not one of them said "yes, I want to meet you for a date. This form of dating is best for people who are fairly secure and self-confident."

Michael Webb, who has written five best-selling books on romance, dating and relationships, says he generally supports the concept of speed dating particularly for those who have difficulty meeting others.

"The drawback ... is that if you don't ask the right questions, you can form your opinion merely on physical traits which won't matter 20 years from now," says Mr. Webb, whose credits also include a Web site about relationships, www.theromantic.com and an online-only e-book, *1000 Questions for Couples*. "It is highly unlikely that you can get to know anyone well enough in three minutes to determine whether you have similar interests, goals and values," the North-Carolina relationship pro says.

That may be true, says Mr. Dubrul, but First Glance Dating has its share of refugees from speed dating companies that use the seven- or eight-minute model.

"We've had a lot of people say eight minutes is too long," Mr. Dubrul says. "Three minutes is longer than people think."

Mr. Dubrul acknowledges that some people have asked him whether First Glance Dating's time limit promotes people looking for bed mates rather than soul mates.

That's entirely possible, he says. But there are also plenty of people looking for a non-threatening, efficient way to meet other singles, Mr. Dubrul says. "We're basically creating a safe space for people to meet and pulling out that fear of rejection." The company's motto is, "Party with a purpose."

Participants only find out with whom they've made a match, never by whom they've been turned down.

Matches made

Elisa Patiño of Euless ended up matching with two of the four men she chose following a First Glance Dating party last month at Starbucks on Belt Line and Preston roads.

A recent transplant to the area, Ms. Patiño, 30, says she signed up because she's found it so hard to meet men to date. "You tend to meet people through friends, family or work, and most people in my office are already married," says Ms. Patiño, an operations manager for a start-up Internet company.

Most of the men at the dating party, she says, were professionals who seemed to have their lives together and talk flowed easily. "With some of them, I asked about their family, their occupation, why they were choosing to use dating services. You tend to ask the same questions."

Despite the short time allotment, she says, "You get a feel for the other person. It's amazing how much is communicated through body language, the inflections in your voice, how much you can find out about a person in three minutes and whether you feel that instant attraction."

She's already been on a "real" date with one of her two matches. So far, she says, "Overall I was really pleased with my first impression of him and it held up through our date."

In addition to the men she met, Ms. Patiño also ended up making friends with several other single women and went out for drinks with them after the event. "I was surprised how much fun it was," she says. By the end of the night, "I felt like I'd flirted all night long."

You have to say something

Matt Edens, 29, a mechanical engineer who lives in Arlington, tried out First Glance Dating recently at the urging of a friend. The hardest part of the evening, he says, was getting the very first conversation rolling.

"You have to say something," he says, "so I was like, 'Hey, what's going on?'" For the rest of the evening, he asked whatever came to mind. He found himself attracted to one woman – until she started talking about Internet pornography.

First Glance Dating has no rules about conversation topics, but Mr. Dubrul says the company expects participants to know what constitutes appropriate conversation and what comments are out of bounds.

Of the three women Mr. Edens chose, he matched with one. Three minutes – the amount of time allotted when he participated – didn't seem like enough

time to get to know each woman, he says. Then again, "One girl was so hard to talk to that a minute and a half would have sufficed."

First Glance dater Paul Mauer, 29, says he found three minutes optimal. "You can meet more girls and also, it reduces the possibility of me saying something wrong. It also allows me to maintain a sense of mystery about myself," says Mr. Mauer, an electrical engineer who moved to Dallas from New York last year.

Although he gave a "yes" to all 13 women at the event, Mr. Mauer's evening didn't yield any matches. But that didn't bother him a bit. "I expect to have to meet a lot of girls to find the right one," he said. During the recent Beagle party, Mr. Mauer made at least two matches.

Unlike their company, Mr. Kasten 29, and Mr. Dubrul, 33, were brought together by a chance encounter a year ago. The two men were seated next to each other on a plane bound from Ohio to Texas. Mr. Dubrul, a stand-up comic, was on his way home to Austin from a gig in Cleveland. Mr. Kasten, working as an attorney in Cleveland, was flying to Dallas via Austin to visit his family.

The two men hit it off immediately, quickly discovering they had a lot in common – including job burnout. Mr. Dubrul was looking for something to supplement his income and anchor his life on the road; Mr. Kasten was looking to leave his profession altogether.

"I sense we're going to do some kind of business together," Mr. Kasten recalls his friend telling him at one point. A few months later, Mr. Kasten told his friend he'd come up with a sure-fire business idea and described the trend of round-robin style dating.

It was a slow start. Their first event, held in October at Starbucks on Preston and Belt Line roads, barely had enough sign-ups to make a go of it. They had to cancel a few parties because of a lack of response. "It hasn't been easy," Mr. Kasten says. "We're learning as we go."

But business has been picking up, and their soirees – usually two a month – have been filling up fast. For some reason, Mr. Kasten says, the women's slots usually fill up first.

Ultimately, Mr. Dubrul says, he and Mr. Kasten may join the speed-dating franchise trend and take their company national. But for now, "We just want our parties to be successful."

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