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Agencies help men learn how to approach women

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Sergio Bowser has always found it hard to approach women because he is painfully shy. A resident of Phoenix, he works in customer service for an airline during the day. At night, he works as a DJ pumping up the crowd to his beats.

"It's funny," he says. "As a DJ, I have no problems interacting with large crowds and pumping up the energy in the room. But the moment I'm off work, I close into a sort of shell."

Which is why he contacted The Professional Wingwoman -- an agency that provides dating assistants to help you approach women when you're out.

A wingwoman or wingman will accompany you to bars, point out potential choices for you, and then help you introduce yourself to the person you fancy.

And sometimes a woman is the better choice.

"Often it's more helpful to have a wingwoman rather than a wingman, as with a wingman, you can look like two guys on the prowl," says Courtney Crosslin, founder of the agency. "A wingwoman looks friendlier."

California-based Marni Kinrys says she was the first to start a wingwoman company in 2004.

"There were some wingmen companies, but we were the first to coin the term 'wingwoman,'" says Kinrys, whose company is called Wing Girl Method. "But the idea of wingmen and wingwomen has been increasing in popularity the past few years. They're agencies sprouting up across the country every month."

The concept has also been gaining in popularity because of shows like "How I Met Your Mother" and actor Neil Patrick Harris's popularization of the wingman concept.

Stephanie Kuch started her company a year ago, when she realized how much easier it was to meet guys with her friend Rebecca Sullivan.

"We would go out every other night, and be each other's wingwoman. That's when we figured that since we were good at it, why not get into it professionally?" says Kuch.

It was also good business. Kuch and Sullivan now run NYC Wingwoman, an agency based in New York, and still work as a wingwoman team.

"We find it works better when we're both around with our client," says Kuch. "Three is more of a group. When it's two people, it can look like a date."

Wingmen and wingwomen offer a more hands-on approach, compared to professional dating coaches, since they accompany you while you search for a potential mate. Most wingmen and wingwomen agencies conduct pre-date coaching sessions.

"We help our clients be more presentable and attractive," says Thomas Edwards, chief executive and founder of The Professional Wingman, an agency unrelated to The Professional Wingwoman. "We try and help them figure out why they're being unsuccessful in the dating scene."

"A lot of times wording is a problem for our clients. They're unable to express their interest properly. While at a bar, we help them with pointers on what to say to their potential mates," says Edwards.

Nick Notas, a confidence strategist and professional wingman based in Boston, says he likes to meet with his client for from 15 to 20 minutes before they hit their targeted venue.

"My job is to point out feasible social situations to my client," says Notas.

Be direct, honest

Notas says he encourages his clients to be honest and direct in their approach.

"If my client spots an attractive woman getting a drink by herself at the bar, I encourage him to go introduce himself. The best approach is to be direct. We discourage pickup lines," says Notas.

Christian von Wachter, a software engineer based in Boston, says he feels a lot more confident about approaching women after being out with Notas as his wingman. After barhopping one evening with Notas, Wachter went home with the phone number of an attractive woman.

"I'm not the kind of guy who frequents bars trying to meet people. But with Nick, I realized that it was actually very simple. Most women at bars want guys to come up and talk to them. It's changed my approach towards meeting girls," says Wachter.

The concept of a wingperson works because most people hang out in bars and other public spots in groups. So it's easier to start talking to people group-to-group, rather than singling out an individual in a group, and then focusing on him or her.

Most agencies have rules against one-night stands.

"If people are looking for sex, there are other agencies that provide such services. We don't want to be one of them," says Edwards.

Client ages and types vary. "We have clients who've just graduated from college to those who're approaching their 60s. We have clients who are doctors, lawyers and artists. We have clients who've never kissed a girl to those who've just come out of marriages that lasted longer than a decade," says Edwards.

Cost is steep

All of this is at a steep cost.

The charges at The Professional Wingman range from \$125 to \$250 per hour.

Crosslin of The Professional Wingwoman is currently in Arizona recruiting wingwomen for her team.

"I'm looking for women who're comfortable in different social situations, who don't have trouble starting conversations, and who are fun and friendly. Those are the ideal characteristics of a wingwoman," says Crosslin.

Crosslin realized the need for such a service after her divorce. She had to pack her bags, move to New York, and start her life over.

"I realized that there were a lot of people out there who were just out of long-term relationships, and wanted to start dating again. It's hard to start dating after a break. The idea for The Professional Wingwoman stemmed from there. I wanted it to be a service for people who were new to dating, and for those just out of stable

relationships," says Crosslin.

Women look online

Kuch says that though she started the service to be a wingwoman for women looking to meet men, the market for that was barely existent.

"Women still look to online dating as a way to meet dates. So we decided to focus on being wingwomen to men looking to meet other women," says Kuch.

"It sometimes backfires," says Kuch. "It turned out that one of our clients was actually interested in me."

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