

The anti-social-network social network

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Facebook and LinkedIn are great for connecting with friends and business associates you already know. But what if you want to expand your social circle and meet new people?

For that, there's By/Association, a still-tiny site that is a new twist on social networking — not that its founders would describe it that way.

"We've stripped out everything that would make it a social network," said Michael Karnjanaprakorn, who is heading the venture. "You can't search for people, see other profiles or pictures. It doesn't matter what they look like — it's not a dating site."

Instead, he said, the idea is to foster introductions between creative types who are looking to expand their social horizons.

"I know a lot of people in the tech and design community in New York but don't know any knife-makers or doctors," said Mr. Karnjanaprakorn. "I wanted to meet people in other industries — someone I would never meet otherwise but would really get a lot of value out of meeting."

By/Association is the latest creation of All Day Buffet, a new-media start-up in New York that hosts conferences and provides marketing consulting for companies. Mr. Karnjanaprakorn is one of the company's founders.

By/Association is a private service. Members are screened after filling out a somewhat lengthy online application with a series of questions about themselves and their interests. Since the service was introduced in July, more than 700 people have submitted applications, and the service has about 450 members.

"We only reject people that write one-word answers or don't take it seriously," Mr. Karnjanaprakorn said.

The matchmaking is currently done by hand, by examining applications and choosing people in corresponding cities who seem like a good fit. As the program expands, Mr. Karnjanaprakorn said, the company might employ a software-driven recommendation system to help facilitate matchmaking. Those who are matched get an introductory e-mail message, and it is up to them to decide what to do next.

The site covers London, Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York, with plans to expand to Toronto and Chicago by the end of the year.

"We want to grow it slow and grow it right," Mr. Karnjanaprakorn said. "We aren't trying to blow this out and make it like Facebook."

The service is now free, but the company says it plans to charge an annual membership fee as it grows larger in major cities. The idea is that members will eventually be able to organize and host events through the service, similar to what Meetup.com does.

"We know it's not going to be perfect all the time, but we hope we can get at a secret sauce of finding someone interesting to meet," Mr. Karnjanaprakorn said.

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