

Two's company

The world's most exclusive social network



Let's swap emoticons

South Koreans take romance seriously. Lovers are expected to swap sweet nothings many times a day and woe betide the clod who forgets a "100-day anniversary". Some pairs dress in "couple style", in the same garish red sweater and blue jeans combo, for instance. Small wonder that a Korean firm has created a social network for couples.

VCNC's app is called "Between". It creates a private space for two people, in which they can share photographs and special memories, chat in real time and exchange any number of cute "emoticons": smiley faces, winks, hearts and so on. Though revolting to singles, Between is a hit. Since its launch in November, more than 560,000 Koreans have fallen for it. This comes despite VCNC spending virtually nothing on marketing. Park Jae-uk, the firm's boss, claims another 200,000 users abroad, divided between China, Japan and North America.

Between is part of a trend towards intimacy in social networking. Some Facebook users are fed up with the torrent of "friend" requests from people they barely know. Others resent being tagged in embarrassing photographs their boss can see. Hence the rise of services such as Path, an American network that limits members to 150 friends. Other networks, such as FamilyLeaf and Storytree, target families.

VCNC is betting that couples particularly value their privacy. A message on one's Facebook "Wall" from an old flame can incinerate a new relationship. Cutting the ex (and everyone else) out removes the risk. Cynics may ask how a social network for two differs from simply sending text messages back and forth. Between's users presumably think the cynics lack romance in their souls.

Revenue will come from advertising. The firm hopes that nice restaurants and sellers of romantic holidays will pay to pitch to loved-up couples. It also plans to offer premium services, such as the printing of photobooks documenting the progress of a relationship.

Swingers may be miffed to learn that Between allows only one partner per user. But some cheaters have beaten the system by using multiple identities, laughs Mr Park. He is unlikely to join them. Running VCNC keeps him too busy even for one girlfriend, he laments.

Fonte: The Economist, London, v. 403, n. 8785, p. 72, 19-25 May 2012.

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