

**Jason Stockwood MD International match.com
Philosophy Alumnus Graduated 1995**

Featured in Origins Ed 3. April 2009.

Please do not reprint without permission. Contact Alumni & Development Office.



1) According to our research, you have progressed rather impressively from winning a scholarship to America, then to study Philosophy at Bolton Institute (1995) to MD, International of Match.com. Our current students would like to read, 'how did you get to where you are now?'

Like many 18 year olds when I left school, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I didn't want to go into tertiary education straight away, so instead I applied for and won a scholarship to study in the US. Whilst away I discovered my appetite for travel, so I went on a Kibbutz in Israel for a few months and travelled around the country. When I returned to the UK, I worked on the docks in Grimsby for six months while interviewing for a number of opportunities. I was fortunate to be accepted as a Cultural Representative at Disney World in Florida which was essentially dressing up in plus fours and a frilly shirt to talk to Americans about what it is like to be from the UK. Here I continued to read incessantly, particularly literature and poetry and would always cross reference the writer's sources, which invariably led to works of philosophy. It quickly occurred to me that I could come back to the UK and basically read for three years all of the stuff I loved to read anyway, so I applied to a number of places to study for a degree in Philosophy. I originally went to Manchester Metropolitan University and after my first year transferred to Bolton to complete my study.

When I graduated I had been accepted to The University of York to continue my studies with an MA/DPhil in Political Philosophy. I had every intention of trying to pursue an academic career, but first took a job with the travel company, Trailfinders in London. I found I enjoyed the work, the company and the opportunity to continue to travel almost monthly, so stayed for three years until I accepted a job in Business Development for Lufthansa German Airlines. During my time at the airline the internet was starting to become commercially interesting, Lufthansa was among nine airlines that had joined together to look at creating their own travel portal. I was personally interested in the new technology and put my hand up to write a paper

on the state of the internet in the UK, who the main players were and what the potential market opportunity was. During the course of the research I became aware of a business called lastminute.com and when I discovered they needed someone to run their airline business in the UK, I was in a good spot for the role as I had immersed myself in the new technology and was passionate about its potential.

At lastminute.com I was fortunate enough to be involved with a great business and worked with inspirational leaders and hard working, smart people who were passionate about the brand. As the business grew, I grew personally and was given more responsibility until I eventually became MD of Travelocity Business.

After nearly seven years at lastminute.com and a number of roles I was looking for a new challenge, something that tested my skills beyond the travel industry and utilised some of the technologies and concepts that were being categorised as Web 2.0 (social media, peer to peer, user generated content etc). I also wanted to get involved with something that had a more social utility, so when I was approached by Match.com to run their European businesses I was delighted to accept a great opportunity with both a nascent category and brand.

2) Match.com has recently launched its personality testing, how is it progressing? Has it helped your millions of UK members to find love and happiness?

We launched our new Personality Test on the UK site at the end of last year. The Test has been put together by world renowned biological anthropologist Dr Helen Fisher to help our members find real love by understanding their personality type.

Dr Fisher has studied the science behind love and attraction for 35 years. She has found that who we fall in love with all comes down to our chemical make-up and the most dominant chemical in the part of our brain that deals with romantic love and attachment e.g dopamine, serotonin, testosterone or oestrogen. Dr Fisher has determined four personality types based on which particular chemical is dominant. These are; Explorer, Builder, Negotiator and Director. Our Test helps identify the personality type of our members to help us make even better matches.

To date the test has been taken by over 200,000 members in the UK and we are seeing a huge increase in engagement across the site. In January alone, an additional 500,000 emails and winks were sent between members compared to the same month last year.

3) The UK singles market is expected to hit 16 million by 2010, that is a lot of unhappy or happy bachelors, why do think this is and do you have any plans which you can share with your single customers to help them find Love?

There are many sociological and economic reasons that can explain why the number of singles in Britain is on the rise.

There is no longer the stigma around being single there once was. It's both more common and more acceptable to get married and start a family later. Largely because we lead increasingly busy lives in which making our way up the career ladder is prioritised. Higher incomes have brought greater financial independence and more single person households.

We are no longer prepared to settle for someone who just isn't 'the one' because we don't need to. We've seen our parents and possibly grandparents who married young divorce so know how important it is to get it right.

But none of this means we've fallen out of love with falling in love. Love remains a fundamental human need and the fact that we all want to find someone to share our lives with will never change. It's why online dating sites like match.com have become so popular. Searching for your soul mate online fits neatly into our busy lives and the technology helps find our best possible match.

At match.com we've seen a 35% increase in new-sign ups this year, so we're busier than ever, but our focus remains the same. Everything we do is about Making Love Happen, which is making sure we give our members the best chance of finding love.

The key is talking to and listening to your customers. Your customers are at the heart of your business and to be successful you must act upon what you hear. Over the coming months we will be fine tuning our Personality Test and putting together an advice centre to help our members on their way to success.

4) You've talked in the press about the power of social networking, e-mentoring and power of the web, please explain how our current students and alumni can benefit from these developments?

I think it is all about accessibility and connectivity. The first iteration of the web was essentially about ecommerce and a one way, generally transactional relationship with web-sites. The trends that have emerged over the last five years have put precedence on the social applications of the web and have created an ongoing dialogue between everybody that has access to a PC.

This taps in to our fundamental human need to communicate, listen and learn. The information that is possible to discover and talk about because of the web constantly amazes me. In practical terms it means that there is now (a) no excuse for not knowing something and (b) no excuse for not putting your ideas out there to be shared and debated. I work on the firm belief that the free expression of ideas and the debate and discussion of those ideas are what moves both us as individuals and the world forward.

Technology has never been better placed to help make that happen. As an example there is a great mentoring website called www.horsemouth.co.uk that connects mentors skills with people who have questions/issues they want help with. It is now so easy to open a browser and ask someone with experience about starting a business, to help address trouble with you girlfriend or ask which college course to attend. Ten years ago that type of resource was unimaginable. The real beauty of the web is that it's always providing new ways we can engage with each other and it's all these new types of social applications and our free access to information that will make us all, in the words of The Cluetrain Manifesto; 'feel bigger rather than smaller'.

5) Is the social online success of Facebook, Twitter and MySpace etc perceived as competition, complimentary or a communication tool for Match.com?

Social networking has clearly fuelled the net generation and people are spending more time on the web than ever before, but we think of the relationship between dating sites and social networks as complimentary.

Dating sites and social networks share many of the same characteristics. We're both about bringing people together and this is something we've been successfully doing since 1995.

Sites like Facebook are great at helping people manage their existing relationship networks, but what match.com does is help people expand these, by meeting new people with an interest in forming romantic relationships.

6) What is match.com's advantages over traditional dating agency methods?

Firstly a dating site puts you in control of your search for love. As a member of a site like match.com, you can use the sophisticated searching and matching technology to find him/her for yourself at a time and in a place that's right for you.

Secondly it all comes down to scale. match.com alone has seen over 6 million new members join the UK site. That's a lot of single people in one place.

Finally with the average cost of a date coming in at £38, a dating service costing just over £10 a month offers great value for money.

7) During these difficult times, our younger current students face limited first job opportunities and our part-time older students are feeling financial and social pressures not to complete. What advice, wisdom and encouragement can you offer?

I can only suggest what I personally have had some success with which is finding something you love to do and work hard at it. Use every experience as an opportunity to learn and take the longer view on what success will look like for you as an individual. It may sound trite, but your own happiness and personal fulfillment is what is at stake, so make sure your aspirations look to fulfil that goal rather than some externally imposed view of what success looks like.

When looking for a job, it may not start with your ideal role but if you can get a job in that general sector if you work hard and impress people, you can move towards your ideal. If you can't get a role in that sector, keep updating your skills that you can transfer when the opportunity arises.

As we only get one shot in life, it seems obvious to me that your best shot at being successful is through education in its broadest sense, whether that is through a formal environment like University or through learning in your own environment. As individuals you are the only one responsible for your progression through life. So be passionate, have confidence in your ability, be prepared to take risks and fail and just keep getting back up again and learning. Be ready to grab every opportunity that comes your way. As Samuel Beckett says; "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

Most importantly don't take yourself too seriously and try to let go of your ego as soon as you can in your career; the secret to success is being part of a hard working team and surrounding yourself with people that are smarter than you.

8) Finally, tell us about your time at Bolton Institute, any fond memories? and how did a Philosophy degree contributes to your success?

As someone who came to tertiary education later (I still feel I haven't peaked yet) Bolton Institute gave me the intellectual tools and framework to be able to continue to learn and grow. For me, it was the starting point for the rest of my education and fuelled the passion I still have for learning and education.

9) Would you be willing to return to University of Bolton and share your entrepreneurial achievements and give a guest lecture to our students?

Absolutely

10) Have you tested Match.com for yourself?

Of course, using and understanding your own product is absolutely fundamental when managing a business. However I have a beautiful partner and a young baby so don't need to test the services fully.

11) What's your favourite match.com success story?

There are so many. More than 500,000 people a year write and tell us they have found the person they are looking for on match.com. Not a day goes past when we don't receive emails and letters from people who have successfully found love.

The great thing about the internet is without doubt its ability to bring people together who would never normally meet. Take Nicky and Paul for example. They lived in the same street, visited the same local pub and their parents even worked together, but they never actually met until joining match.com. Another couple worked in the same hospital and were emailing on match.com from the floor above each other, which just goes to show, sometimes you really can't leave love to Cupid and Fate.