

Matchmaker, matchmaker, find my start-up a co-founder

A frenzied dating game is on as entrepreneurs seek the right match

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Have an idea, but need a techie with great coding skills to see it through? Or need a seasoned marketer to build your business?

Quick, place an ad for a co-founder on LinkedIn. Or go on one of those speed-dating sessions at networking platforms like StartupWeekend or TiE to find one. Or post your profile on matchmaking sites like Co-founders lab, ColabFinder, Found2be, AngelList. Or simply join one of those communities on Google+, like PartnerUp.

Move over, Tinder. The most frenzied dating game today is in the start-up world. Everybody wants a co-founder. Desperately.

"You can lead your life without a dating partner. But

you can rarely survive in the start-up world without a co-founder," said Ravi Kiran, co-founder of Venture Nursery, a start-up for start-ups. Since paid employees are considered less committed, entrepreneurs are casting out lures in the form of equity to get hold of a co-founder.

It took Akshata Agarwal and her husband, stand-up comedian Kamal Trilok Singh, five months of hard searching to find a co-founder for their start-up, Gigit, an event discovery platform. The duo knew the events business in and out as they ran a comedy gig called Awkward Fruit, but they needed someone to take care of the tech nuances.

"If we had to really put a step-by-step guide to finding a co-founder, Step 1 would be to go to a temple, close your

eyes and wait for the voice. For us, it (finding a co-founder) has been the most difficult part of being able to build our business," said Agarwal.

They started off by posting on LinkedIn, then tried "some outsourcing mechanisms".

"We got cheated a couple of times," recalled Agarwal. "When all hope seemed lost, we stalked Aurobindo Sarkar, a very senior techie, on Link-

edIn." He agreed to mentor the duo and find a co-founder. And thus they got hold of Satyajit Bhadange, an MTech from IIT.

Sought after breed

"The start-up world is full of business guys looking for techies to give shape to their dreams," said Kashyap Deorah, the IITian founder of RightHalf, and author of *Golden Tap*, a book on start-ups in

India. There are plenty of co-founder dating events and matchmaking apps hooking up entrepreneurs, pointed out Deorah.

"Just like in Tinder, where there are more men looking for women, and women have to protect themselves from stalkers, in the start-up community, it is all about tech co-founders," he added.

Coding skills

But increasingly now, there are entrepreneurs with good coding skills who are seeking co-founders with business development skills as well.

"People want co-founders for multiple reasons—for skills, for funds, to help cushion shocks. Unlike earlier, most people understand that one individual cannot build a business. They need a team," said Venture Nursery's Kiran, citing the saying: "Alone you can walk fast, but with a friend you can walk past."

He pointed out how he himself has built all his businesses with co-founders — be it Venture Nursery (with Shrawan Shroff, founder and former MD of Fame Cinema), Friends of Ambition, a growth advisory firm, or Dazzletoday, a B2B SAAS platform for the event industry.

Also, Deorah pointed out, "with the social proof for entrepreneurship arriving, slowly the dating game is becoming less one-sided."

There is now a feeling that if you are in a job with an MNC, you are not creative enough. So, there are now a lot of experienced guys who want a share of the excitement of the start-up world offering themselves up as co-founders.

Venture Nursery has a forum called Executives in Residence, where people in paid jobs who want to be part of the rollercoaster start-up ride but have no ideas of their own can meet up with entrepre-

neurs. "To be fair, the programme has not hooked up anyone yet," confessed Kiran.

Good strike rate

There may be plenty of dating platforms, but just like Tinder, there is a lot of swiping left and right, heartburn, bad experiences before you get to the right partner.

"The strike rate for finding the right partners is as good as Tinder when it comes to marriage," said Deorah. "You might quickly get past first level, go steady for a while, but actual conversion to coming on board is going to be very low."

And even after you find the ideal co-founder, divorces can happen. Several stories of cheating and compatibility issues are surfacing now.

But undeterred, our entrepreneurs will get over the heartache, and go on yet another dating platform to find a new partner.



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