

AirTroductions Sets Up In-Flight Connections

By Frank Ahrens

Unless you can afford a first-class seat on an airplane, you're stuck in steerage -- a cargo area where solo travelers have little say about the person who will become their seat neighbor -- also known as the person you plan to claw your way through when this thing ditches in open water.

Now, a Web business, <http://www.airtroductions.com/>, is attempting to ameliorate the undesirable seat-neighbor problem.

The recently launched site has described itself as "JDate meets the Mile-High Club," though participation presumably is not limited solely to those of the J-ish persuasion.

"Having taken over 500 flights in the past four years, I can count on one hand the number of times that I've been seated next to someone I actually wanted to talk to," site founder Peter Shankman said in a release. "Creating AirTroductions was a labor of love. Hopefully, people can match themselves up and sit next to someone they want to talk to! Imagine what kind of success can come from this, on a business, personal, and friendship level!"

Shankman sounds very much like someone you would not want for a neighbor unless he dialed back the exclamation marks a bit.

It works like this: You buy your ticket as usual, then go to AirTroductions, log in and create a profile. You can post a photo, just like JDate, Match.com or any other computer dating service, then are encouraged to say what kind of person you would like to sit next to. I wrote:

"I'm a 41-year-old male who's looking to meet a younger woman, possibly an aerobics instructor or NFL cheerleader, who has an advanced degree from an Ivy League school and a mid-six-figure salary."

Were I being entirely truthful, I would have written: "A very skinny mime with excellent hygiene and a big bladder." But I figured that might scotch the road test.

The site then asks users to describe themselves. I wrote:

"I'm a 41-year-old male with delusions of grandeur."

I had coincidentally just booked a flight from Washington to Charleston, W.Va. That plane usually has about a dozen passengers, most of whom make me want to ride on the wing. I typed in the flight data, and AirTroductions searched and responded: "No travelers found."

Shocker.

I got the same result when I pretended to be a swinging bachelor, typing in a long-weekend Columbus Day pond-hop to London on Virgin Atlantic. I tried an extra-hip Thanksgiving weekend flight to Iceland. Same thing. But the site continues to search. If it turns up a match, who knows? I can see myself kickin' it with the big-brained aerobics instructor in a natural hot spring in Reykjavik in November.

So far, I have numbers working against me. Because the site is so new, it has fewer than 800 registered users. Tough odds: How many of us could honestly say that, out of a pool of less than 800 people, there's even one you could stand to sit next to on the L.A.-to-Sydney hump?

The site is free to browse. If it turns up a match and the traveler chooses to contact the person, there's a \$5 charge.

Or you could spend the \$5 on an in-flight cocktail, which will undoubtedly make you witty, fascinating and powerfully attractive to the person next to you.