

hello
ROMEO



Thanks to the internet and the mobile app, everything, including sex, is just a click away. Finding the right long-term partner, however, remains as challenging as ever. Perhaps that's why an offline, old-fashioned dating agency for gay men is doing great business. Tim Warrington meets Vinko Anthony from Beau Brummell Introductions for this report from the romance front.



I was a touch sceptical when asked to pen a story about an agency that specialises in hookin' up fellas. I mean, what's wrong with the tried and true method of get drunk; go to bar; meet guy; get laid?

My prospective date compatibility tests, usually conducted over the rim of a beer glass had served me well in the past... I think. And while I haven't met my shining knight yet, the guys haven't been that bad... have they?

Okay, so there was the guy who tucked his dick between his legs and asked me to tickle his legs and call him Julia. Then there was the guy who threw up on me while we were having sex. Oh, and musical theatre man who could only climax if the *Sound Of Music*, *Hello Dolly* or *Xanadu* soundtrack was playing during our love making.

And it suddenly dawned on me, as I hurtle towards my forties, that I'm one cat and a microwave meal away from the spinster stereotype. I am a dating disaster. I need help!

Beau Brummell Introductions was founded by romantic partners, Vinko Anthony and Andrea Zaza. I asked Vinko about the success the company has experienced (and sought a little personal advice into the bargain).

DNA: What can a prospective client expect?

Vinko Anthony: The Beau Brummell process is unique. I'm not aware of anyone else working in the personalised, detailed way we do.

We like to meet everyone face-to-face. We invest time in getting to know each one of our clients until we feel confident that we know them well enough to introduce them to our other clients, who have been through the same process.

It's important for us to create friendships with our clients so that they feel comfortable enough to share their lives with us, their inspirations and desires. We need to understand people's values. In our game it's just as important to understand what works sexually for people. Let's face it, we're not here for friendships, we're here to create relationships. Yes, we agree that the process of getting to know someone comes first. Creating firm foundations before sex is important, but we're the first ones to point out to our clients that they might have been on one too many dates and it's time for dating to take a different direction, if you know what I mean. We're really happy for people to stay friends; this is a big part of our service, to extend friendships through dinner parties and functions that we hold in our home. Clients get to know our environment and feel safe and comfortable there.

One on one introductions are always done between two people after a certain amount of information has been shared between them. This way they already feel like they have been on several dates before they meet each other. With us knowing each client as we do and with the amount of information exchanged, it's very hard to get it wrong and for the two

people not to like each other. Whether the sexual chemistry is there is up to them. One thing all clients have in common is that they're on the same page when it comes to long-term relationships and they are all open to dating. This makes our job much easier.

Our personal lives have stopped! If Andrea and I didn't work together we would never see each other! We work with busy people's diaries, meaning lots of meetings after 5pm and every weekend fully booked with new dates and interviews. We take the whole process very seriously, but most of all we have a lot of fun. It's dating and it's meant to be light and easy.

Our clients enjoy having someone sift through the obstacles – we only match them up to people we believe are their equal. I love that we have created a place where people feel comfortable. They put their trust in us and believe that we're able to introduce them to people that they ordinarily wouldn't meet. Our process is not about sending clients on hundreds of dates; it's about finding the right dates.

“Knowing each client as we do and with the amount of information exchanged, it's very hard to get it wrong and for the two people not to like each other.”

Are straight men and gay men different when it comes to dating?

I have no idea how straight men date! Dating is about fun and meeting new people. It becomes about mirror imaging – if you're open and honest and try to be the best person you can be, then you'll get the best out of the other person. Try to be engaging, intriguing and positive – most of the time you'll get the same back.

Don't go on a conventional date – an interesting walk is one of my favourites or even an art gallery. Looking at art is a great way to find things out about people's tastes. It's interesting and provocative. The first date doesn't have to be long – keep it short and sweet if you prefer. It's still ample time to find out if there are enough things you like about that person to go on a second date.

Do you find that your clients are generally older, because younger guys tend to think, “I know what I'm doing.” And it's not until later

that they realise they're still single so maybe they're doing something wrong?

A lot of our clients are aged between 33 and 48, but even in the 26 to 33 age group our numbers are high. The younger clients understand exactly what we do and are very open to it. The men in this age group who come to us are generally those who don't necessarily want to just go out on the gay scene. They've had enough of electronic applications and bad nightclubs and want something more. They understand that a young, professional, gay man has his goals set and would think out of the box and meet people in other ways. This is exactly why we have been so successful in Australia. There are thousands of young professionals you just don't meet out and about. When there is an event you see them and you ask yourself, “Where do they all live?” Meeting them is difficult as they spend time with their friends and have more of a serious approach to life. They are normally high achievers and inspiring people with goals.

When we asked a Melbourne client, a 27-year-old doctor, what he liked about the concept and why he thinks it would work for him he said, “Well, I have thought about it and matchmaking is one of the oldest customs in so many cultures and it obviously works.” Then he added, “If you don't find me someone by the time I'm 30, then my mother is going to try and I'm sure you have better people for me than my mum does!” Of course, we signed him right away.

How does your service differ from an online dating site?

We're totally different to online dating sites – there is no comparison at all. They're not our competition. In fact, they're the reason we get so many clients. We give people confidence and guidance; we do all the work and search for the right person. There is no need to spend endless hours searching through photos, which may or may not be authentic. We only introduce clients to those who will complement each other.

Our recipe is definitely working; we've successfully matched 48 couples in the first 14 months of business. It comes down to our clientele. We have attracted a great bunch of guys through clever advertising and branding. Our success rate is about 70 per cent.

Do opposites attract? Do you put people together who look opposite on paper?

Opposites attract but you have to be careful here. One of the most important things about being in a relationship is that you feel like you're learning and growing all the time. We have much more to learn from those who are our opposite and will introduce us to different experiences. We have to be careful when it comes to energy and personality, but people that have different careers often work well together and complement one another. Age is also a funny thing these days, even though

Vinko (left) was born in Dubrovnik, Croatia and grew up in a small, close-knit community, which shaped his down-to-earth outlook on life. Andrea (right) from Bitonto in Southern Italy studied in Rome and lived in Vienna before meeting Vinko on holiday in the Adriatic and moving to Sydney.



we do try to match you generationally. We have to be aware of people's spirit and lifestyle desires. We have often been surprised by who works with who. We always listen to our clients' conversations and engage as we might pick up on something that will take us in the direction of their true love.

In so many areas of our life we're given guidance. But in one of the most important, choosing a life partner, we're remarkably independent and tend to receive little advice. Why is this?

We're becoming more open to taking guidance in this area. In the end we choose independently but it always helps to have guidance – if only to save you time and make the process easier. We are all individuals and have that sexual thing that can drive us crazy and we often make decisions from the heart. Nevertheless, we all like to have a partner who ticks all the boxes that we believe we deserve. In this respect a professional can help to guide you into making smarter choices.

It's not always easy to do it on your own and advice is often welcomed by those who know what they want and who they want to spend their life with.

According to Jerry Seinfeld, "Dating is pressure and tension. What is a date, really, but a job interview that lasts all night?" Is a date really like a job interview?

I guess it can feel that way sometimes, which is why we always introduce people after they've had some initial contact. This way they're

likely to have got some of the more basic questions out of the way and they can focus on discovering whether they really get along and if there's a spark. We encourage our clients to look at dating as an opportunity, if nothing else, to meet someone new, enjoy their company, learn something and share life experiences. **You say on your site, "Busy professionals with full lives and hectic schedules often have little desire to devote their precious free time to investigating the well-trodden paths to finding a partner." Will these sort of clients have enough time to invest in their partner once you introduce them?**

We find that they do. They come to us because they really want to spend their free time wisely, not trawling bars in search of a partner. If they're committed enough to use our services then they're committed enough to invest time in any resulting relationship. They make it a priority.

It's amazing how, once you meet that special person, your schedule clears pretty quickly and you make time. What many people don't have time for is going on the wrong dates. This is what our work is about, introducing you to people who are on the same path as you, people who understand busy lives and people who will complement each other in many different ways.

Have you ever received any negative criticism? Agencies which specialise in this sort of introduction have, at times, been accused of exploiting the lonely or broken hearted.

The clients we represent understand the value

in our work. We are so much more than just a matchmaking service – we're about relationship guidance and leading a more fulfilled life. Our clients want a higher calibre of person than they are meeting through other avenues and that's what we provide. We work with everyone in the same personalised way and only introduce them to the right people, which reduces the room for negative criticism. **What sort of people come to you?**

Our clients are mostly busy, professional men who don't have time to spend hours in bars or on internet sites. He doesn't necessarily feel fulfilled by the typical gay scene and finds other things like career and lifestyle more important. I hate to use the word "normal" but that is a good way to explain them. They're regular people with high standards, definite goals and busy lives. We attract private people who genuinely want to share their lives with someone with the same values. Trust, honesty and monogamy are very important to our clients.

There are probably a lot of guys thinking it's a great idea but they're a little nervous about taking the first step. What would you say to them?

People come to us when they're ready. They make the first step when the time is right. Our first meeting is obligation free and provides a way for people to understand our concept and the way we work with our clients. We love it when new clients share our enthusiasm and are positive about the future after meeting with us. All I would like to say is that we have a lot of fun by bringing the communication >>



* Favourable odds: Beau Brummell's success rate is about 70 per cent.

>> and social aspects back into the community. A recent article in *Marie Claire* claimed that playing hard to get never works. What do you think?

I agree! No one these days has time to play hard to get. Our clients like real people – people that are open and honest about their feelings. If the other person feels the same, you'll get positive results and cut out all the unnecessary games.

According to author Shannon L Alder, "Love doesn't make the world go 'round; love is what makes the ride worthwhile."

Absolutely. There is nothing like being in love. Life is so much more worthwhile when shared with someone who you love and loves you back. However, it takes a lot of devotion, patience and respect. Relationships are constant work but worth every cent. I am a true romantic at heart – it's the simple things in life that we all want to share with someone and life is so much more beautiful when shared.

Do you think technology/social media has had a negative impact on dating?

Technology has had a huge impact on dating but I guess it has a time and a place. Our clients are pretty unanimous in their desire to get back to real, genuine communication. Technology can take a lot of empathy from our lives. We're writing a book at the moment that concentrates on developing good communication and listening skills. We need to get back to basics.

Perhaps dating isn't the best way to get to know someone. Everyone is on their best behaviour during a date. Maybe it's better to spend time with people in their natural habitat.

I agree that the best way to get to know someone is in their everyday environment but you have to start somewhere and a date is the perfect way. Your first date is often a great reflection of how confident, comfortable and

imaginative you can be. You'll be mindful of what you choose to do, what you talk about and how you make the other person feel and that's a solid start in getting to know someone.

People have forgotten how to go out on dates, what to do and how much to reveal. Through the process of getting to know our

"People have forgotten how to go out on dates, what to do and how much to reveal... The first date can be short and sweet."

clients we try to encourage them to just be themselves and remove the mask. It's a real skill to be able to do this as we are often programmed by life and work to put on a façade. My favourite way of getting to know someone is through doing an activity together; something fun; something that brings out the inner child.



JONAH (39)

DNA: At what point did you decide to seek professional help from an introduction agency and why?

Jonah: After being out for six years, I aggressively started to date online. Two years

later, once my business consumed all of my time, I decided I needed to do something different.

How would you describe the experience?

The service far exceeded my expectations. Having been through a disappointing experience with a Los Angeles introduction service, I knew I needed something more personal. I am in the service business and the service I received was the most personal I've encountered.

What was the best thing about the service?

It was all about me, all the time and I really had the feeling that they "got me". I'm a tough person to understand and they proved that they did by introducing me to the right potential mates. It really was very impressive.

Did you have any reservations?

Yes, I did before I used the first service in LA and even more so after I had such a disappointing experience. Vinko and Andrea did a great job of convincing me that their service was different and followed through.

Are you satisfied with the outcome?

Beyond satisfied. I'm so grateful to the guys for what they did for my love life that I take any and all reference calls that come in regards to their service. I don't do that with any other services I've used in the past.

With all the online dating, cruising and sex sites as well as apps, what made you choose Beau Brummell?

I was sold by the guarantee of personal attention and the idea that if they got to know and understand me that I'd be able to connect with someone that would really be the right fit. My gamble paid off.



ROB (32)

DNA: At what point did you decide to seek professional help from an introduction agency and why?

Rob: It was New Years Eve 2011 and after

midnight I was pretty much, "That's it. I want a reliable midnight kiss." I had already seen the ad for the agency beforehand and considered it, but midnight NYE was the moment that pushed me across the line. There are actually not that many options for meeting guys that aren't about just hooking up. Partly this is because you risk a punch in the face if you ask out a straight guy by mistake but I think it's also because gay men are becoming lazy in their relationships and frequently choosing casual ones, which are perceived as easier and more accessible. I was looking for something different and thought that if I didn't give Beau Brummell a try I'd end up wondering, "What if?"

How would you describe the experience?

Really enjoyable but also confronting. I love meeting new people and Vinko and Andrea are incredibly friendly and attentive. They actually

date you first to get to know you and see what you are like in that kind of environment; very quirky but also clever. I found, though, that it forces you to take a hard look at yourself and evaluate what you are really looking for in life. I've met a bunch of guys that I would never have otherwise met and, even though I'm not in that elusive long-term relationship yet, I've made a few really amazing friends.

What was the best thing about the service?

I would have to say the hope that it instills. Over time you can start to get jaded with the gay community because what you see and hear most often about is the "scene" lifestyle and everything that entails. Engaging with Beau Brummell has basically reminded me that there are plenty of guys out there with similar values to me and it's just a matter of time before I meet that one for me.

Did you have any reservations about using a service like this?

Of course! It's very new and different and we all shy away from things that we don't have experience in. Online sites and apps allow us to hide behind a computer screen or phone. Beau Brummell is an opportunity to put yourself out there (and potentially get hurt in the process) but hopefully also get something really positive out of it. It's a chance to be brave, which I think a lot of us can sometimes forget how to be in the world of relationships.

Are you satisfied with the outcome?

Despite still being single, I would have to say yes I am. Of course you go into these kind of things hoping for a particular outcome, but the reality is that it can still take a while to meet that right person. If I had the option of starting over I would absolutely do it again.

With all the online dating, cruising and sex sites as well as apps, what made you choose Beau Brummell?

The answer is in the question. Beau Brummell is fundamentally different in its structure to the myriad of online dating sites and apps. The latter are based on immediate gratification, and therefore defy building something for the future by their very definition; not that it doesn't sometimes happen.

Beau Brummell is, from the beginning, about finding people that are looking to stay around for more than one evening. It requires you to put yourself out there as well as put some effort in, which results in becoming invested in the whole process and consequently more likely to build an attachment with someone.

It's easy to confuse a casual relationship for a real one and therefore we're at risk of thinking we can just jump into another relationship and not work at the one we're in. I was seeking an avenue for meeting other gay men that were looking to build a future with a partner. It basically helped me narrow the field to those who were more serious.



MICHAEL (LATE THIRTIES)

DNA: At what point did you decide to seek professional help from an introduction agency and why?

Michael: Having recently been through a number of short term relationships, I had grown tired of the frivolous lifestyle that in many respects characterised my twenties and early thirties. I'm a fairly active person so I certainly wasn't ready to settle down either. Being adventurous and impulsive was still a big part of my character, so I was almost looking to date two different types of people! **How would you describe the experience?** Finding a partner wasn't going to be easy and to tell you the truth I didn't have any great expectations in relation to satisfying this gap in my life. I read an article on Vinko and Andrea and thought why not? I could afford the service and having never run into this kind of agency before I was curious about who I might meet.

I wasn't about to tell anyone that I had contracted two trendy looking scouts to track down a possible hopeful, especially not my straight friends or my brother and sisters.

"It's amazing how, once you meet that special person, your schedule clears pretty quickly and you make time."

Did you have any reservations about using a service like this?

I didn't think anything would happen, so I snuck over to their abode and briefed the dynamic duo on my needs and expectations. I arrived with a pocket full of scepticism but I must say I left feeling rather optimistic.

What was the best thing about the service?

Above all else I really like the two boys. They listened to me and they laughed at all my jokes. I was impressed. It was obvious they like people and love their work and more importantly they conducted themselves with great dignity and style. The money suddenly seemed less of a gamble and more of an investment. I really hassled these two boys. After three first dates that were great but not romantically suitable, Vinko, to his great credit and patience, reigned me in and told me those first few dates were all about patience. Mine and his. He was narrowing things down and getting a feel for who I was.

So, I waited for the fourth date.

In truth, when I look back now, I had a bit too much attitude and I expected too much. And I was a bit defensive. Those three guys were all lovely, it's just that they weren't exactly what I was looking for. My fourth date was stunning. Bingo. Bingo. Bingo. I could have run over to Vinko's place and just kissed him to death. I was looking for a lot. I really was. And to the boys' credit, they tracked him down.

With all the online dating, cruising and sex sites as well as apps, what made you choose Beau Brummell?

Look, anything that works, works. But I really believe a personalised service with someone who knows people and really knows a lot of people is always going to beat an internet site. It was money well spent. It worked. My partner and I have been in a relationship now for six months thanks to Beau Brummell.



JOCK (55)

DNA: At what point did you decide to seek professional help from an introduction agency and why?

Jock: I publicly came out two-and-a-half years ago and found it difficult to meet other gay men. I was keen to find someone to love and be my partner. I had a lot of catching up to do. Beau Brummell was the vehicle I chose to accelerate this deep desire, and they did.

How would you describe the experience? Wonderful. They went about creating their magic with tremendous care, commitment and love. I have met some really great guys and have some very deep friendships. I sense true love is not far away.

What was the best thing about the service?

The friendship, care, attention and love. I felt that I was connected to other guys and accepted as a gay man.

Did you have any reservations about using a service like this.

Absolutely none. From the first day I met Vinko and Andrea, I haven't looked back.

Are you satisfied with the outcome?

I am more than satisfied. I continue to enjoy furthering my friendships and love the thrill of meeting new guys; my confidence levels are far more enhanced and I am feeling the love; I just need Mr Right to ride in on his stallion.

With all the online dating, cruising and sex sites as well as apps, what made you choose Beau Brummell?

Simple. I needed a service that had my interests at heart. You cannot get that from cyberspace. ★

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