

Love, A Billionaire And A Plan To Save The World



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Franchises

Amber Kelleher-Andrews believes that matchmaking can change the world for the better. As co-CEO of Kelleher International – the high-end matchmaking service her mother Jill founded some 27 years ago – she’s attempting to do just that.

Helping wealthy and sometimes famous people find lovers and mates can get you invited to some interesting parties with some influential people and Ms. Kelleher-Andrews is beginning to leverage that access for philanthropic ends.



Amber Kelleher-Andrews, CEO of Kelleher International.

UK entrepreneur and Virgin Group founder **Richard Branson** is hoping the high-end, international matchmaking firm’s contacts can benefit his company’s charitable arm, the non-profit **Virgin Unite**. This summer Kelleher-Andrews visited the billionaire’s Virgin Islands getaway, Necker Island, to learn more about the philanthropic organization. “We decided that I happen to have a rolodex of some of the most influential, powerful business leaders and that it would behoove both Virgin Unite and Kelleher to merge these groups together,” she told FORBES. Branson’s camp did not respond to requests for comment.

The result of that collaboration? A series of ‘mixers’ that will bring some of Kelleher’s A-List clients to the island where they can learn more about Virgin Unite while meeting rich and recognizable singles. “I have really close rapport and relationships with the clients because we’re talking about their love lives—these people trust us with the most important aspect of their entire life so they’re willing to hear ideas beyond the next match.” she said. “In other words we have their attention and I intend to use that as a force for good.”

The mixers could start early this coming year and, if everything goes according to plan, wealthy and well-known Kelleher clients will find themselves stuck on an idyllic island, plied with tropical drinks and petitioned by a philanthropic organization whose sales pitch will be delivered by such speakers as Desmond Tutu, Jimmy Carter and Nelson Mandela (not to mention Sir Richard Branson). Sounds like easy pickings for the Kelleher-Branson team.

The Necker Island soirees are only the first concerted effort at philanthropic networking for Kelleher. Its clients and matchmaking introductions have included individuals that have founded non-profits, worked on Galapagos Islands conservation, banned the hunting of sharks and stingrays in the Virgin Islands and are active participants in **TED** conferences. 'Matchmaking for philanthropy' is a new direction for the company and Kelleher-Andrews says she’s only just begun.



Sir Richard Branson kite surfing at Necker Island, (photo by Dominic Lee, Priory Studios, Dublin).

Making Matches

Kelleher officially began in 1986 in San Francisco, the brainchild of founder Jill Kelleher – a **former photographer** for a singles company who had a knack for putting people together. The idea was to serve high profile men and women that might find it awkward to attend singles parties or use a dating service. Such clients are often dating on their own but are quite particular about who they’d like to end up with and are unwilling to compromise in their search for a long term partner. “This was never a mass market dating service,” says Kelleher-Andrews. “We get 1,000 inquiries a month, we probably take 20 people.”

But those lucky few that enter what she calls “the world’s most exclusive club” have some dues to pay. A local search starts at \$25,000 but that figure escalates as the company casts a wider net and looks in different cities or overseas for possible matches. Having Ms. Kelleher-Andrews or her mother personally conduct a global search – otherwise known as “the CEO Club” – will set you back up to \$200,000 for international service. The company as a whole generated about \$6 million last year. Forget what you’ve seen on reality shows, Kelleher and companies like it are the real deal (though the company was featured on **Eva Longoria**’s NBC TV series *Ready for Love*).



Kelleher-Andrews hints at the fame, wealth and renown of her clients, of course without divulging identities. Those that are very well known and interesting need not pay for being matched with a worthy suitor—his or her desirability lends the glitter and chic upon which Kelleher’s reputation – and thus its business – thrives. “I just got off the phone with somebody that’s a fascinating individual and everybody in the world would know who she is but we’re not charging her,” Kelleher-Andrews told Forbes. “The way that it works is whoever calls us – whether they see us in the airlines, they find us online, maybe they read about us in Forbes Magazine – when they contact us we want to know who this person is. They’re interviewing us but really, for us, we want to find out ‘is this person somebody that would be an interesting addition to our database, whether they pay or not.’”

Finding love for clients goes beyond the algorithm and services like Kelleher’s cannot be compared to online dating platforms like Match.com or OK Cupid. The 40 or so full-time personnel include matchmaking operatives – active in offices throughout the country and some abroad in London, Sweden and Canada – who use in-depth client profiles to bring together compatible singles.

The company’s new interest in proactively serving the greater good does not necessarily require that it stray far from the philosophies it’s survived by for the past 27 years. It unites people. When it works, the results of successfully introducing two lovers is the same as forging philanthropic or entrepreneurial bonds—players come together and create something that’s infinitely more valuable than the sum of its parts.

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