

## CASE STUDY



# Make Friends Online

*Rackspace® plays host to love on the Internet*



Online dating agency **Make Friends Online**, affectionately known as MFO to its many members, has grown into one of the most popular dating sites on the Net witnessing numerous marriages and engagements worldwide. Launched in 1998 by old school friends **Martin Bysh** and **Marcus Hamilton** who were working together to set up Primary Drive, a web applications development company, MFO quickly grew into a thriving online dating community.

## Friendship and romance

Initially, MFO members numbered only the employees of Primary Drive and their friends but membership has soared to over 100,000 as word of mouth has drawn more and more people to the site in search of friendship and romance. Traffic has been doubling every three months for the past nine and shows no sign of slowing down. The community spirit that underpins the success of the site, also means that members spend a staggering average of 15 minutes per session online, causing many members to joke about the need for "MFO addict support" groups.

Bysh explains why MFO has become so popular: "Make Friends Online offers a natural, organic approach to dating and making friends online. It provides an environment where people can meet privately and in groups across the Internet and get to know each other as friends before romance begins to blossom. To find love like this is far less contrived than the search and match methods many other online dating agencies offer. MFO is a real community, members don't tend to leave once they've found love but stay to chat with friends and meet new people."



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### High traffic volume

With such high volumes of traffic, a rapidly growing membership and the length of time spent online by its members increasing, MFO quickly outgrew the hardware and technology infrastructure it had implemented to initially host the site. Finding a Web hosting solution to meet the increased demand in its dating service became a top priority for MFO as the site continued to attract more and more new people. Bysh and Hamilton recognised the importance of providing the best technology and customer care to MFO members in order to support and encourage the development of the burgeoning online dating community.

"Ensuring members have access whenever they want it is key to a service like MFO", Bysh comments. "It's extremely annoying not to be able to chat to newly made friends just because a Web site is inaccessible. It doesn't matter to members whether this is because of heavy traffic or a technical fault and it shouldn't. What counts to people is that if there is any downtime they are being prevented from socialising. If you were expecting a telephone call from a girlfriend/boyfriend and your phone wasn't working it would be very frustrating. Making sure we chose the right hosting solution was therefore crucial to providing a good service to our members and helping support the growth of MFO."

Fed up with poor levels of hosting service, Bysh and Hamilton weighed up the hosting solutions available in the marketplace. Bysh picks up the story: "We started five years ago with a virtual server, provided by a leading UK ISP. Very quickly we needed a faster solution and more support. Staying with the devil we knew, we upgraded to a dedicated server but eventually became so frustrated with the extremely poor level of support - DNS failing for days on end and technical staff being distinctly untechnical and not really interested - we decided to move to another Internet service provider (ISP).

Bysh continues: "Managed hosting was the only serious option for us after virtual hosting. We wanted dedicated hardware and we needed to be able to rely on hardware support 24/7. Co-location was out of the question – by using your own hardware you make it much more difficult for the co-location ISP to mend any problem. It would be unrealistic to expect a co-location host to stock every kind of memory or hard disk that a client may conceivably need at a moment's notice. With managed hosting, however, you can be sure that an ISP will use a range of standard products, keep



these in stock and be able to react to any hardware failure without having to first chase up a hardware manufacturer. They will also be familiar with the hardware so can recognise any hardware failure rapidly and react quickly."

The question facing MFO was which managed hosting provider to work with. Bysh says the key to choosing a good provider is speaking to companies in depth to make sure they have the knowledge and expertise they claim to on paper. "Most ISPs look similar on paper," he explains. "For instance, every ISP says it has the best support, when most of them are actually quite poor. It's important to get good references and talk to the technical staff as well as the sales staff to check there really are good levels of expertise available."

### Good technical knowhow

After speaking to a number of managed hosting companies, MFO chose to work with **Rackspace**. "Rackspace clearly showed good technical know-how. The support staff we spoke to were enthusiastic and keen to help. The solutions were also flexible and there were no contract tie-ins - monthly contracts are available with no penalty for leaving."

"The level of service has been excellent. What's particularly impressive is that even when a problem turns out to be ours, perhaps something we've installed, Rackspace is still there with advice on how to tackle the issue. From experience we found that for many ISPs the problem is always someone else's - unless you can prove otherwise. With Rackspace, even the problems you cause yourself get a sympathetic and informative response. This is particularly useful for me, as like many Web entrepreneurs and managers, I'm not a server specialist."

### Fanatical Support<sup>®</sup>

Fabio Torlini, marketing director for Rackspace comments: "We're dedicated to providing Fanatical Support to our customers. Every one of our customers works with a devoted support team who get to know their Web hosting needs and solutions inside out. We believe that if you speak to the same team, solid relationships and trust can be established between the customer and the Web host."

### Real People 24-hours a day

"We're strongly opposed to automated telephone systems and ensure that our phones are answered by people who can help with any queries a



customer may have. A number of our customers are Web development companies and it's crucial for them to be able to discuss their needs with people who know their system well. "It's always great when we have the opportunity to change the mind of a new customer, whose had bad hosting experiences in the past with other ISPs, and show them that good customer service does exist within the Web hosting industry and that it's possible to find the perfect Web hosting match."

If you are looking for a friend, visit [www.MakeFriendsOnline.com](http://www.MakeFriendsOnline.com) or if you need specialist managed hosting for your business please visit [www.rackspace.co.uk](http://www.rackspace.co.uk) or call for **FREE** hosting advice on **0800 988 0100**

