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The liars club

December 12, 2005

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Jeff Irwin says he is in the business of helping families -- though in an unusual and, some would argue, immoral way. He provides alibis for cheating spouses. As founder of the Alibi Network (www.alibinetwork.com), Irwin provides back stories and excuses for spouses who want to stray from home. For some, it could be a quick dinner with a special friend, while for others it could mean a weekend tryst in an exotic locale.

"With the statistics that we have, there is more cheating going on now than ever," says Irwin, who runs the Buffalo Grove company. "We didn't create the market, it's already there. We are just providing a service."

And boy, what a service: everything from sending phony e-mails to receiving calls to buying airline tickets for that romantic -- but illicit -- getaway. Sounds like something actor Jude Law, who earlier this year admitted to cheating on fiancée Sienna Miller with his children's nanny, could have used.

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number might be lower. The Center for AIDS Prevention Studies at the University of California conducted a study that found about 24 percent of men and 14 percent of women have had sex outside of their marriages.

Irwin's line of work isn't new: There are companies all over the world providing similar services, from Moscow to London. But Irwin believes his company might be the first in the states.

Most clients come in with an alibi already in mind, but if they don't have one, Irwin's staff will help concoct one.

For example, a police officer client might want to spend the weekend with his special friend. Irwin's company can help set up a phony seminar at an out-of-state location.






"We could send them an itinerary in the mail, we could make a phone call confirming attendance and we can even send a certificate of completion for when they get home," Irwin says.

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Another popular alibi is having a job interview in another state. Clients can have someone call their home, and if the non-cheating wife answers the phone, the caller will say they work for a company, which is actually fake, and say they're interested in talking to her husband for a job.

Or an operator will call the client at home when the other spouse is there, asking questions that make it seem like a job interview is being conducted.

There are also mail and phone receiving services, travel arrangements and debit card services provided by the company.

Not everyone thinks having a business dedicated to helping cheaters cheat is a good idea.

Penny Tupy, director of the Wisconsin-based Save Your Marriage Central and a marriage coach, says there are already plenty of other factors stripping away the sanctity of marriage.

"When marital infidelity among celebrities is portrayed as a love story, it demonstrates total disdain for the sanctity of marriage. We forget that real people, including innocent children, suffer very real and lasting hurt from these affairs," says Tupy, who developed national Marriage Fidelity Day.

Though some might rationalize the need for a business such as Alibi Network, it doesn't make it right, she says.

"Certainly there is a market for this, but there is also a market for crack cocaine and heroin and meth ... it doesn't make it ethical," she says. "There's a market for a whole lot of things that are unhealthy and harmful."

Irwin said business is booming. The company has been around only since April, but through word of mouth has about 1,500 clients -- about half of them women. And so far, he says, no one has been caught.

The services can get pricey depending on the alibi. A phony e-mail, for example, can cost as little as \$10, while providing cover for a weekend away overseas could go for hundreds of dollars. There is also a \$35 membership fee.

Irwin says there are other uses for his services -- not just cheating spouses - - such as planning surprise parties, buying gifts and organizing something related to work. But, it's the cheating that sells best.

He says he's neither condemning nor condoning the practice of cheating on a spouse. He argues that sometimes the infidelity is a one-time thing that isn't worth destroying a family over.

"On these mini-alibis, it could be someone that just wants to go out to dinner with someone or spend the night with someone," Irwin says. "It's like a seven-year-itch type of thing, they scratch their itch and then go on with their life. Their family and home life remain untouched."

After all, it's not the cheating that breaks a couple up, he argues. It's the finding out.

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