

DNA adds new twist to dating online

BY SUSAN MOHAMMAD • The answer to true love can be found in your spit. At least that's what a new site called *GenePartner.com* claims. For \$199, the Swiss company promises to hook you up with your perfect mate using a sample of your DNA. The site says "love is no coincidence," and that genetic compatibility between you and your partner creates a better sex life, a higher fertility rate and healthier children.

The service, which launched this month, was inspired by a study at the University of Bern, Switzerland, where female volunteers sniffed men's T-shirts and rated them for attractiveness. The study found that women were most attracted to the scent of men whose HLA (human leukocyte antigen) molecules were most different from their own. Research has shown that we prefer mates with different HLA genes because it helps to produce offspring with stronger immune systems.

GenePartner.com simplifies the process by analyzing saliva samples to produce unique ID numbers based on customers' DNA. The numbers for two partners can then be plugged into an online algorithm system for a compatibility reading.

Tamara Brown, managing director of *GenePartner*, says that rather than build-

ing its own dating site, her company will partner with existing sites that could let customers include *GenePartner* ID numbers in their profiles. "The goal is to make it complementary to dating sites," she says.

So far, the company, which launched with US\$500,000 in seed money from investors, has been approached by two major dating sites. In the first nine days of operation, it signed up more than 270 customers.

Nate Elliott, an online marketing analyst at Jupiter Research, says the US\$750 million online dating industry is showing signs of saturation when it comes to new users, so sites will need to extract more money from existing customers. Unique services, such as the one offered by *GenePartner*, could help them do that. "As a marketing tool it should get some attention," he says. "But to survive they'll need big partners." M



ACCORDING to *GenePartner*, your spit can lead you to love