

# GDI

POWER BOOK

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# POWER BOOK 2020

RECOGNISING EXCELLENCE  
AND ACHIEVEMENT IN THE  
ONLINE DATING INDUSTRY



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## WELCOME TO THE SIXTH ANNUAL GDI POWER BOOK, THE DEFINITIVE LIST OF THE INFLUENCERS, LEADERS AND INNOVATORS WHO HAVE SHAPED OUR INDUSTRY OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS.

Online dating has gone from strength to strength this past year and it's safe to say that the stigma surrounding our wonderful industry has all but gone. We're seeing numerous outlets report that 'online' is now the most popular way for all singles to meet each other, overtaking the 'through friends' category for the first time. Tinder remains atop the global rankings, in terms of most downloads and total revenue, and is continuing to change the way young people socialise.

We've said goodbye to a few of the market's biggest leaders over the past few months. Mandy Ginsberg (Match Group), Andrey Andreev (Badoo and MagicLab), Jeronimo Folgueira (Spark Networks) and

Grant Langston (eharmony) have all stepped down from their respective CEO positions and everyone at GDI wishes them the best of luck in the future. IAC has also confirmed that it won't have a part to play in the online dating world by the end of 2020. The holding company is in the process of floating Match Group as a standalone business, having made sure that it has the necessary tools to survive.

Speculation that a Badoo or Bumble branded IPO was on the horizon took a turn in the summer when MagicLab was formed, a brand new parent that also housed Chappy and Lumen. The venture was the subject of a \$3 billion takeover deal just a few months later. While a stock market launch isn't completely off the cards, MagicLab is



currently focusing the majority of its attention on establishing its position and acquiring new brands. Meanwhile, Grindr's IPO plans were halted when it became embroiled in a proverbial tug-of-war between the US government and Kunlun Tech Group. Concerns were raised over the safety of the gay dating app's users, and its Chinese owners have reluctantly agreed to sell the asset by June of this year.

Facebook continues to keep its cards close to its chest as the slow roll out of the new dating service is yet to hit the EMEA region. So far, Facebook Dating is only available in 20 countries across The Americas and Asia, although this does crucially include the US. While Mark Zuckerberg is very positive about early activity, rival competitors are

insisting that they haven't been detrimentally affected in the relevant markets. Until some more information comes to light, we are left to hypothesize what sort of impact the social media giant is having on the industry.

It has been a fascinating year with plenty of other successes and developments, all of which are covered in the following pages. As always, it's been an honour to keep you all updated with the industry's biggest stories. We are proud to present the GDI Power Book 2020, in association with HubStars!

**SIMON CORBETT**  
FOUNDER,  
GLOBAL DATING INSIGHTS



2019 has been yet another bumper year for the online dating industry, and here at GDI we've had a front row seat for all of the most groundbreaking developments. There were new holding companies formed, high profile departures, video technology used in every way imaginable and geographical expansions across the globe.

In the first Power Book of the new decade, we are celebrating the most creative professionals who helped shape the industry over the past 12 months. For the first time, we are splitting the Power Book into three sections: NAM, EMEA and APAC, to acknowledge each company in relation to the market they are based in. We are also introducing a 'One To Watch' entry for each region. These are three promising companies

that were launched this year and are already showing early signs of disruption.

GDI is never content with standing still and we are always challenging ourselves to take on new projects. Our first New York City conference will be held in March, following on from previous successful events in Los Angeles and Singapore. These are spearheaded by the flagship London conference, with each event continuing to be bigger than the last. The GDI Networking Drinks are also starting to go international. Lisbon and Barcelona, the first European cities we've ventured into, are just a taste of things to come.

Finally, The GDI Podcast was released a few months ago. I got the chance to record over 30 episodes of bitesize interviews with leading executives from every corner of the industry and find out how they are striving to change the lives of people all over the world.

I can't wait to see what the rest of 2020 has in store. From everyone at Global Dating Insights, thank you so much for downloading the sixth annual Power Book. Happy Valentine's Day!

**DOM WHITLOCK**  
EDITOR,  
GLOBAL DATING INSIGHTS

"GDI IS NEVER CONTENT WITH STANDING STILL  
& WE ARE ALWAYS CHALLENGING OURSELVES"



**SHAHZAD YOUNAS**  
Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Muzmatch



**ERIC SILVERBERG**  
Chief Executive Officer, SCRUFF



**WHITNEY WOLFE HERD**  
Chief Executive Officer, Magiclub



**CLÉMENTINE LALANDE**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Once Dating Group



**NATHAN ROTH**  
Chief Marketing Officer, Hinge



**LEIGH D'ANGELO**  
Chief Executive Officer, Dig



**ADAM COHEN-ASLATEI**  
Founder & Chief Executive Officer,  
S'More



**JIM BUDGENS**  
Chief Financial Officer,  
The Meet Group



**LAY HIANG LOW**  
Head of Design, Paktor



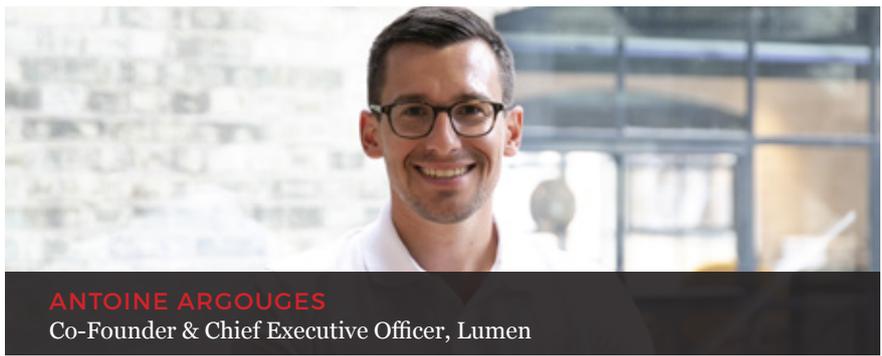
**DMITRY VOLKOV**  
Co-Owner, Social Discovery Ventures



**SAMEH SALEH**  
Chief Executive Officer, Hawaya



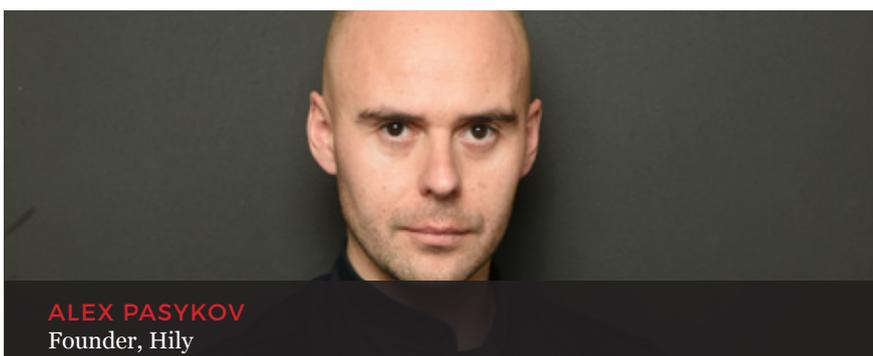
**LUCILLE MCCART**  
Australia Country Lead, Bumble



**ANTOINE ARGOUGES**  
Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Lumen



**ISHIBASHI JUNYA**  
Chief Executive Officer, Pairs



**ALEX PASYKOV**  
Founder, Hily



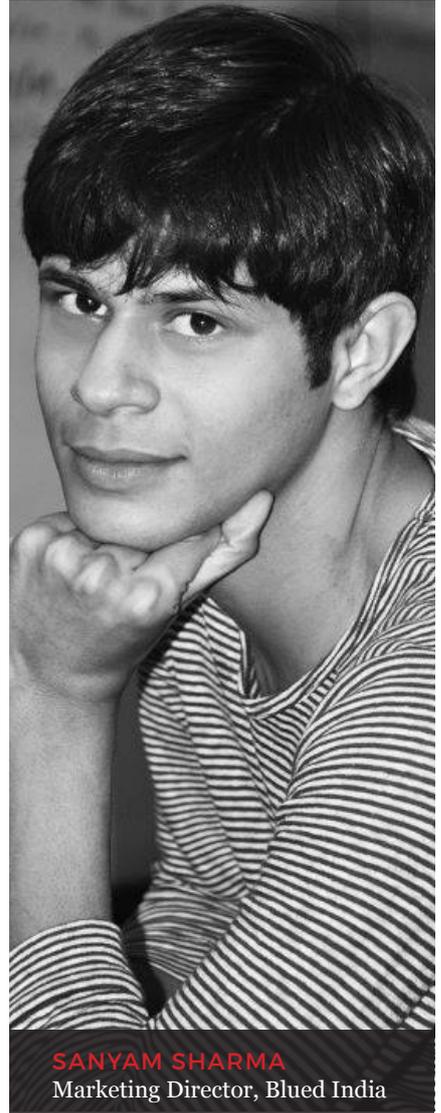
**KARENA EVANS**  
Swipe Night Director, Tinder



**GEORGE RAWLINGS**  
Co-Founder & Chief Executive Officer, HoneyPot



**DOMINIC GALLELO**  
Chief Marketing Officer, Badoo



**SANYAM SHARMA**  
Marketing Director, Blued India



**PONY MA**  
Chief Executive Officer, Tencent



**SUMESH MENON**  
Chief Executive Officer, Woo



**TARU KAPOOR**  
General Manager, Match Group India



**LUCIANA TELLESI**  
Chief Marketing Officer, Spark Networks



**ZHE REN**  
Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Yidui



**I'M DELIGHTED FOR HUBSTARS TO BE ABLE TO PROMOTE THE GDI POWER BOOK FOR 2020. THE POWER BOOK IS A FANTASTIC COLLECTION OF SOME OF THE BEST INNOVATORS AND ENTREPRENEURS IN THE DATING SECTOR.**

I'm not sure we can cleanly call it a sector anymore as dating seems to have bled into so many media forms and formats in the last few years. Whether as part of a wider social discovery network, entertainment platform or the cutting edge of a woke capitalism

movement, dating has never been more visible to the general population. We have all seen how dating can be a reliable coal bunker; full of heros, villains and combustible human interactions that fuel the boilers of reality TV.

The three pillars of success for any dating app are branding, technology and scale. You cannot succeed without nailing each one of these fundamentals.

### **Branding**

There are so many new and novel takes on the dating concept and more each week. Each hoping to break through to the consciousness of busy media saturated singletons. Many are finding out that branding is hard and very marketing expensive if you get it wrong. You need to be fast and agile, a bit like the RoadRunner.



### Technology

In order to get registrations beyond your loyal friends and gain traction you need a technology platform that looks good but most importantly just works. We have all seen the compelling demos of the minimum viable dating product. All the rapid prototyping with the muddled stack of plugins and hacks can quickly turn into a performance or GDPR nightmare.

### Scale

When you achieve that scale you encounter all the issues that nobody tells you about in dealing with millions of users. The level

playing field of the early internet has coalesced into hills and valleys as national agencies see to regulate and influence the online spaces of their citizens. Trying to do the most good for your users, keep them safe and encouraging the most interaction and positive communication is tricky. All the more so when your back office teams are flat out swerving the Wile E. Coyotes and telling you that it would all work much better if nobody could communicate!

At HubStars we provide a private label dating as a service for dating in English and Spanish. More than just ACME dating, we handle all the boring back office and regulation for over 20 million members, thousands of dating sites and billing in 17 currencies. We provide the immediate scale of an established dating brand and all of the back office functions to enable dating entrepreneurs to have laser focus on their branding & marketing, and we offer it for free. We're revenue share, so we only earn when your product does. Get in touch if you have a dating brand idea or want to learn more about how to profit from the dating boom with us.

I hope you find inspiration from the leaders and innovators in this book who have each shown excellence with their branding, technology and scale in dating in 2020. Meep meep!!

**MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN**

OWNER, HUBSTARS

[www.hubstars.dating](http://www.hubstars.dating)

# NORTH AMERICA

RECOGNISING EXCELLENCE  
AND ACHIEVEMENT IN THE  
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“WHITNEY  
CONTINUES TO SET  
AMBITIOUS GOALS  
IN HER EFFORTS  
TO EMPOWER  
WOMEN ALL OVER  
THE WORLD”

# WHITNEY WOLFE HERD

CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
OFFICER, MAGICLAB

The Bumble founder ended her momentous decade with a new job title after being put in charge of the newly-formulated umbrella MagicLab. October saw the brand, which encompasses Bumble, Badoo, Chappy and Lumen, being bought out by Blackstone Group in an unexpected deal worth approximately \$3 billion. The elusive Andrey Andreev stepped down from his position as CEO and Whitney was entrusted with the reigns. The two biggest online dating conglomerates in the Western market are now fronted by women, a result that is very on brand for the businesswoman.

The 30-year-old has also been striving to make an impact outside of the social networking world and was successful in introducing a law that criminalises cyberflashing in Texas. Anyone found guilty of sending an unsolicited nude image can now be charged with a misdemeanour and faces a potential \$500 fine. She isn't planning to stop there and is already in discussions to introduce the bill in California before taking it nationwide. The law was preceded by the creation of 'Private Detector', a groundbreaking piece of AI software that can immediately recognise and blur images of exposed genitalia if they are sent through the in-app messaging system.

Whitney continues to set ambitious goals in her efforts to empower women all over the world, and with the added muscle of MagicLab behind her, the possibilities of 2020 appear to be endless.

**MagicLab**<sup>+</sup>

# ERIC SILVERBERG

## CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SCRUFF

As online dating is by far the most popular way for LGBTQ singles to meet, it's important that the available services are providing users with the best possible experience. In particular, ensuring that those who live in more conservative regions are able to safely explore their sexuality must be an utmost priority. Eric Silverberg is publically very critical of other companies that might be falling behind in these areas, especially the ones that have a significant number of heterosexual individuals acting as high-ranking executives.

SCRUFF is a dating app that is exclusively led by members of the LGBTQ community and prides itself on putting the wellbeing of its users ahead of potential profit margins. A couple of years ago it separated from all third party advertising networks

and moved everything in-house. This allowed the brand to control what marketing material was being shown and made sure that only relevant companies were being promoted. The new program has coincidentally helped SCRUFF generate more advertising revenue in 2019 than it ever did before.

'Hosting' is a live quiz game that rewards players with a share of \$500 if they win. It opens SCRUFF up as a social community platform rather than one just for dating. Eric is also the CEO of Perry Street Software, SCRUFF's parent company, which completed the acquisition of Jack'd in July. The deal saw it become the world's largest LGBTQ-owned and operated technology company, both in terms of revenue and market reach.

# SCRUFF



“SCRUFF IS A DATING APP THAT IS EXCLUSIVELY LED BY MEMBERS OF THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY”



## KARENA EVANS

### SWIPE NIGHT DIRECTOR, TINDER

When the story broke in September that Tinder was working on its own original television series, it was a significant step forward for the whole industry. *Swipe Night* was released in the US the following month, with an added twist that took the experiment one step further. It was created in a ‘choose-your-own-adventure’ style, reminiscent of the 2017 film *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*. Tinder made the experience even more interactive by recommending matches that had made similar choices. Initial figures indicated that *Swipe Night* was a success, and a worldwide release is due in early 2020. Having previously worked on several Drake music videos, Karena Evans is currently one of the hottest young directors around. She was praised by the rest of Tinder’s creative team for producing a quality finished product that was “made for Gen Z, by Gen Z”.



## ALEX PASYKOV

### FOUNDER, HILY

At the start of last year you would’ve been forgiven for not knowing much about Hily. However, the Las Vegas-based startup has grown exponentially in the past twelve months and, as a result, has turned itself into a name that shouldn’t be overlooked. Hily rounded out 2019 by welcoming its 10 millionth user and is a regular name on Sensor Tower’s worldwide chart for the highest grossing dating apps. Alex Pasykov has expertly orchestrated the expansion by methodically launching in new geographical markets, most notably in Europe and Latin America. He splits his time between Hily and TAIMI, a product that began life as a dating app exclusively for gay men, but now serves as an empowering social network for the whole LGBTQ community.



## JIM BUDGEN

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER,  
THE MEET GROUP

Known for its portfolio of apps that seamlessly integrate online dating and one-to-many livestreaming, The Meet Group has spent the last few years launching video across all of its platforms. It continues to look for new opportunities to introduce video, through further acquisitions and its recently announced vPaaS platform. At the beginning of 2019, The Meet Group completed the acquisition of Growlr, the first LGBTQ product to join the family. Jim Bugden supervised the deal, which was reportedly worth just shy of \$12 million and immediately added more than 200,000 daily active users to the company's network. Led by growth in livestreaming video, a succession of positive financial reports for the combined business followed and its total revenue climbed to over \$52 million for the third quarter of 2019.



One to  
Watch



## ADAM COHEN-ASLATEI

FOUNDER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,  
S'MORE

Adam Cohen-Aslatei left his position as Chappy's Managing Director in May because he wanted a different challenge. Instead of helping to run a platform that was only for gay men, he began setting up his own all-inclusive dating app, one that people of every gender and sexual orientation could use. S'More, short for "something more", is designed to tackle 'swipe culture' and help modern singles start more serious relationships. Profile pictures begin blurred, allowing users to get to know the person underneath before seeing what they look like. The images and other important information slowly get revealed if the AI detects that a positive interaction is taking place. Currently only available in a select number of US cities, S'More is definitely an app to keep an eye on as Adam brings his vast amount of industry expertise to a new project.



# NATHAN ROTH

## CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, HINGE

Hinge is one of the most popular apps for the millennials that are looking for a serious relationship and it is committed to prioritising the wellbeing of its users. Founder Justin McLeod confirmed that most of the revenue comes from premium subscriptions and pledged that Hinge would never run in-app advertising. He called the practice “antithetical” because it would mean encouraging people to spend longer on the app in order for the company to get higher ad impressions.

Instead, Hinge unveiled the first stage of its ‘Designed to be Deleted’ restructure in April. It wanted to emphasise that it measures success by the number of users who delete the app after finding

a meaningful connection. Part of the new layout includes changing the colour of the ‘delete’ button to a more neutral grey, so individuals feel less guilty about ending their membership.

Nathan Roth was tasked with taking the new mantra and creating a corresponding global marketing campaign. The end result featured ‘Hingie’, a fluffy, animated representation of the Hinge logo. Adverts showed Hingie being killed off in a number of memorable ways after couples decided to take the next step in their relationship and get rid of the app. An online shop was also opened to sell items like t-shirts, jewelry, bath bombs and piñatas to help couples celebrate their ‘Delete Day’.

## Hinge

“HINGE  
WANTED TO  
EMPHASISE  
THAT IT  
MEASURES  
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THE NUMBER  
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WHO DELETE  
THE APP”





“UNDERSTANDABLY, DATERS ARE GIVING THOUGHT TO THEIR PETS’ FEELINGS WHEN LOOKING FOR A ROMANTIC PARTNER”

## LEIGH D’ANGELO

CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
OFFICER, DIG

Dogs have seen their hypothetical stock grow exponentially in recent times and having a four-legged friend is arguably more popular now than it has ever been before. Understandably, daters are giving thought to their pets’ feelings when looking for a romantic partner, similar to the way single parents take their children into consideration.

Inspired by her sister’s previous experiences dating someone who wasn’t as keen on animals as she was, Leigh D’Angelo created an app exclusively for dog lovers. She used her background in broadcast journalism to make sure Dig was covered by local news stations all across the country and turned the app into a viral sensation. Its success is aided by a number of dog-friendly launch events in each of its new markets. Attendees are encouraged to bring their pets and learn more about the dating platform, while also being introduced to local businesses that cater to every need a dog could ever have.

In October, Dig won a \$50,000 prize to put towards a digital marketing campaign. Just over a month later, it released the ‘My Mom’s Single’ and ‘My Dad’s Single’ promotions. They featured real Dig users and showed how dogs can be the perfect wingman. Collar tags are available to purchase from the Dig website which lets dogs easily tell people if their human is looking for a romantic relationship.



# EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA

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“SHAHZAD YOUNAS HAS SUCCESSFULLY NUTURED A PRODUCT THAT IS GROWING INCREASINGLY POPULAR WITH MILLENNIAL MUSLIMS”

## SHAHZAD YOUNAS

FOUNDER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, MUZMATCH

The best niche dating sites are created out of necessity and are produced by entrepreneurs that truly understand the target demographic. This is why Muzmatch founder Shahzad Younas has successfully nurtured a product that is growing increasingly popular with millennial Muslims.

The former banker and self-taught app developer wanted a modern platform that allowed him to meet new people who shared similar religious beliefs, but also satisfied his family members who automatically associated online dating with hookup culture. Five years later, Muzmatch secured \$7 million Series A funding from prestigious seed accelerator Y Combinator and quickly set about working on the third iteration of the app.

The update was rolled out at the beginning of 2020, and every single screen was completely redesigned to manufacture a cleaner, crisper finished product. Some of the new features included in-app video and voice calls, which add an extra step to the process and hopefully makes users feel more comfortable when meeting someone for the first time.

Additions will continue to be made, such as social community areas to further Shahzad’s aspirations of creating a network that can serve all of the 1.8 billion Muslims around the world. He has also promised to carry on using cheesy puns in the company’s eye-catching marketing materials that have become a recognisable part of London’s public transport system.





# CLÉMENTINE LALANDE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
OFFICER,  
ONCE DATING GROUP

When Once was first founded in 2014 it aimed to be an alternative to swipe-based apps that had the potential to overwhelm users with the volume of matches and messages they'd receive. The slow dating platform only sends one potential match every day and undoubtedly values quality over quantity. Founder Jean Meyer wanted to expand his reach and bring his refined style of dating to a wider audience. Therefore, he formed Once Dating Group and appointed Clémentine Lalande as Chief Executive Officer in May.

Pickable was the first product to be launched by the new holding company and is designed to be one of the safest dating apps for women to use. They can browse male profiles completely anonymously without uploading photos, personal information or even creating an account at all. To initiate a conversation, women send a picture of themselves to the man who then confirms whether or not he is interested. It is promoted as putting women "100%" in control of their dating lives.

Also added to the portfolio this year was Once Again, a platform for singles over the age of 50. Finally, two products were introduced to enhance the overall dating experience. Once Records helps daters curate the ideal musical playlist for any stage of the romantic journey, while Once Places is a comprehensive list of the best bars and restaurants for a date, no matter how old or new the relationship is.



"PICKABLE IS  
DESIGNED TO  
BE ONE OF THE  
SAFEST DATING  
APPS FOR  
WOMEN TO USE"



## ANTOINE ARGOUGES

CO-FOUNDER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,  
LUMEN

In the ever-evolving world of online dating, seniors are a demographic that have been slightly left behind. Older singles had a lot of similar complaints. They thought the available senior platforms were outdated and women on mainstream services found that men were only interested in dating well below their age. That's where the Lumen team saw a gap in the market. Co-founded by Badoo's former Head of Revenue Antoine Argouges, and initially backed by a £3.5 million investment from Andrey Andreev, Lumen is a modern, swipe-based app that's only for singles over the age of 50. It continues to gain media attention by running eye-catching billboard promotions (its last two Christmas adverts have both been banned by the TfL) and uses its position to fight ageism with the empowering '50 Is Just The Start' marketing movement.



## LUCIANA TELLES

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,  
SPARK NETWORKS

In March, Spark Networks completed its acquisition of Zoosk in a deal that ended up being worth \$255 million. By the time the transaction was completed, the Berlin-based business was the second largest publicly-traded dating company in the world. The ever-growing portfolio means it needs to constantly be on top of the latest marketing trends and adapt its plans for various target demographics. This is especially important when looking after platforms based on different religious beliefs. Luciana Telles joined Spark Networks at the beginning of the year and immediately began working to build a quality integrated marketing strategy. One of her biggest priorities was ensuring that if a user gets bored of one brand, they are likely to relocate to another one within the Spark Networks family, whether it's EliteSingles, SilverSingles or ChristianMingle.





## SAMEH SALEH

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HAWAYA

Hawaya is one of the most recent brands to be welcomed under the Match Group umbrella. Based out of Cairo, Egypt, the app is targeted at younger Muslims to give them an opportunity to find a relationship for themselves. It also aims to be an up-to-date product that respects traditional values so even the most conservative of family members would be comfortable. Hawaya furthers its commitment to creating serious relationships by offering psychological support to couples along every step of their journey and ensures they form a healthy family environment. The announcement came in August that Match Group was investing in Hawaya and ended up hiring the entire team. The online dating giant is using its wealth of resources to develop the app, the overall marketing strategy and furthering its own mission of expanding in Asia and MENA.



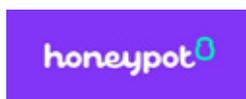
One to Watch



## GEORGE RAWLINGS

CO-FOUNDER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, HONEYPOT

Anyone living and working in Central London has probably come across one of HoneyPot's guerilla marketing stunts. The local startup coined the phrase 'micro-dating' when it was first launched in summer. Users check themselves into small geo-fenced areas, or 'honeypots', and connect with nearby singles who are also available for a quick meetup. Working on a shoestring budget, George Rawlings masterminded a series of thrifty promotional campaigns that followed a simple format: a public display of emotion using only a whiteboard. Having spent just over £50 on their first execution, the HoneyPot team brought in an estimated 1.3 million impressions from foot traffic and subsequent, organic social media shares. With a number of new features and the promise of more exciting advertising efforts coming in the next year, HoneyPot is one to look out for in the UK.



honeypot  
London's dating app for the spontaneous.

# DOMINIC GALLELLO

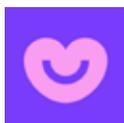
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, Badoo

Dominic Gallelo joined Badoo in June and immediately unveiled a complete rebrand. Along with a new logo, a simple smiley face inside a purple heart, the dating platform also introduced its new slogan 'Date Honestly'. The line was created to help people overcome their self-doubt, open themselves up to others and fully embrace the journey of meeting someone new. It was also designed to not only be applicable within the Badoo community, but with the wider dating world as well.

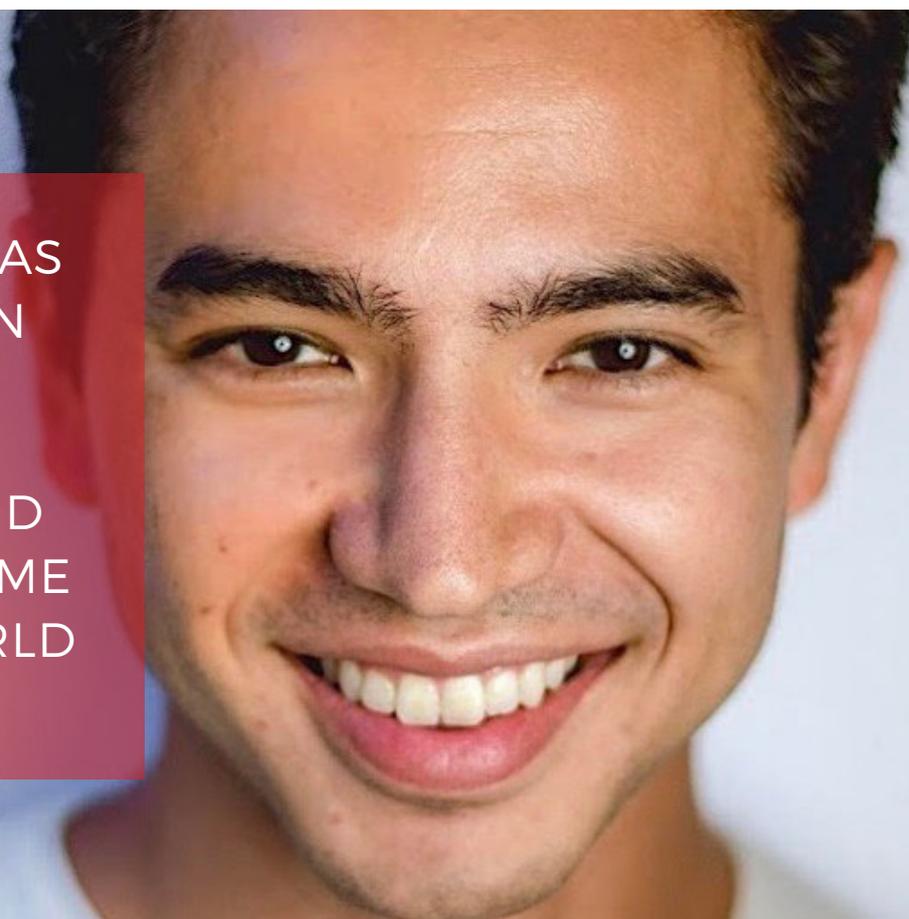
The rest of the company's 2019 marketing materials followed the same belief system and continuously aimed to promote honest dating behaviours. This included a podcast series hosted by pop star Mel B which featured reality TV stars giving

advice and talking about some of the most intimate parts of their dating history. It is also working on a 'Stories' web series which sees real Badoo users telling their dating tales, while well-known influencers act out the scene. The format debuted for a Spanish-speaking audience but was adapted for UK viewers at the beginning of February.

Badoo has also been using its position to try and ignite some real world change. A fundraising collaboration with the online magazine Gay Times aimed to teach heterosexual users how to be an LGBTQ ally. Dominic said that it was very important to partner with an organisation like the Gay Times to authentically work towards making a difference "rather than painting rainbows on products".



"Badoo has also been using its position to try and ignite some real world change."



“HE IS CONTINUING TO KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR NICHE APPS IN “PROMISING CORNERS OF THE MARKET”, WITH THE HOPES OF PUTTING THEM IN THE PORTFOLIO.”



## DMITRY VOLKOV

### CO-OWNER, SOCIAL DISCOVERY VENTURES

The online dating industry witnessed the creation of another powerful umbrella company in October, when Social Discovery Ventures and SOL Holdings merged to form Dating.com Group. The deal saw Social Discovery Ventures receive \$215 million and an equity stake in the newly conceived business. It immediately started to work on expanding its collection of assets, which already included numerous international brands like Dating.com, AnastasiaDate and DateMyAge. Dil Mil, a platform for expat South Asians residing in the UK, US and Canada, was added just over a month later.

The company considers Asia to be a market that is full of potential and has said it will look to acquire brands from the continent throughout 2020.

Dmitry Volkov told Global Dating Insights that he is continuing to keep an eye out for niche apps in “promising corners of the market”, with the hopes of putting them in the portfolio. Dating.com Group currently boasts over 73 million users and an annual revenue of approximately \$250 million. Dating.com updated its livestreaming capabilities this year, a trend that was made popular in Asia and has since stretched into American and European countries.

Dmitry is a serial investor via Social Discovery Ventures, which is actively involved in VC investments in tech startups. Social Discovery Ventures recently contributed to the initial funding round for S'More, a new startup dating app founded by Chappy's former Managing Director.



# ASIA- PACIFIC

RECOGNISING EXCELLENCE  
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# ISHIBASHI JUNYA

## CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PAIRS

As one of the most popular online dating platforms in the world, Pairs has spent the last year looking for ways to continue growing its user base. Overall, Match Group upped its focus on the Asian market in 2019 and Pairs was unsurprisingly its biggest driving force in Japan. Led by CEO Ishibashi Junya, the app was downloaded almost two million times throughout the year. This 44% increase compared to 2018 made it the fastest-growing dating app in the country.

Founded in 2012, Pairs was regularly included in Sensor Tower's monthly list of the highest grossing dating apps. It peaked at third position in August, behind only Bumble and sibling Match Group subsidiary Tinder.

The biggest development for Pairs came in the same month when it introduced a brand new matrimony product. In an attempt to corner a section of Japan's \$500 million matrimony industry, Pairs Engage was launched and promised users that they would find their future husband or wife within 12 months. As a completely online service, it was promoted as being a more affordable and more efficient alternative to traditional, brick-and-mortar matrimony businesses. Costing just under \$100 per month, Pairs Engage is approximately 66% cheaper than five of the leading offline companies. Having seen positive early traction in its first four cities, the service is expected to be rolled out in South Korea and India in the near future.



“LED BY CEO ISHIBASHI JUNYA, THE APP WAS DOWNLOADED ALMOST TWO MILLION TIMES THROUGHOUT THE YEAR”

# LAY HIANG LOW

HEAD OF DESIGN,  
PAKTOR

Based in Singapore, Paktor is one of the most popular and successful social networking apps for singles in Southeast Asia. With a number of international dating brands expanding into the continent, the design team strives to continue bringing out new updates to keep the platform fresh and retain its 15 million users.

Led by Head of Design Lay Hiang Low, the biggest update of 2019 was the introduction of profile voice recordings. Members can record 15-second audio clips to their page which helps them communicate their personalities more effectively and make the online dating experience more personal. The feature was immediately popular when it was first released, with approximately 80% of new Android users uploading a voice note. Several new categories were also added to profiles with singles from different geographical locations in mind. For example, blood type is an important factor for people in South Korea, while horoscopes were included specifically for Taiwanese daters.

Established features like Boost and Photo Picks are still very popular among premium subscribers. Profiles that get 'boosted' tend to be seen nine times more often than ones that haven't. The platform also tried to raise awareness of romance fraud scams this year by launching a 'Dating Safely' campaign. This gave lots of advice to singles about how to stay safe at the same time as having fun while online dating.



“THE BIGGEST  
UPDATE OF  
2019 WAS THE  
INTRODUCTION  
OF PROFILE  
VOICE  
RECORDINGS”

## SUMESH MENON

### CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WOO

India is one of the fastest growing markets in the online dating industry and many international brands view the country as the next stop for their expansion plans. Dating apps offer millennials an opportunity to take control of their romantic lives, rather than going straight to traditional matrimony services or being set up by their family and friends. Woo is one of the leading products that was developed in India, so the team knows exactly what the domestic users want. Female safety is one of Woo's main priorities and it tries to ensure women feel as comfortable as possible while dating in a new and potentially daunting way. Therefore, multiple security features have been introduced, such as invisible female profiles and the ability to have in-app audio calls without exchanging personal details.



## LUCILLE MCCART

### AUSTRALIA COUNTRY LEAD, BUMBLE

Bumble has made significant moves in Australia in recent times by running a series of glamorous activations to increase its local profile. After surpassing two million Australian users at the start of 2019, the female-first social app continued to use its platform to empower women all across the country. In Sydney, it hosted the inaugural APAC Bizz Summit for aspiring entrepreneurs, as well as the Glass Ceiling Awards to celebrate all the successful businesswomen who are paving the way for future generations. Lucille McCart was promoted to Country Lead in September, taking over, in part, from Michelle Battersby who had projected herself to near celebrity status by being the face of Bumble in the region. While the shoes to fill are big, Lucille's extensive experience will ensure she can carry on delivering quality events throughout the next year.





## SANYAM SHARMA

MARKETING DIRECTOR, BLUED INDIA

As the largest gay dating and social app in the world, Blued has long been campaigning for equal rights across Asia. Its efforts in India were rewarded two years ago when the country's Supreme Court ruled that homosexual activity was legal and no longer an "unnatural offence". However, that was just the start for Blued and it used the ruling as the first building block in its pursuit of nationwide equal opportunity. Local Marketing Director Sanyam Sharma launched 'Blued Queer Flicks', a competition that rewarded LGBTQ filmmakers for their short films covering queer themes and issues. This was followed by a new anti-cyberbullying campaign just a couple of months later. It aimed to educate trolls about the consequences of their malicious online behaviour, ranging from verbal harassment to blackmail and physical threats.



One to Watch



## ZHE REN

FOUNDER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,  
YIDUI

It's been a big year for online dating in China with a flurry of new products being released to try and take advantage of industry's growing popularity. Beijing Milian Technology & Trade looked to jump on the trend by releasing Yidui, a video dating app that allows users to have face-to-face conversations before meeting in real life. The target demographic is singles living in China's second-tier cities, and the owners claim they set up more than three million dates every month. Yidui's development was aided in the summer by a \$10 million Series A funding round and estimates hinted that its annual turnover for 2019 would reach \$142 million. While the app is still relatively new and unknown outside of China, the amount of traction it's getting suggests the industry could hear a lot more about Yidui in 2020.



“THREE TENCENT DATING APPS WERE RELEASED IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER, EACH DESIGNED TO TARGET A DIFFERENT DEMOGRAPHIC ACROSS THE COUNTRY”

## PONY MA

### CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, TENCENT

Tencent is one of the biggest technology companies in the world. On track for a total 2019 revenue just under \$50 billion, putting it at approximately one third the size of Google, the Chinese business has begun to widen its horizons and focus more on the online dating industry. As its flagship instant messaging app WeChat faced increasing pressure from new rival products, executives made the decision to take advantage of Asia's growing online dating market. Three Tencent dating apps were released in November and December, each designed to target a different demographic across the country.

Maohu was the first, a video-based product aimed at young singles who spend their time watching livestreaming content. The app doesn't support text or audio conversation; instead only allowing users to communicate through five-minute video calls. This was followed by a 'slow dating' app called Quingliao that only shows users a limited number of potential partners every 18 hours. Finally, Dengyu Jiaoyou is a social app that encourages members to pursue romantic relationships by anonymously submitting posts to public chat rooms.

Similar to the way that the Facebook Dating announcement brought online dating into the spotlight, a company the size of Tencent dipping its toe into the market can only have a positive effect and help the collective industry progress.

**Tencent** 腾讯

# TARU KAPOOR

## GENERAL MANAGER, MATCH GROUP INDIA

Match Group is arguably the biggest online dating company in North America and Europe. At the start of the year the corporation decided it was going to focus more attention on expanding its impact across Asia. This plan of action was cultivated through India, one of the online dating industry's fastest growing markets. As General Manager of Match Group in India, Taru Kapoor has had to fight off stiff competition from Bumble, which brought its values of non-discrimination and empowerment to the country at the end of 2018.

Tinder continued to localise its product and introduced ways for women to feel more comfortable about using a dating app. A partnership with BuzzFeed led to the creation of a six-episode video

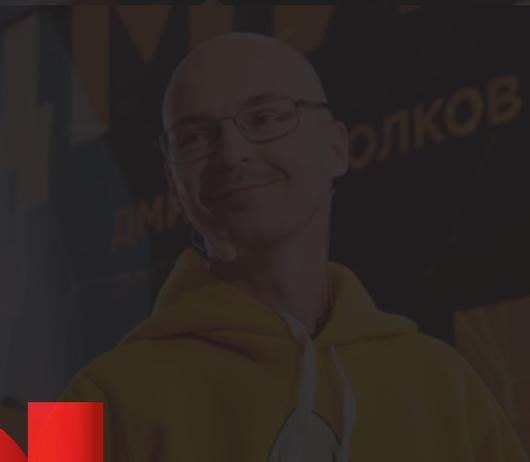
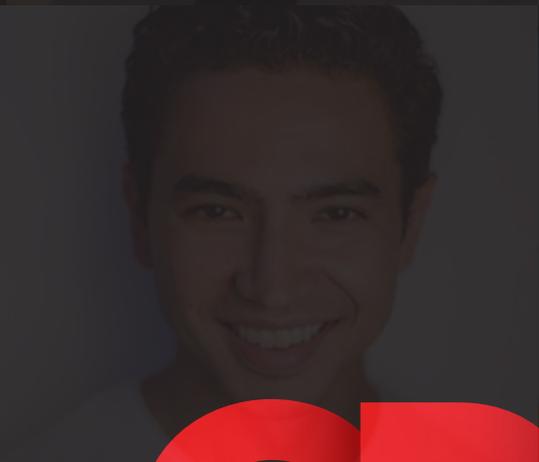
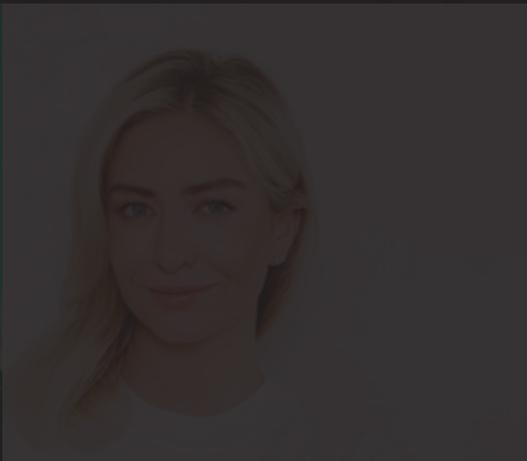
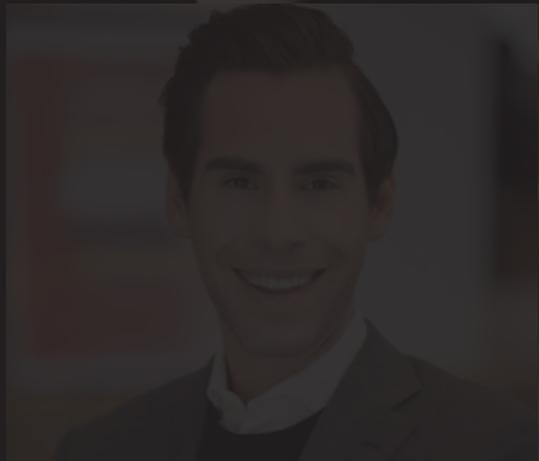
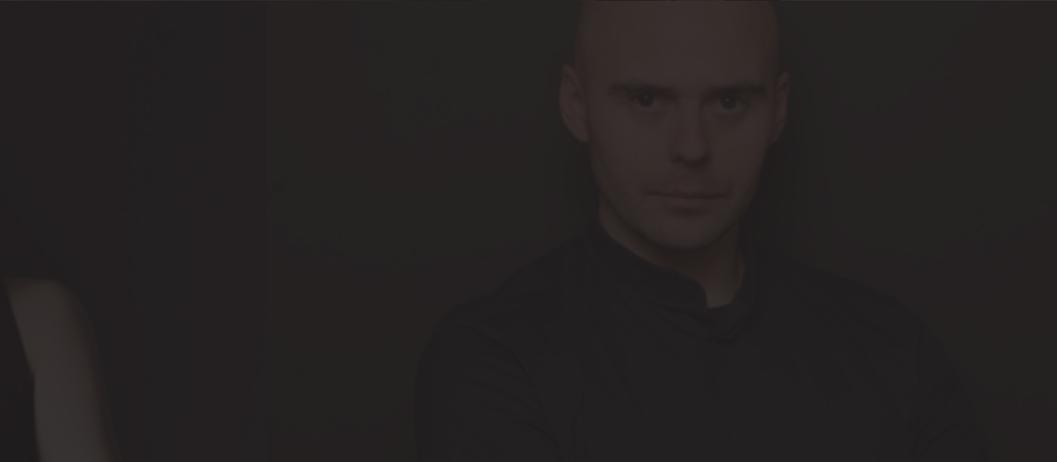
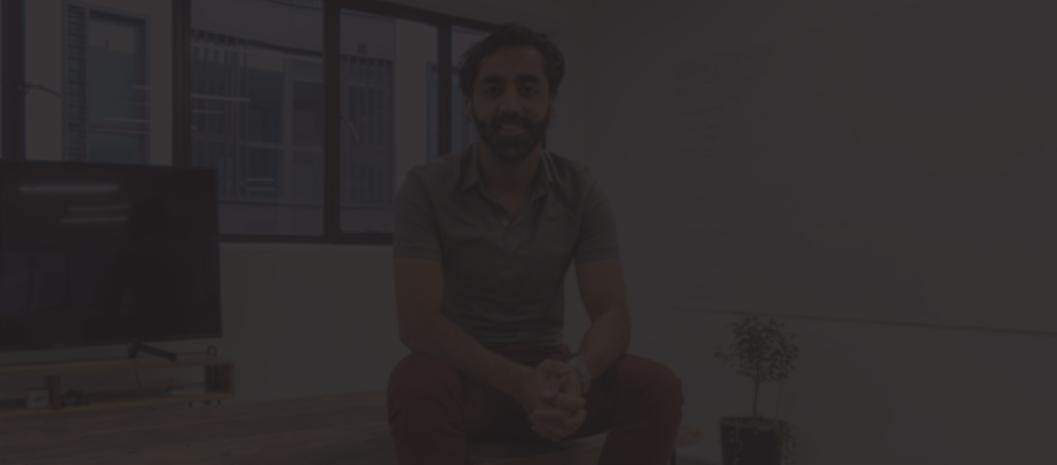
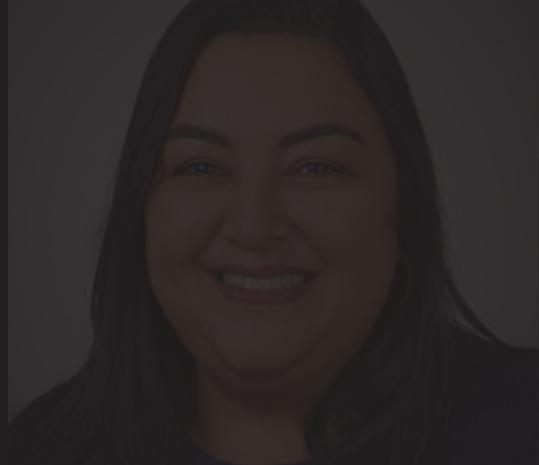
series that covered difficult topics like the unrealistic expectations placed on women by the media, female friendship and cultural attitudes. It also produced a comprehensive guide to help heterosexual people support their LGBTQ friends and pushed for greater equality for all genders and sexualities.

However, OkCupid has made even bigger Indian strides over the past twelve months. The 'Find My Kind' campaign promoted it as the platform for singles to look for their own romantic partners without pressure from their family. The significant investment has resulted in the Indian user base growing by more than 1,400% since the beginning of 2019. In fact, the movement has been so prosperous that a similar push is being drawn up for Middle Eastern countries throughout 2020.

matchgroup

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