

LOVE Doctor

Who says love and business don't mix? As far as eHarmony's founder is concerned, the two are a marriage made in cyberspace.

// STORY BY MICHELE MILES GARDINER

↳ **"IF WE COULD EVER GET THE DIVORCE RATE TO SINGLE DIGITS, IT MIGHT WELL BE THE MOST IMPORTANT SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN THE HISTORY OF THE HUMAN RACE,"** SAYS DR. NEIL CLARK WARREN, FOUNDER OF THE PASADENA-BASED NATIONAL RELATIONSHIP WEB SITE eHARMONY. THIS ISN'T LAST CENTURY'S DATING SERVICE. HIS BUSINESS HELPS PEOPLE GET MARRIED AND STAY THAT WAY. THANKS TO eHARMONY'S PATENTED COMPATIBILITY MATCHING, 33,000 COUPLES MARRIED WITHIN A 12-MONTH PERIOD. THE COMPANY IS PROVING TO BE A HUGE SUCCESS IN LOVE AND BUSINESS, DESPITE ALL THE INITIAL CHALLENGES.

In his 40 years working as a clinical psychologist in Pasadena, Dr. Warren saw approximately 7,000 people in psychotherapy. Early on, he became distressed at the number of failing marriages, convinced that 75 percent of them failed because they were in trouble from day one. People simply married the wrong people, he realized. "I believed this could be changed," Dr. Warren says, "but only if we could get to people before they got married."

Happily married to his wife, Marilyn, for almost 49 years, he wanted great marriages for his own children, as well as for others.

In 1995, Dr. Warren and Greg Forgather went into business together. "Greg is masterful at getting things done. While I am a dreamer and a conceptualizer, Greg puts legs to these dreams and makes them happen," Dr. Warren says. They dreamed of matching people for improved marital success. With the help of Dr. Galen Buckwalter and Dr. Steve Carter, they developed a long questionnaire (now 256 items) and researched 5,000 married people, looking carefully at what contributed to healthy marriages.

There were plenty of challenges at first, Dr. Warren explains. "In 1995, Greg and I had \$1 million—invested by a friend to help us get started—but we went through this in about three years. In order to keep going, Greg had to buy, fix up, and sell two large homes in the San Gabriel Valley, while working afternoons, evenings, and weekends on our business. I kept seeing people in psychotherapy to help make a living." He says that the current CEO

of eHarmony, Greg Waldorf, helped get a major contribution to keep the company afloat: Waldorf's partner at the time, Faye Sarofim, put up \$2 million of the \$2.5 million Waldorf observed eHarmony needed. The remaining \$500,000 came from friends.

There were other challenges as well: Nearly 800 hundred offline and online dating programs already existed; "experts" told them not to talk about marriage; they were told the questionnaire was so long no one would fill it out; they knew next to nothing about the Internet; they knew nothing about radio or television advertising; they needed enough singles online to make matches possible throughout the United States, but, at the time, more men than women were online.

They persevered, and on August 22, 2000, eHarmony launched online the Internet.

"At one point in the beginning," says Dr. Warren, "our growth was so slow and our outflow of cash was so fast that we thought seriously we might fail."

But by late 2002, the company started heading in the right direction. By November 2003, eHarmony had more than 2.25 million registered users. Presently, the subscriber base totals more than 19 million.

Eventually, eHarmony learned how to present its message to the nation through radio and television so that people could see that they're competent, sincere, and authentic. "Our media budget is highly significant, and we are so deeply pleased that we have been able to let our successful couples take our message to the

world day in and day out," Dr. Warren says of the married couples who appear in their ads.

eHarmony has grown in other ways, too. "At our first-anniversary Christmas party, held at Il Fornaio in Old Pasadena, we had 11 employees. Today, we have well over 200," Dr. Warren says. eHarmony recognizes how important it is for the staff to be happy, to have time with family and friends, "because our employees have, without any question, made this business what it is today. They are an incredibly committed group of people."

"Our president and COO, Greg Steiner, has been with us from day one of our company, and no one cares more about our customers, as well as our employees, than he does," Dr. Warren says.

But none of this growth would be possible if it weren't for today's technologies. "Without the massive capacity of the Internet, there would be no way that we could have reached the millions of people who are currently registered with us," Dr. Warren acknowledges.

"Someone asked me the other day if we ever thought we might be truly successful and even make a lot of money," Dr. Warren says. "I think both Greg Forgather and I never even dreamed of anything like this." But that doesn't mean that Dr. Warren is ready to ease up. He has goals. "We will never stop working hard at this until we have mastered the enormous challenges of helping people get married to someone with whom they can experience depth and abiding joy for a lifetime." ◀