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## Niche Dating Sites Grow Steadily As Mainstream Ones Flail

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*This post was written by guest contributor Mark Brooks, an analyst/consultant whose blog [Online Personals Watch](#) summarizes the daily internet dating industry news.*

In the internet dating space, bigger is not always best. According to the latest U.S. numbers from [Hitwise](#), the top niche dating sites are steadily gaining market share while their big mainstream counterparts stagnate.

We compared the overall dating market share of the top 5 sites – [Singlesnet](#), [Plentyoffish](#), [TRUE](#), [Yahoo Personals](#) and [Match](#) – to the market share of several top niche sites to see how their growth rates compared. In March 2008, the top 5 overall sites held 7% less market share than they did one year ago (Plentyoffish and Singlesnet were the only sites to buck this trend individually). Meanwhile, the top sites from the top five major niche dating categories made considerable gains, with the gay dating and religious dating categories growing the fastest.

| U.S. Monthly Market Share of U.S. Visits Among 20 Dating Sites Selected For Categories |              |           |                        |                |             |              |
|--|--------------|-----------|------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|
| DATE   | Dating Top 5 | Gay Top 3 | African-American Top 3 | Religion Top 3 | Asian Top 3 | Latino Top 3 |
| March, 2007  | 83.33%       | 7.81%     | 5.26%                  | 1.51%          | 1.53%       | 0.56%        |
| March, 2008  | 77.30%       | 12.03%    | 6.01%                  | 2.55%          | 1.55%       | 0.57%        |
| YOY  | -7%          | 54%       | 14%                    | 69%            | 1%          | 2%           |

It's apparent that a growing proportion of users is looking for more focused experiences with those who share particular interests and desires; this despite the fact that users can find more fish in the proverbial sea at mainstream sites.

The particular interests mainly relate to sexual preferences, races, and religions. Top sites include [Adam4Adam](#), [Manhunt](#), [Gay.com](#) for homosexuals; [BlackPeopleMeet](#), [BlackSingles](#), [BlackChristianPeopleMeet](#) for African Americans; and [ChristianMingle](#), [JDate](#), and [Christian Café](#) for the religiously-oriented.

Another top niche – and the biggest niche in terms of total traffic – is casual dating, which consists of sites like [Fling](#), [AdultFriendFinder](#), and [SexSearch](#). Although I'm not sure casual dating can really be called a niche. As Adam Small, CMO of SexSearch has put it bluntly: "Our target market is anyone over the age of 21 who is interested in sex, which is almost everybody."

Casual (or "adult") dating sites are the antithesis of eHarmony and are definitely not focused on helping people find long-term relationships. Instead, they help the more "casually inclined" to find the people who fit their specific physical and sexual preferences. Very specific preferences in some cases.

These casual sites have shown solid gains in the internet market as a whole. While the top 10 mainstream dating sites gained only 0.01% of total Internet traffic over the past year, the top three casual adult sites gained 0.07%. That's a hefty 56% increase in the traffic to adult dating sites, although it's important to remember that smaller sites have an easier time showing big gains in their traffic.

| U.S. Monthly Market Share of U.S. Visits Among All U.S. Websites |               |                                      |                    |
|--|---------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| DATE   | Dating Top 10 | Dating - Niche (leading 15 websites) | Dating Adult Top 3 |
| March, 2007  | 0.63%         | 0.10%                                | 0.14%              |
| March, 2008  | 0.64%         | 0.15%                                | 0.21%              |
| YOY  | 2%            | 43%                                  | 56%                |

**Disclosure:** Brooks has worked for FriendFinder and has advised Manhunt. Plentyoffish is presently a client of [Courtland Brooks](#), his consultancy.

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