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Online elite

What does it take to be a virtual A-lister? Hint: A Saudi jailmate.

BY STEVE BURGESS



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Is there such a thing as an online velvet rope? Yes. Many, in fact. But, as with those real bricks-and-mortar clubs, the problem is catching the doorman's eye.

ASmallWorld is one of the best-known private online organizations. Founded in 2004 by Erik Wachtmeister, it began as an online meeting place for the elite group of well-connected people he kept bumping into on his international travels. Membership is by invitation only. What does it take to enter ASmallWorld? "There are no qualifications necessary," says Brenna Kearney, editor of *ASmallMagazine*, the site's members-only publication, "but members happen to be a well-travelled, highly educated group of people who share similar lifestyles and interests."

Think George Clooney in *Up in the Air*. And membership does have its privileges. "Our members take care of each other," says Kearney. "In the past, we've had members band together to help other members in trouble. In one case, they organized the release of a fellow member from a Saudi jail. In another instance, they arranged for a private jet to help a member in a medical emergency."

It goes without saying that to cadge an invitation for ASmallWorld, you have to be the sort of person who is capable of being thrown into a Saudi prison to begin with. But should you ever find yourself in one, at least you can make the right kind of connections.

Some online clubs target specific groups. No points for guessing the target market of **Affluence.org**. You don't need an invite to join, all you need is a "verifiable minimum household net worth of US\$3 million or an annual household income of \$300,000." Of course,

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