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## Richclub.com: E-networking for the hip set

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KOLKATA: The hitherto open and free-for-all social media is turning exclusive, at least in parts. A new breed of social networking sites is gaining currency, slowly and gradually: for the rich, for the high networth individual and for the socially influential. You need to have your name on the social who's who list to be members of sites like [asmallworld.net](http://asmallworld.net), [affluence.org](http://affluence.org) or [elicio.net](http://elicio.net).

For example, membership of sites like [asmallworld.net](http://asmallworld.net) is strictly by invitation —members get to invite his/her friends. Others like [affluence.org](http://affluence.org) require a verifiable minimum household net worth of \$3 million (Rs 13 crore) or an annual household income of \$300,000 (Rs 1.3 crore).

"Affluence is a private social network where wealthy individuals connect, share information and engage in meaningful conversations. Affluence also provides exclusive, high-quality content and advice from experts on subjects such as art, technology and travel," says the website.

Some like Quintessentially has a whopping basic membership fee of £1,000 (Rs 70,000) per year, while a dedicated membership fee of £2,500 (Rs 1.77 lakh) a year.

Interestingly, a good number of Indians are part of these sites – mostly self-employed professionals, entrepreneurs and senior corporate executives. [Affluence.org](http://affluence.org) has 5,000 Indians registered with them – about 13% of its total membership—and one can find doctors, chartered accountants and lawyers among them. [Asmallworld.net](http://asmallworld.net) and [elicio.net](http://elicio.net) also have a large number of Indians as members.

Unfortunately, there are no similar Indian interfaces. But Ms Marut Bharadwaj, founder of Gurgaon-based M Marcom Services – a brand promotion company, and member of [affluence](http://affluence.org), [asmallworld](http://asmallworld.net) and [elicio.net](http://elicio.net) — is planning to launch an Indian version. "We are working on the site which is likely to be launched in January," she said. "I wouldn't discuss what premium car to buy with my classmate since he may not have been as successful in his career. Instead, I would prefer to discuss it with my peers on these sites who profile fit perfectly with me," said an user of [affluence.org](http://affluence.org).

"Discussion on these sites revolves around business, exotic travel and high-end retail experience. These are forums for like-minded people who generally discuss things of interest including sports car, exotic shopping experiences, and travel destinations among a few," says Deepak Goyal, founder-member of [drizzlin.com](http://drizzlin.com) and a social networking analyst. Specialised sites for HNIs usually have about half-a-million members against Facebook which is 500-million strong today.

From an advertising stand-point, it is a competitive and niche market to play in. "A rough estimate shows about 60% of the members in these sites are actually rich – it's about the right connection for the right people," said Mr Goyal

Ms Bharadwaj says: "Affluence offers me with a niche target audience for our services. I started by registering as a member of [affluence](http://affluence.org) to develop a network of acquaintances with similar interests." Marut's colleague and managing partner at M Marcom, Bhaskar Rao says: "Our research shows that users from such elite sites are typically business professionals and their discussion revolve around various professional aspects like investment and new projects. Typically, most of them connect online and a large number of them move to offline modes like conversation through phone calls and emails."

Rajeev Kumar, an entrepreneur, business mentor and CEO of Blue Lotus Holdings, is an early member of [affluence](http://affluence.org) says: "I have met some fabulous people here, some of whom that I have very made good connections offline."

[Affluence](http://affluence.org) helped Rajeev Kumar meet some key people from Hollywood and he is currently helping a firm make a film with an ex-James Bond movie character. Kumar wouldn't divulge the name of the actor since he's signed a non-disclosure agreement with the firm. The movies, he added, are likely to be released next January.

Kumar, also befriended officials of Perdomo, one of the largest brands of Cuban cigar from [Affluence](http://Affluence.org) and is now mentoring an exclusive lifestyle club [clubperdomobangkok.com](http://clubperdomobangkok.com) that's going to Clubs in India. "We are targeting the top affluent people who would like to meet at very exclusive places. The limit for membership would be 500 members per club."

and the clubs would be open in Mumbai, Bengaluru & New Delhi during the next 18 months. Membership starts at Rs. 10 lakhs through Rs. 50 lakhs," he said.

But these sites always face a problem of member verification. As with adolescents who socialize on the web, affluent people here are equally as vulnerable to becoming victims of crime. In the past there were many "posers" pretending to be high profile members, celebrities, producers and extremely wealthy people. Some of these try and weed them out. But the question, asked by a user on one of these sites is "Are all remaining profiles legitimate?"

As in all social networking sites, some hops off the train. For example, Anurag Kati, owner of E-dutainment Unlimited registered for one of these sites when he received an invitation from one of his wealthy friends. "I did get to know a few people but gradually lost interest since it is not truly interactive."

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