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## Web hot in LDS singles scene

*But sex assaults spur warning from operators of sites*

By [Marin Decker](#)  
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PROVO — Lynn Scoresby was shocked at the response to his recently launched, LDS-oriented Web site.

"We're virtually dumbfounded by the extent of the response and the intensity of the interest that people have in what we've done," said Scoresby, a Brigham Young University psychologist. "We've had people walk in — men, interestingly — who ask to be taught how to use the computer so they can get on it."

The site doesn't offer general conference tickets, new genealogical information or access to a previously unreleased volume of "The Work and the Glory." Scoresby's Web site has enticed some 4,000 users in the past two weeks because it's centered around helping LDS Church members reach a goal some pray about often: marriage.

Scoresby's site, [www.LDSPromise.com](http://www.LDSPromise.com), is the first survey-based, matching site in a sea of rapidly growing LDS singles Web sites. LDS singles eager to find mates have been logging on to LDS dating Web sites in ever-increasing numbers: the largest site, [LDSSingles.com](http://LDSSingles.com), has more than 100,000 members, and anywhere from 100 to 350 people sign up each day.

But with that increase has come another trend: In one month, three incidents of sexual assault have been reported by Utah County women who say they met their alleged attackers on LDS singles sites.

Two men have been arrested in connection with the alleged incidents.

One is a 33-year-old prison guard accused of raping a 19-year-old Pleasant Grove woman, the other a now-expelled Brigham Young University student who allegedly raped one woman and groped another.

All three of the alleged incidents happened in homes the women agreed to go to after meeting the men online, police said.

Mindy Woodhouse coordinates the sexual assault program for the Utah Valley Center for Women and Children in Crisis. Woodhouse says she sees more and more women who have been assaulted by men they met online.

"Especially because that's the way people are meeting a lot now, that's definitely becoming a problem," Woodhouse said. "People can present themselves as wonderful and be something completely the opposite because it's over the Internet."

Part of the problem could be that clients of LDS-oriented sites feel more secure — even falsely secure — because the Web sites are geared toward fellow LDS Church members.

"It feels nice to be in a place where people hold the same values, or at least you expect they do," said Kevin Koger, vice president of business development for LDSSingles.com. "I think people do feel a little safer, and, unfortunately, cases like this make it appear that we need to keep up those same guards and barriers as we would anywhere else we might be."

Most LDS singles sites state that users must be faithful members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but site operators must rely mainly on other users to report violations of the policy.

LDSSingles.com was not the site on which the women met their alleged attackers, but Koger says there are no guarantees that something similar won't happen again.

"No site like ours can prevent people from doing whatever they're planning to do, and we can't gauge their intent, but we do take it very seriously, and it's something that we hope we can avoid ever happening, but again, we try," he said. "Unfortunately, this, I'm afraid, will happen once in a while, on online dating sites, whether it's on an LDS site or elsewhere, and it does happen elsewhere."

Woodhouse said that it is not the number of Internet-related sexual assaults that are increasing but the number of people who meet online.

"I would say it's increasing only because that's an increasing way people are trying to meet others," she said. "This is just another way they're meeting people, but the majority of the rape victims that we work with are assaulted by someone that they know."

Scoresby cited one industry source that said about 18 million to 40 million people click on to a singles Web site on a regular basis.

"The dating business throughout the country has grown so fast and so large it's a little shocking," he said. "Those large numbers are probably one reason why we see more of these awful but sensational stories about assaults."

Site operators stress that they do their best to caution members about face-to-face meetings with people they have met virtually on the Internet.

"We have built into the site several cautionary statements that are very clear and direct about when people should meet and under what circumstances, and when they shouldn't meet," Scoresby said.

Most singles sites, LDS or not, provide members with tips to help them stay safe when they opt to meet in person. Meeting in a public place during daylight hours, having your own transportation, and not moving to a private location are a few of the tips sites offer.

One mainstream singles site, [True.com](http://True.com), takes safety a step further, performing criminal background checks and marriage status verification on each member. The site is lobbying nationally to encourage legislation requiring all sites to do the same, or at least state that they do not.

"Because of all the horrible things that have happened, we think that there should be better protection for people that meet online, so we're trying to do something about it," said Bill Rathburn, advisory board security consultant for True.com.

Scoresby pointed out that a woman could be sexually assaulted by a man she meets anywhere, not only online.

"The same tragic events can happen in any environment," Scoresby said, "And I'm not protecting the industry; I'm just saying that's the climate of our time."

Koger agreed. "This could happen no matter where you meet, unfortunately, whether it's at a bar or a church dance," he said.

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