

Are you Down4Lunch?



Written by

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If you ever thought networking felt a little like gambling, Jess Sadick is apt to agree.

"Networking events, in my view, are crapshoots," said the 39-year-old entrepreneur and Brighton native. "You can't control when they happen ... You have no idea if you're going to meet anybody worthwhile."

Sadick is trying to make the process more efficient with a new startup called Down4Lunch, which hosts its launch party tomorrow. The free web service allows users to plug in their information, say who they want to meet and when they're available. The system provides matches, allowing users to exchange contact information after they agree to meet.

"You're going to spend money on lunch anyway; you might as well go meet someone new," Sadick said.

Down4Lunch isn't the only networking program offered locally. There's #RocPeepsLunch, named for its Twitter

origins. It was started about a year ago after various users on Twitter decided to meet in person. The group now hosts monthly lunches around town. The next one is at 11:30 a.m. Friday, July 22, at Salena's Mexican Restaurant at the Village Gate.

The Rochester Business Alliance has the paid ConnectForLunch program. It's where members can receive a weekly invite to attend lunch with as many as three other available members.

People primarily join the chamber to network, said Ellen Rosen, RBA's vice president of marketing, communications and membership. ConnectForLunch added variety along with an intimate opportunity to make personal connections.

"A lot of business is still done on a very personal level," she said, estimating that a dozen or more lunch groups take place every week.

Sadick, meanwhile, developed the idea for Down4Lunch while working on his MBA at

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the University of Rochester. But he wasn't sure how to get the business off the ground, so he moved back to Washington, D.C. in 2009, where he completed his undergraduate work.

He said social networking sites for professionals, like LinkedIn, are primarily for people who already know each other, making it less useful for those who would like to meet someone new.

Earlier this year, Sadick decided to self-finance the venture and hired local web developers Phu Concepts to build the first iteration of Down4Lunch.

He plans to draw advertising revenue from restaurants that offer promotions or participate in meetups.

And for those who need an incentive, friendly competition is built in. A review mechanism asks people to rate the person they had lunch with. The most highly rated users will be displayed on Down4Lunch's website.

Sadick added that the goal is to help people make meaningful connections.

"This eliminates the gatekeeper," Sadick said. "You don't have to go through a secretary and explain why they should transfer the call."

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If You Go

What: Down4Lunch launch party.

When: 6 to 8 p.m., Thursday, July 14.

Where: Max of Eastman Place, 25 Gibbs St., Rochester.

RSVP: info@Down4Lunch.com.

Web: Down4Lunch.com

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