

HEALTH AND BEHAVIOR

Cheating hearts make a good excuse for a business

Perfect cover is provided — for a price

By Shelley Emling
Special for USA TODAY

LONDON — John Watson has no plans to cheat on his spouse, but he knows there are plenty of errant husbands and wives who do.

And that's why he launched a business, Ace Alibi, to serve those who stray. As its name implies, the business provides credible cover stories for all those extramarital moments. The fee: \$25 and up, depending on the extravagance of the tailor-made fib.

Say you want to meet a lover for the weekend but don't want the spouse to get suspicious. You could hire Ace Alibi to mail you a phony invitation to a business or sporting event, giving you a valid reason for being away from home.

Or you could pay Ace to take calls for you as if you were attending a conference at a hotel. The company would allow the calling spouse to hear it trying your room or paging you, then would take a message so you could phone back. You could even buy phony receipts from Ace to help in your deceit.

Does Watson regret making money from helping people mislead their partners? Absolutely not. He insists he's helping to keep couples together.

"I simply don't believe a family should be destroyed over two or three nights of madness," says Watson, 36, of Inverness, Scotland. "If someone uses this service, then that person obviously wants to preserve their family."

And he says there are lots of people using his service, which is advertised on the Web. Since launching the business six months ago, Watson has received more than 1,800 customer inquiries, a third of them from women. He says he has mailed 50 or so American clients (the rest are European) invitations to non-existent conferences in Europe so they could



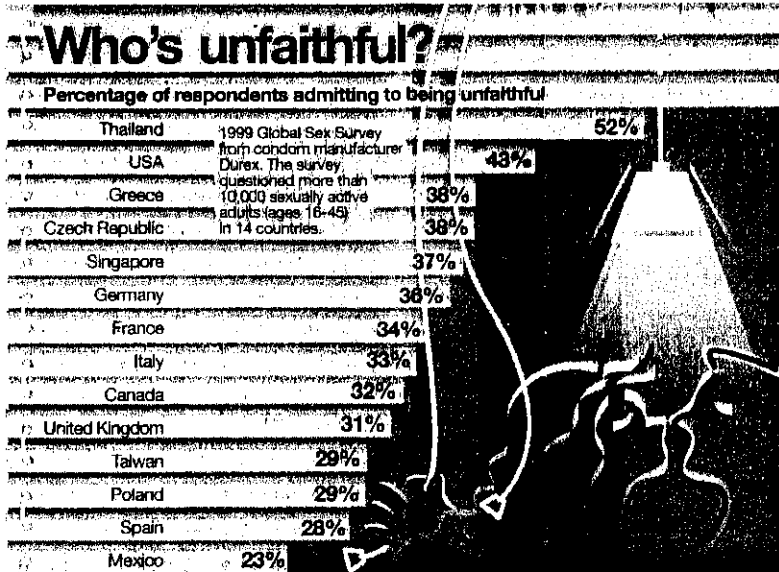
Watson: He has no regrets.

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ciety, this type of thing is going to happen and that there's no sense in breaking up a long-term relationship over it," Watson says.

Watson's business mirrors a London-based company,



USA within a few months, and in several other countries by the end of the year. "We want to protect your loved ones from the stress that goes with suspecting your spouse is unfaithful," says Brock, who isn't married. Depending on the study, 40%

to 60% of American marriages are marred by adultery. In Europe, according to the 1999 Global Sex Survey conducted for Durex, the condom manufacturer, Greeks and Czechs — 36% of those surveyed — cheat most. Britons aren't too far behind,

at 31%, but Germans (36%), French (34%) and Italians (33%) cheat more. The survey puts the USA at 43%. Brock's business was born of his experiences on the road, managing British rock stars. "Many of them would want to fool around, and so I would

tell their spouses they were going on business. He provides clients with an overseas phone number they can give to their spouses. When the spouse calls, someone from Ace answers in an arranged manner, then phones the client with the spouse's message. The fee: \$30, plus the cost of the calls.

"No, I don't condone this type of behavior, and my wife doesn't like the business too much. But she likes the money, and we know that in today's so-

the Alibi Agency, founded a year ago. It also advertises on the Web.

Want to buy a bauble for your mistress? The Alibi Agency will make the purchase so that the gift can't be traced back to you.

The owner of the Alibi Agency, Ronnie Brock, says the deception game has proved so profitable — he has received more than 10,000 customer inquiries — that he plans to open franchises in Argentina and the

For more information

- ▶ www.ace-alibi.com — The controversial site of the Scottish company Ace Alibi, which provides cover stories for adulterous occasions.
- ▶ www.alibi.co.uk — The site of the London-based company Alibi Agency, which also provides alibi stories.
- ▶ www.infidelity.com — Founded by Anthony DeLorenzo, this site offers support and information for people whose spouses have cheated.
- ▶ www.durex.com — The site of Durex, the condom manufacturer, includes the results of its 1999 Global Sex Survey.

provide excuses for them," he says. "I got so good at this that later on I decided it could become a great business."

Critics are appalled at the idea of businesses built on lying for profit.

"These businesses try to look good by saying they want to keep families together," says Anthony DeLorenzo, founder of the Web site infidelity.com, which offers support to the victims of adultery. "But, in fact, they should come out and admit they have no morals."

"They are trying to make money, period. If they really wanted to keep families together, they would inform the husband or wife that their spouse is cheating so that they could work things out."

Some church leaders say they are flabbergasted that this

type of company is allowed to conduct business.

Says the Rev. Michael Manley of St. John's Church in Blackpool, England: "I thought this whole thing must be a joke. I didn't think it could be legal, because obviously this service is open to anybody, so how do you know people are just cheating on their wives, which is bad enough? They could be cheating on their companies — anything in fact."

Meanwhile, for those who've been cheated on, help is out there. In Japan, Infidelity Detection Cream recently went on the market. Just massage it into your spouse's back before he or she leaves home. If he or she showers during the day — a telltale sign of an affair — the chemical reacts with water to form big, nasty blisters.