

# Time Out

## New York

### Summer's TOP 10

The obsessive guide to impulsive entertainment  
May 20-27, 2004 Issue No. 451 \$2.99

Welcome to my house Bush.

OUT THERE

## Call them the seekers

From time to time here at the *Time Out* offices, we get calls like the following: "My daughter is celebrating her birthday next week. Could you suggest the best restaurant for a teenager who thinks she's seen it all?" Or: "Hi, I'm Dustin Hoffman's assistant. His son is starting school next week, and I wanted to know where I could buy him the coolest backpack." Though we do aim to please, we can't be there for you all the time. On such occasions, there *are* people out there who can help you handle all those perplexing retail queries. Finderguy.com is a revelatory online service that is different from any other search engine in one gigantic way: It has real human beings diligently working on each request.

Log on and type in what you're looking for (say, a store that sells rare cigars or a boutique that carries a certain Gucci handbag). Enter your target price and your neighborhood choices. (The service, for now, is for Manhattan only.) Once your request is received, one of five full-time "finders" combs through a database of 2,600 stores for the answer. If that search fails to provide any leads, the finder picks up the phone and begins calling—and keeps calling until he or she finds what you're looking for. In one to three days, the website will send you an e-mail containing store info for your search. (Our two test searches—for a \$50 bicycle and a local all-you-can-eat Indian buffet—were answered in about three hours.)

And Finderguy is free. Users pay nothing, and the site actually makes zero commission on each referral, says Carolyn Meyer, who founded the ser-



SEARCH PARTY  
Finderguy.com's  
Meyer is on the case.

vice in 2002. Instead, it earns cash by highlighting stores on a special boutiques page. Obviously, the finders try to steer users toward these partner stores (which are mostly independent retailers, because, Meyer says, "we want to bring business to the smaller boutiques that make New York so great"), but the finders won't hesitate to recommend chain or nonpartner stores if that's where the answer lies.

While the service is nice for users, for the finders it's hell. Besides dealing with the occasional oddball query like "Where can I find a model of a head with an exposed brain?," each finder must visit every single one of the 2,600 stores catalogued in the database before they begin work. Says Meyer, "It was awful. I wouldn't do it again for a million dollars."

—Reed Tucker