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Couriers take off as delivery option: Service uses passengers to carry parcels

By Jesse Noyes
Sunday, December 18, 2005

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When Chris Caron flies from New Jersey to Ontario, Canada, this holiday season, he might carry more than just his luggage.

Caron, a 35-year-old Canadian native, volunteered last week to deliver a stranger's package through the Web site CasualCourier.com - a service pairing travelers with folks shipping goods who don't want to pay top-dollar.

Casual Courier mixes the concepts of eBay and online dating services, with a postal twist. Travelers deliver items for customers at rates below Federal Express' and UPS' typical fees.

The sender and delivery person negotiate the fee while the site takes a 99 connection fee.

"The Web site is basically a matchmaker," said Jack Jacobs, Casual Courier founder and a Jerusalem-based environmental lawyer. "Instead of matching people to go on dates . . . it matches people with packages."

Visitors to the site can also find a babysitter for a flight or rent out container space.

Jacobs said the hand-delivery service is safe since passengers are encouraged to check the contents of customers' packages before agreeing to deliver the goods.

But some airline industry experts say the risk isn't worth the reward.

"I can understand the motivations but it really represents great potential danger for the passengers carrying these packages," said David Stempler, president of the Air Travlrs Association.

Even if travelers examine the packages they might not be "knowledgeable about what would be dangerous or what would be contraband," he added.

Over 500 users have registered at Casual Courier since it launched last month and traffic to the site is picking up in anticipation of the holidays, Jacobs said.

Some users likely want to earn a little extra money.

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But for Caron, it's just part of the holiday spirit. "It almost seems like a humane thing to do - to help someone else out when I'm going there anyway," he said.

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