

Access control

FROM THE GLAMOROUS TO THE PLAINLY OUTRAGEOUS, PRIVATE CONCIERGE CLUBS CAN HANDLE IT ALL. BY LINDA MALI

WHEN JENNIFER LOPEZ got married, she wanted 12 albino peacocks at her wedding. She got them. Madonna wanted a brand of herbal tea only available in America. She had it flown to her house in London in time for breakfast the following morning. Once upon a time, such whims were reserved for the obscenely rich and famous. Not anymore. Thanks to private lifestyle clubs with super-PAs, almost anybody can get star treatment.

Personal concierges are people with connections. They perform well under pressure, and always get the job done. They get to know their clients so well, they don't have to ask what colour napkins to get for Wednesday's dinner party. They already know.

What you might have accomplished in six phone calls, you can now get done with a single call. Want a private chef to cook for your dinner guests? Call a personal concierge company – they'll do all the legwork, and you'll get all the credit. Need a goat dressed in a French maid's outfit to meet you at the airport? One guy did, and he got it, too – thanks to a personal concierge, of course.

Around the world, the private lifestyle industry is burgeoning and evolving to meet clients' needs. Katherine Giovanni, chairman of the International Concierge and Errand Association (ICEA) explains, "Recently, the terminology of 'lifestyle management' has surfaced, and concierges have embraced it because it's better terminology for what they do."

"Originally concierges were errand runners. Now it's, 'Let me do everything for you so you don't have to.'"

A few clubs stand head and shoulders above the rest, making all your problems theirs. For a fee, these clubs will propel you past the velvet ropes, into premieres, fashion shows and events of the most exclusive kind. They love a challenge – the more obscure, the better.

If you need an A-list celebrity to endorse a product or event, a concierge club such as

American Total Prestige (www.totalprestige.com) can get you one – from movie stars and sports personalities, to motivational speakers and political figures.

Ten UK (www.tenuk.com) offers relatively low rates and prides itself on being a lifestyle club for the common man. "It's not about being rich, it's about being smart about how you spend your time," says Alex Cheatle, the company's CEO. Ten UK specialises in helping you find the cheapest tradespeople, from plumbers and electricians to carpenters and landscapers. They'll even go to your house and wait for the service company to arrive while you're at work.

Ten UK's members have requested everything from advice on how a son should prepare for his Cambridge University interviews, to a tantric sex instructor for a failing marriage. They'll even fire your cleaner if that's what you ask of them. Cheatle believes that, in time, having a personal concierge will seem as natural as having a GP: "Anyone who thinks they are too busy will want this service," he says.

British heavyweight Quintessentially (www.quintessentially.com) specialises in the obscure. With offices in 45 cities around the world (including Johannesburg and Cape Town), they're equipped to handle any curveball you throw at them. If you want a full circus for your daughter's birthday party in the back yard, a metal detector to find the car keys you dropped in a field, or an appointment with the stylist who did Sharon Stone's hair in that movie you recently saw, 'Q', as it is affectionately known, will see to it.

Quintessentially's impressive client list – including Robin Williams, Clint Eastwood, Kate Moss, Gwyneth Paltrow, Bill Clinton and royal families around the world – might lead you to assume that membership is restricted to people of a certain calibre. But according to Charlie Hodge of Quintessentially SA, this is a misconception. "Our company saves its members money, there are fewer hassles and it allows them access to

events and experiences that may not be available to the man or woman on the street," he says. And it's true that a growing number of exhausted housewives, businesspeople and CEOs are opting for personal concierge services.

In some cases, uber-concierge services can cost you anywhere north of five figures a year. But for the club's members, time has become the most precious commodity of all, and lifestyle clubs are simply there to create more of it.

South Africans are accustomed to doing things for themselves. After all, that's the fastest way to get the job done, right? Wrong. A single phone call, email or even an SMS is all it takes to make your laundry and tax returns disappear, to have your garden landscaped, or arrange for a chartered airplane. We rounded up the country's top personal concierge services, for whom finding bodyguards for high flyers or groceries for a new mom is all in a day's work...

ORGANIZE CONCIERGE

On a day spent scouting the net for information, Megan Kaimowitz stumbled on the global world of private concierge clubs. She convinced her partner Grant McGuire to form a South African equivalent in 2005, Organize Concierge in Cape Town. Their stylish website reflects their level of service; Kaimowitz uses only the best suppliers for her clients, most of whom are foreign businesspeople. There is little that Organize cannot do, from arranging a trip to the Sao Paulo Grand Prix, to tracking down an interpreter: "If it's legal, I'll do it!" Kaimowitz quips. Organize works on a fixed hourly retainer that varies from R250 to R350. www.organize.co.za

BEYOND RED

What started as a Joburg-based events management company became a bespoke concierge service in 2007, when corporate clients began relying on co-owners Greg Lipton and Riaan Drever for more than events coordination. A South African branch of the ICEA was recently

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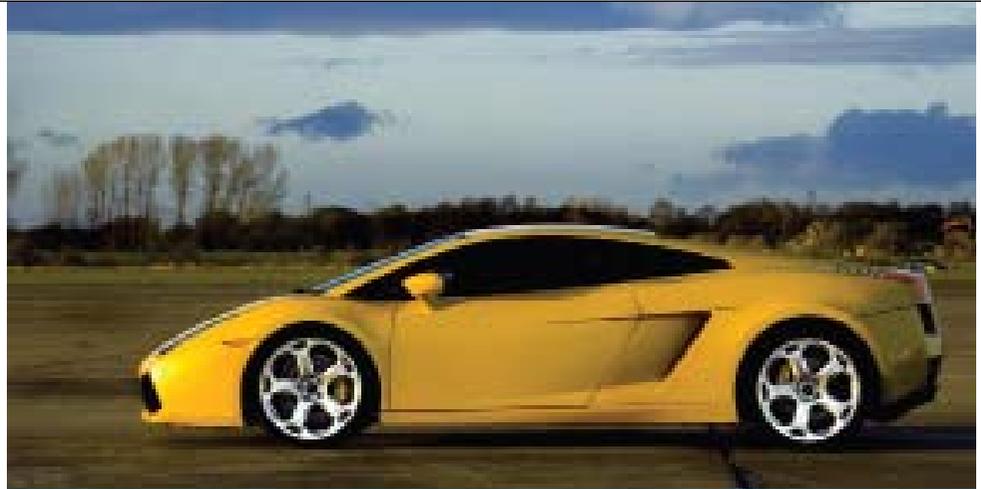
established, with the aim of governing the local concierge industry by creating some form of accreditation. Drever was elected National Chairman of the ICEA in South Africa. Beyond Red caters to local band members, former Miss South Africa and businesspeople of every description, and is accustomed to fulfilling needs in record time: "We often joke about renaming our business to 'lastminute.com' because many requests require an extremely short turnaround time," says Lipton. Fees range between R130 to R350 per hour depending on your membership status. www.beyondred.co.za

THE DESK

She found fallow deer horns for one member's home and secured exclusive land on a golf estate for another. Carole Day's career in the personal concierge industry began in the UK, before she brought all she had learned to South African shores. Her aim is to help South Africans understand the importance of service delivery at the highest level: "Impeccable service has a positive impact on the success of an economy and brings investment and guests from abroad," says Day. "The better we get at service and delivery, the more likely we are to succeed with big events such as the World Cup." At The Desk, fees range from R300 to R450 per hour, again depending on your membership status. www.thedesk.co.za

LEAVIT2ME

As laid back as Durban may seem, there are plenty of hard workers there. Those are the people Helga Wild was interested in when she founded Leavit2Me, a company that helps its clients maintain a balance between their lives and their work. Leavit2Me specialises in on-site corporate concierge and errand desks, giving employees the luxury of immediate access. Errands are billed per task or on a retainer that covers a set amount of hours per month. "My services enable staff to spend their time productively at the workplace, decreasing absenteeism caused by personal, mundane but necessary tasks that need to get done," says Wild, who is Regional Manager of the newly established ICEA in KZN. Leavit2Me's services extend to the household, and are as varied as



CRUISE CONTROL

Owning a sports car has its perks. People stare enviously at you, and there always seems to be parking space just outside your destination. The downside, however, includes maintenance costs, asset depreciation and the fact that as much as you love more than one model of car, you probably can't buy them all.

Enter vehicle time-share and fractional ownership. The local answer to the US' Classic Car Club in Manhattan is Emotiv Private Supercar Club. A single phone call gets you access to a fleet of the most desirable cars, without the drawbacks of traditional ownership. There's no need to choose when you can drive them all.

Take a yellow Lambo Gallardo for the weekend or an understated but devilishly elegant Bentley for that important business meeting. With Emotiv's corporate package, up to four colleagues can subscribe under one membership at a special rate. On an annual basis, Emotiv membership costs roughly half of what you would pay to own or hire a supercar.

You need a valid driver's licence and a relatively clean driving record. You might want to consider an advanced driving course to handle the torque, though. Currently based in Durban, Emotiv plans to open branches in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. It's the perfect arrangement if you're passionate about supercars. With all the admin taken care of, your only dilemma will be deciding which exhilarating ride to try next. www.emotiv.co.za

helping with relocation, doing groceries and accounting admin, booking holidays, dealing with insurers after car accidents, taking your vehicle in for a service, buying gifts and sourcing tradespeople. "We effectively eliminate your to-do list, allowing you to focus on what's important in your life," says Wild. www.leavit2me.co.za

ALTERNATIVELY PLAN B

Having endured the rat race for five years, Maria Morfou and Angie Lambrinos knew exactly how little time and energy is left over for anything other than work. Abandoning their tailored suits and high heels, the pair founded Alternatively Plan B, a concierge and personal shopping service that gives their clients time to do the things they enjoy. The company operates in the greater Johannesburg area, and takes care of a company's employees, attending to their clients' shopping lists while they're at work, standing in queues at post offices or revenue services, and reminding them of important dates. Concierge companies are not without problems, Maria Morfou alerts. "We need to educate people about our services as the concept is relatively new to the country. We also always have to reinforce the fact that our service fees are reasonable and affordable to the average South African." www.aplanb.co.za

ROUNABOUT CONCIERGE

As a game ranger, Terence Levin met a variety of people from around the world. They all had one thing in common: they wanted to simplify their lives. Levin now runs Roundabout concierge and specialises in safaris and holidays. Levin goes along to do your groceries, fetch your laundry or deliver you a meal if you're not up to scratch in the kitchen. "I take care of all my client's necessary evils," says Levin, whose clients are predominantly corporate. Based in Johannesburg, he operates in the Gauteng area and has plans to expand to other parts of the country. "I've had a few requests for my services in the Western Cape so I'd like to take on the challenge of growing my business there," he says.

www.conciergeservices.co.za

MARCEL GITS CONCIERGE SERVICE

MGCS specialises in property management. Operating in the Knysna area, Gits and his team are there to ensure that your home is in tip-top shape while you are away, doing regular check ups after storms, making sure the pool is clean, attending to maintenance and even stocking the fridge before you return. They also manage construction projects, sending you photographs and progress reports to keep you in the loop. It's the perfect solution if you have a holiday home that needs regular upkeep. www.mgcs.co.za □