

First TV ads for divorces - offering a £65 online quickie

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Adverts for cut-price divorce services are to be screened on television for the first time.

The company involved is offering a divorce online for just £65, plus VAT.

Customers are posted all their forms to sign and don't even have to attend court.

The ad will be shown on digital channels later this month and has also been posted on video YouTube.

Split screen: Mark Keenan's firm offers fast, cheap divorces online

The founder of Divorce-Online, Mark Keenan, denied that he was profiting from couples' misery - or that the ads would encourage them to split.

"We're doing the opposite," he said. "We do a good, professional job for people and provide an alternative to high street solicitors, and we just charge a tenth of the price.

"The number of marriage breakdowns is sad but these are already happening. We just help people keep more of their money to benefit themselves and their children."

He said the company wanted to show that an uncontested divorce, where both parties can agree on their finances and arrangements for the children, does not have to be an expensive and drawn-out process.

A survey of 100 solicitors showed that an uncontested divorce costs between £850 and £2,500. But those who use the online service can get unhitched for £65 plus VAT and court fees, within 12 weeks.

The court fees, which are standard for any divorce, are £340.

Currently, one in three of us will get divorced. In 2005, there were 155,052 divorces in England and Wales, with one in five of those second divorces.

The Swindon-based company decided to venture into TV advertising after realising

that its online promotions were reaching only those in larger cities.

The advert shows a divorcing couple with a solicitor standing between them. When they realise they can separate cheaply online, the middleman is 'rubbed out' with an eraser.

"I don't think it makes people more likely to get divorced," said Mr Keenan.

"People only make these decisions after a long period. The people who come to me have mainly already been separated for a while and they just want to make it legal.

"I've never had someone ring me up and say, 'My wife's just annoyed me, I want a divorce right now'."

He said demand for their 'no-frills' service, operated by paralegals, increased by 28 per cent last year, and had already risen by 36 per cent this year.

A spokesman for the marriage counselling service Relate welcomed the move to reduce the bureaucracy involved in divorce, and said they did not expect it to encourage couples to divorce 'on a whim'.

But she warned that even if the process became easier, divorce would still take an emotional toll.

"There's no way that any divorce, quickie or otherwise, will help you to understand what went wrong, and that's where counselling comes in," she added.

"It should be a natural part of getting a divorce, making sure that you are OK emotionally and that your children are OK too."