



PHOTO BY RICHARD FAVERTY / BECKETT STUDIOS

Seth Kramer

Sharing Trade Show Secrets

By John Moehring

The cards are swiftly spread in a picture-perfect arc across the top of his trade show stand. The flourish is flashy enough to cause two passersby to freeze in their tracks. “Have you gotten your free sample yet?” Seth asks. “No? Well, just push out one of those cards for your free sample.”

The word “free” perks the ears of a young lady carrying a shopping bag filled with brochures and promotional samples. Seth asks if she would mind pushing out another face-down card. He asks for another, and then one more. He’s now looking at four face-down cards pushed out from the spread, as well as the faces of about a dozen other people who have moved in closer to see what’s going on. The cards are turned over. Voila! They are the four Aces.

“All Aces,” Seth says, “Just like the amazing deal we have for you here at the Blackstone touch-’n’-buy booth. However, before I let you in on that marketing secret, I’ll have this gentleman select one of these Aces...”

Mr. Kramer is off and running. He’s entertaining the people and achieving the first objective of the successful trade show performer — stopping traffic and gathering a crowd.

During his break between shows, Seth says, “That opening trick is a variation of Paul Le Paul’s Quadruple Coincidence from *The Card Magic of Le Paul*. I’ve been using it for seven years to get people out of the aisles and into the booth. It’s a real stunner, a great trick.... But if you really want to know something, this trade show business is not about the great tricks. It’s all about the client.” Seth maintains that it doesn’t matter what tricks you choose and use. It’s more important to focus on the presentational aspects of the magic and find clever, subtle, and not-so-subtle ways of delivering a powerful message about your client’s company and the product. “That,” he says, “is the real secret to being a trade show magician who’s always busy.”



Seth Kramer was in Las Vegas the day before the opening of AAPEX. That's the annual Automotive Aftermarket Products Expo, where more than 1,200 exhibitors were busy setting up for the business-to-business trade show that represents the \$250-billion retail and service aftermarket in North America. Seth was working the show, but had some spare time and offered to bring me up to speed on the trade show business.

"My client for this one is the Super Glue Corporation," he said as we took a booth in a far corner of the Venetian's coffee shop. "The good thing about this company is that it has over 100 products, and at each trade show the focus is on a different product. I was originally hired because they had developed a 'magic glue' called Bondini. For this show, I'm pitching the Permanent Patch, a fiberglass repair patch."

Seth tells me this is his eighth year representing Super Glue, and, as far as he knows, he'll be the only magician working the AAPEX show this week. That really wasn't that surprising to hear. Ten or twelve years ago when I attended a couple of big trade shows, the National Homebuilders Show and the Consumer Electronics Show, it seemed there was a magician on every aisle. Then, not long after the Millennium, these guys who were supposedly getting rich and famous at trade shows disappeared. I asked Seth if there were actually fewer magicians performing at trade shows in the 21st century?

He said there were fewer *true* trade show workers nowadays than there were a decade ago, and then told me about the 1997 Network/Interop in Las Vegas, a show that boasted of a whopping 27 magicians. "It was more like a magic convention than an Internet trade show. It was a time when too many magi-

cians were focusing too much of their attention on the Internet business. So when that bubble burst and their clients went away, most of those magicians never recovered. Performers like Paul Gertner, Danny Orleans, Charles Greene, Harrison Carroll, and myself were diversified enough that we could do work outside the Internet world. It's difficult to rebuild if you don't have some diversification to fall back on." And Mr. Kramer was not talking about being able to pick up a bagful of different tricks or adapt your old patter to fit a new client.

As already mentioned, it's Seth's firm

It's Seth's firm belief that being a successful trade show magician has little to do with the tricks you perform.

belief that being a successful trade show magician has little to do with the tricks you perform, and it's also not about creating an in-demand personality. When he started to reel off the criteria for being a diverse and successful trade show magician, I realized it was time to turn on the tape recorder I'd brought along.

"Yes, your tricks have to be good," he said. "And, yes, both the audience and your client have to like you as a person, performer, and representative of the company. But at the end of the day, the client expects you to accomplish two things: One, stop traffic and bring qualified leads to the booth; and two, deliver a professional, informative, and memorable message about the company and its products."

As Seth elaborated on the importance of working with the corporate client's sales force, saying, "I let these people know that I want to be considered a part of their sales team," I had

a strange feeling that we were being eavesdropped upon. A 35-ish looking gentleman, dressed business casual, had eased into a chair at the adjacent booth and was leaning toward our table, as if he wanted to say something but couldn't because he noticed the little red light on the cassette recorder. Seth halted and looked straight at the man. I clicked off the recorder.

"You're the Super Glue guy!" the man said, grinning at Seth.

"Yes, I am," Seth said with an equally big smile. "You remembered me. Are you in town for the show?"

"Yeah, back again. I was pretty sure that was you when I was standing over by the cash register. The Super Glue guy!"

"Sir, you have made my day," Seth said to the gentleman and asked a few questions about what company he was with, where he was from.

This had to be a set up. I started looking around for the hidden camera. This fellow had to be Seth's stooge.

"I don't believe it," I said when the man finally left. It took a couple of minutes for me to be convinced that the guy wasn't the hired-president of the Seth Kramer Fan Club; but instead, he was just a trade-show attendee who'd been indelibly impressed with Seth's magical abilities to pitch Super Glue. Thinking back, I should have kept that recorder running. Seth would have a super testimonial for the folks at Super Glue, something that could be the convincer for the company to keep him around another eight years.

"I still don't believe what happened," I said as I switched the recorder back on. Seth uttered, "Yeah, I know." I suggested we start at the beginning and asked that hackneyed-for-the-record question, "How'd you get interested in magic?"

Seth Kramer was born in Bayside, New York July 10th, 1960, and like many kids growing up in the '60s and '70s he was influenced by the magicians he watched on television. "There was a magician from the local power company who did a magic-of-electricity show for a school assembly, but it was Mark Wilson's TV specials that really intrigued me. And I was pretty fascinated with the kind of magic I saw on *The Amazing World of Kreskin*."

Seth had already been introduced to sleight of hand by an amateur magician named Danny Donner. "He was an accountant and one of my dad's friends who spent a lot of time with me. He started by teaching me the simple one-hand Charlier Cut. I would practice what he showed me and when he was satisfied I could perform



No matter who the client, Seth becomes part of thier sales team.

it he'd give me something else to learn."

Seth's dad introduced him to the magic shops of New York City, taking him to Tannen's when he was 13 years old. "After that first visit my parents let me ride the train into the City, and I'd divide up my day between hanging out at Tannen's and going over to Al Flosso's shop on 34th Street." Plying his newly acquired skills, the teenage magician was soon doing the obligatory neighborhood birthday parties and getting \$5 a show, which his parents thought was a gross overcharge.

It wasn't long before Seth was becoming acquainted with such sleight-of-hand performers as Frank Garcia, Darwin Ortiz, Derek Dingle, Jeff McBride, Lou Lancaster, and a most helpful gentleman of magic, Bob Elliott. "Bob was an engineer for Johns-Mansfield Corporation who would show up at Tannen's on Saturdays to demonstrate and work behind the counter. It was Bob who pushed me in the right direction for buying my first books. One was *Close-up Card Magic* by Harry Lorayne, another magician who'd show up at Tannen's on Saturdays. Harry was always doing his latest stuff and hawking his books. And there was Governor's, the deli/diner where everybody met for coffee or lunch. The usual schedule was hit Tannen's first, go to Governor's, then stop by Flosso's. That's how I spent my Saturdays for many years."

Kramer was soon able to demand decent fees for his performances, and by the time he was in high school, the birthday parties were for adults and the anniversary parties and bar mitzvahs he worked were in New York City, New Jersey, and Connecticut, as well as on Long Island. "My first gig where I was paid to travel was in 1978 during my senior year of high school. A travel agency booked me for a week at the Royal St. Kitts Hotel in the West Indies. It was the grand opening of the hotel and I worked poolside during the day and in the evenings at the main restaurant. It was a blast for a 17 year old."

After completing high school, Seth enrolled at State University of New York at Stony Brook, where he would earn a degree in theater, with a minor in political science. Through college he continued performing. "In Port Jefferson, a nice little waterfront community one town over from where the University is, there was a nice seafood restaurant overlooking the Long Island sound and I worked there on a regular basis, including most of the summers. In addition, there was a lot of work doing private parties in the area, be it kids' birthdays or bar mitzvahs."

After graduation from Stony Brook, Kramer took his law board exams and enrolled in the Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University in Manhattan. Around this same time, he took his first step into the world of



Kramer doing what he does best: stopping traffic with his magic.

corporate entertainment. A relative who enjoyed Seth's style of magic and was an engineer at Union Carbide Corporation suggested that Seth try to book himself for an upcoming company party. "My uncle Gene introduced me to Lou Agnello, the marketing manager

who hired me to do this show for a small gathering of maybe 20 people." The folks at Union Carbide liked the show and Seth was asked to do more shows for some sales meetings and soon found himself traveling around, working special corporate events. "These shows were



Size matters. Seth often presents a theater show to attract and draw larger crowds into the client's booth.

for golf outings in Pebble Beach, customer meetings on Sanibel Island, a product introduction at Hilton Head, South Carolina. I was getting \$500 to \$600 a show and for a law student, making that kind of money and getting to travel all over the country was a pretty good thing.”

In fact, so good was the money he was making with his magic that Kramer was starting to have second thoughts about his law studies. He'd just experienced an unhappy summer working as an intern in the legal department of a Long Island manufacturing company and, quite frankly, dreaded the thought of a lifetime career as an attorney. So, half way through his second year at Cardozo, he sought the counsel of his wise friend Bob Elliott. “Bob always told me that my education should come first and everything I learned in college would come in handy should I someday pursue magic full time.”

Elliott fully understood Kramer's dilemma when Seth told him about the lucrative corporate work he'd been doing for Union Carbide. Bob told Seth to sit tight while he made a phone call to his friend Bud Dietrich in St. Louis.

Bud Dietrich was one of the true pioneers

of trade show magic. At the time, Seth had no idea who he was, even though in 1975 Dietrich had written (with Dick Jarrow) *The Trade Show Handbook*, a little booklet that quickly became a classic in the business. When Bob hung up after his 15-minute phone call he told Seth, “Bud has agreed to meet with you in Washington, D.C., where he's working the World of Concrete show. If you can get there he'll get you into the show and let you watch him work. You can see how he customizes his magic and learn how he pitch-

and Bud simply said, ‘If he can get down to D.C., I'll show him what this whole trade show thing is about.’”

When Seth approached the exhibitor's registration desk of the Washington Convention Center, Bud greeted him with a smile, a handshake, and presented him with his very first trade show badge. Once inside the main exhibit hall, Seth was overwhelmed by the scope of the show. Hundreds of exhibits stretched the length and width of several football fields. Concrete trucks, cement mixers,

and heavy machinery were everywhere. The sound was deafening. They headed for Dietrich's booth, where he was representing the Berema Corporation, manufacturers of air-powered jackhammers.

Bud clipped on his microphone, grabbed a set of Linking Rings, and stepped into the busy aisle

to go to work. Seth stood in awe as he witnessed a ring routine unlike any he'd ever seen. As the rings clattered and marvelously linked and unlinked, Bud rattled off an unusually entertaining spiel about the latest model Berema jackhammer. Trade-show passersby were stopping, looking, and listening. There was laughter. One man shouted, “No way!” The unison chant of “Berema!” was heard whenever Dietrich asked for the magic word

So good was the money he was making with his magic that Kramer was starting to have second thoughts about his law studies.

es his client's product. And Bud said you can ask him all the questions you want about the trade show business.”

Seth confesses that his head was spinning. “I had no idea what a trade show was or what Bud and Bob were talking about. Looking back, it's sort of unbelievable because Bud Dietrich had no idea who I was either. But Bob did make that call and told him there was this 21-year-old kid who he thought had potential,

that meant power, durability, and performance. Suddenly, Bud paused and pointed to a gentleman in the middle of the 50 or 60 people who'd gathered around. "Just think of a playing card." Then he asked the group to please take a step toward the Berema booth to see "something you'll remember for the rest of your lives plus one day." The crowd anxiously gathered around the podium and for the next ten minutes Dietrich dazzled them with his magic and humor while selling each and every one of them on the merits of Berema jackhammers.

Two other magicians also working that World of Concrete show in 1982 were Dick Ryan and Mike Rogers. Both were close-up performers who, along with Bud Dietrich, had followed in the footsteps of Eddie Tullock, the undisputed founding father of trade show magic.

"Bud introduced me to Dick and Mike, and over the course of the next three days I was able to watch their shows as well as all of Bud's." It was an unprecedented opportunity to observe the different styles of three of the best workers in the business. In addition, Seth received the complete support of all three performers, as they answered any and all of his questions and offered him suggestions and advice. "I was hooked," Seth recalls. "I decided right then and there that law school would have to take a backseat to my new career — trade show magician."

It's been a quarter of a century ago since Seth Kramer's memorable and remarkable initiation into the industry. Today, he averages two-dozen trade shows a year. He has more than 500 trade shows under his belt. And he boasts of over a million air miles flown. Over the years, his client list has grown to include AT&T, Blackstone, Cablevision, Dun & Bradstreet, Elan Pharmaceuticals, Fala Group, Globix, Group 1 Software, House of Seagram, Interactive Technologies, J&R Music World, Kawasaki Motors, Lexicomp, Monsanto, PRAXAIR, Qwest Communications, Rohm and Hass, Super Glue Corporation, Tasking, Union Carbide Corporation, and Waste Management of North America. And, that short "by the alphabet" list accounts for only one-fourth of the impressive list you'll find at www.sethkramerproductions.com/clients, as there are almost a hundred, and many of them are corporate clients that have brought Seth back to work year after year.

If you go to the Seth Kramer Productions web site you'll quickly discover that Mr. Kramer is considered to be the "ultimate magic multi-tasker." At least, that's what's quoted on the bio/interview page of the multi-layered, yet easy-to-navigate site. Naturally, you'll find more than one page devoted to Seth's best-known talent, that of trade show magician. But with a click of the mouse, you'll find yourself at the Seth Kramer Corporate Magician™ page, where it's explained, "He

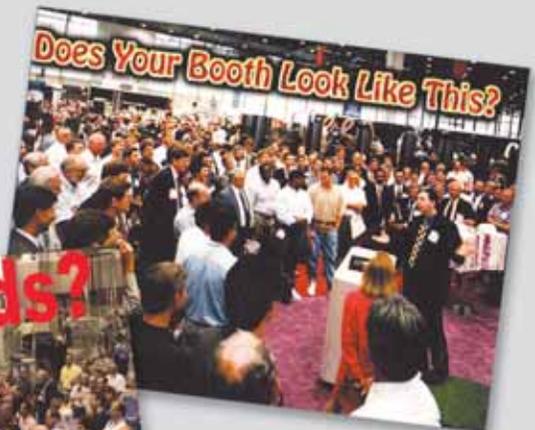
Promo Pieces

Promotional material is important. In my career I've had several different types of brochures, portfolios, handouts, etc., but these days it's mostly my web site, follow-up calls to leads I receive at shows, and postcard mailing campaigns every three to four months.

— Seth Kramer



Your business card should stand out from the rest.



Postcards keep your name out there on a regular basis.



A comic book can be a fun way to convey what you do.



makes your business his business," customizing magic shows with a corporate message for sales meetings, hospitality suites, and corporate events. Another click reveals that Mr. Kramer operates an event-planning company,

producing elaborate parties featuring extraordinary entertainment. "I do everything from putting together a magic night with several magicians entertaining, to staging meeting kickoffs with grand illusions and headliners, to

producing a Vegas-style casino party, to throwing a Brazilian night with music and food and authentic Brazilian dancers.”

A little more clicking around on the web site and you’ll discover that the “ultimate magic multi-tasker” has written and published a book. It’s called *A Modern Trade Show Handbook* and it covers just about everything you’d ever want to know about the specialized field of performing at trade shows. It is a book that answers the question that countless magicians have been asking Seth for years: “What’s the secret to getting started working trade shows?”

Seth’s decision to write *A Modern Trade Show Handbook* came about as the result of an interesting set of circumstances that arose a year ago when he was asked to do a lecture. British dealer and show producer Paul Stone was engaged to book talent and produce events for the 2006 I.B.M. British Ring Convention in Eastbourne. Being familiar with Seth’s work, Paul asked if he would consider doing a lecture.

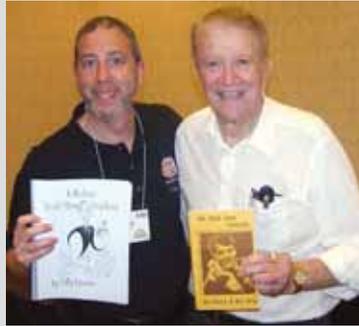
“While several of my original ideas had seen print in *Apocalypse*, *MAGIC*, and *The Linking Ring*, I told Paul I did not have enough new and different material for a full-blown lecture.” But Paul was persistent; he wanted Seth on the program. The notion of presenting a lecture focusing on trade show magic was bantered back and forth and Seth finally agreed to do it, but only if it could be different from the typical magic convention lecture. “My goal was to give the attendees as authentic a trade show experience as possible. I wanted to be able to deliver an actual product pitch from a real trade show stand, with other activities going on in the room, so everyone could see firsthand how a company’s product is integrated with the magic.” With this approach in mind, Seth started putting together a set of lecture notes.

Meanwhile, another dimension was added to the upcoming seminar/lecture when Paul and Seth asked veteran trade show worker Tim Conover to be a part of the event, which was now being called “Trade Show Live.” The concept was that both Seth and Tim would perform their shows at the same time — as often happens on trade show floors — before two groups of standing attendees, and after the groups had watched both shows they would sit down for a Q&A on the trade show business.

At this point in the planning, Seth realized that the lecture notes he was compiling were inadequate. “Everything I wanted to say couldn’t be said in ten or fifteen pages, and as I kept writing down more of my ideas it was evident that a book was starting to take on a life of its own.”

Back in 1975, Bud Dietrich and Dick Jarro wrote *The Trade Show Handbook*, and later, Eddie Tullock and Dick Ryan would put out their “how to” manuals. But the industry had changed radically since those trade-show pioneers were selling their services. “The marketing

Tip Boxes



Seth and mentor Bud Dietrich.

The pages of *A Modern Trade Show Handbook* are sprinkled with sidebar boxes that are filled with practical tips for the trade show worker. And, surprisingly, much of the information has practical application for almost all professional magicians, no matter what their field. Here are three:

✓ One exercise I’ve found to be helpful is customizing every show I do. I’m not talking specifically about trade shows here. I mean birthday parties, family shows, anniversary parties, a restaurant gig, etc. You can always find out some key details about the guest of honor when you book the show, or ask about the unique features of a restaurant before you start working. Prepare a short presentation incorporating those details into your show and perform it for every group you entertain during the event. Start with just one effect and add others as you get more comfortable. Do this and you will become confident adding messages to your show and determining where the perfect spots are in your routine to add the message with out trampling the magic in the process.

✓ Don’t ever give out your business card without receiving one in return. By obtaining a reciprocal business card, you can follow up with that contact after the show with a casual email or voice mail. If they are interested in a specific show date, write that date on the back of the card for later reference. Business cards do get lost or accidentally thrown out or misplaced. Sometimes the contact just forgets to call you, especially after being out of the office at the trade show for several days. Having that information in your possession ensures that you won’t lose touch with that important contact.

✓ As you start to build your client base, you will realize just how much work and effort it takes to get just one trade show client. If there are, say, 500 exhibits at a show and there are five magicians already working the show for various companies, there are still 495 companies at the show that can use your services. The world of working trade show magicians is relatively small, and word spreads quickly. Don’t get the reputation as someone who will try to undercut another working performer by approaching their client when they aren’t around. Chances are that word of mouth of your visit will get right back to the performer as soon as they return. Karma has a way of biting you in the ass.

techniques from the 1950s up until the mid ’70s were different,” Seth says. “Fax machines, personal computers, email, and the Internet were still a long way off.” The current innovations in communications and promotions needed to be addressed. Kramer’s mission now became the creation a book that gave the basic tools and knowledge necessary for a career as a 21st century trade show performer. Thus was born *A Modern Trade Show Handbook*.

Since Seth had never lectured for magicians, he didn’t want Eastbourne to be his first time out. His friend Shep Hyken, a magician and motivational speaker who was also booked for the British Ring Convention, was able to get

Seth on the program at the Midwest Magic Jubilee in St. Louis, a month before they would be heading for the U.K. The “dry run” lecture went well, the convention committee and the attendees were happy, and Seth had the gratifying experience of having his trade-show mentor Bud Dietrich in attendance as he made his debut as a lecturer.

In making “Trade Show Live” as authentic as Seth wanted it to be, the British I.B.M Ring was encountering some unexpected and quite substantial costs. Trade-show exhibits with podiums and sound systems had to be constructed. “To remedy the situation,” Seth says, “I suggested that we have two corporate sponsors pick



Seth Kramer proving that his magic is the most attention-getting technique on the trade show floor.

up the cost of building the podiums and renting the sound systems.” And if the sponsors would provide the products to be promoted in Seth and Tim’s shows, they would receive the benefit of the infomercial-style advertising.

“At first, I thought it would be fun to have two of the magic dealers at the convention sponsor the event, but that caused a whole mess of political nightmares. So Paul Stone and the British Ring committee set out to find two outside (non-magic) sponsors that were willing to pay a fee and have their products

pitched by our shows.”

Beer Be Quick, the manufacturer of a home brewing kit, and a local Eastbourne Italian restaurant that offered a 10% discount to those sporting their convention badges, were the sponsors of “Trade Show Live.” Seth’s exhibit stand for Beer Be Quick and Tim’s podium representing Pomodoro E Mozzarella were situated at opposite ends of a very long room. The two performers did their 12-minute pitches simultaneously, and after each finished, the crowd from Seth’s stand moved over to watch Tim’s show, and vice versa. An hour

lecture and discussion followed, with Shep Hyken moderating and handling questions from the audience.

The event received high marks from the convention attendees. In reviewing “Trade Show Live” in *Abra*, David Hemingway wrote, “The tricks were superb, the friendliness, clean material, and the whole presentation about the client were all absolutely riveting... bushels of useful lessons and know-how of invaluable help to any magicians flowed from these likeable dynamic performers. This sort of

teach-in is rare.”

“The British I.B.M. Ring treated Shep, Tim, and myself royally,” Seth says. “Paul Stone bent over backwards to make sure that everything was perfect — and it was. I enjoyed the experience of lecturing and sharing what I know with others, and I found it helpful in crystallizing my own thoughts about what I do and learned a great deal in the process.” *A Modern Trade Show Handbook* was also a huge hit. The first printing sold out at the convention, and a second print run was required to fill the orders that have continued to flow in.

Because trade show magic is an extremely specialized field and has a limited appeal among magicians, unless a similar situation as Eastbourne arises, it’s doubtful Seth (and Tim Conover) will be re-creating “Trade Show Live” anytime soon. This is even more reason for anyone interested in learning the tricks of the trade of trade shows to obtain a copy of Seth’s book. But remember, the book contains no tricks, instead a lot of secrets — business secrets, promotion secrets, and sales secrets — the ideas and marketing strategies that Seth Kramer has used successfully for the past 25 years. *A Modern Trade Show Handbook* was written with the assumption that anyone purchasing it is seriously considering a career as a trade show performer and he or she is already a competent magician. Furthermore, the trade show secrets shared are only valuable, as Seth says, “if you are willing to put in the time and effort necessary to make it in this very demanding and specialized area of magic.” ♦



When not on the road pitching products, Seth lives in Huntington, New York with wife Julie and daughters Samantha and Melissa.