



# Touch of magic

Seth Kramer brings his brand of illusion to the business of trade shows

"Corporate magician" Seth Kramer works some card magic at the National Retail Federation's annual convention show at the Javits Center. ■ Video at [newsday.com/act2](http://newsday.com/act2)

BY DANIEL BUBBEO  
[daniel.bubbeo@newsday.com](mailto:daniel.bubbeo@newsday.com)

**S**eth Kramer has a way of working his magic on everyone he meets. On a recent Saturday afternoon, the self-described "corporate magician" got inside a reporter's head: Think about an acquaintance you haven't seen in a long time, Kramer said. "Picture the person in your

mind, and then print their first name on a piece of paper and fold it in half," he said. After asking several questions ("Is this someone you worked with?" "Did they move because of a new job?"), he pulled out a card he had in a business folder with that friend's name on it, as if it had been written days earlier.

That brand of mind-boggling mind reading and sleight of hand has been Kramer's shtick-in-trade for the more

than 30 years. Kramer, 55, of Huntington, has performed at more than 600 events using his brand of illusion to draw in passers-by at trade shows, getting audiences interested in new products — anything from computer software to fertilizer. "There are only maybe about 30 magicians in the country who understand the balance between entertainment and education," he says. "The challenge is to integrate it kind of seamlessly. You don't want to

hit people over the head with the message, but you want to draw in people."

All of which makes him something of a cross between a Ron Popeil-type pitchman and a David Copperfield-like showman.

"Seth is very funny. He makes fun of products, pitches products. He really engages people," says Robin Tobias, president of Miami-based Prepaid Press Expo, a trade show for prepaid phone and

gift cards. "Seth absolutely does what you hire him to do. He learns about the product through and through and talks about the benefits while working it into his magic."

To get a feel for the product, Kramer usually has his clients fill out a questionnaire, which he studies intently. Using that information, he then enters buzzwords into his magic routine and sounds knowledgeable.

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act two NI

# MAGIC WITH A SALES PITCH

## KRAMER from E21

able about the product for his audience.

One of his tricks for grabbing customers is the free sample. For instance, after performing a card trick, he'll give onlookers a kit with some cards and instructions so they can perform it for friends. To get the kit, spectators must have their badges scanned.

"That's how the company benefits," Kramer says. "They want to be able to contact them again after the show. During a three- or four-day show, we can get anywhere from 400 to 4,000 scans."

For inspiration and research, he watches plenty of infomercials — Popeil's rotisserie is a favorite — when putting together his routines. "I'll see how many times Ron Popeil says 'Set it and forget it.' He has 30 minutes, so he'll say it 10 or 15 times," Kramer says. "My presentation is 12-15 minutes, so I may repeat a message two or three times — at the beginning, in the middle, and I'll do a wrap-up at the end."

Sometimes, he's a little too good at his job. Kevin Ells, who was the director of marketing at KnowledgeLake, a St. Louis-based software manufac-

turer, when he hired Kramer, said the magician drew so many people to the company's booth that it became unmanageable. "We couldn't handle the volume of people he was getting," Ells says. "Other booths started to complain because we had so many people, we were blocking their area."

Clearly, Kramer earns his paycheck, which can range from \$3,500 for a one-day show to \$7,500 plus travel expenses for a three-day show. Sometimes, his fee can be as much as \$15,000 for longer shows or if a customer asks for more elaborate illusions, such as sawing a woman in half.

Besides trade shows, Kramer also performed at private events for the company. Says Ells: "He became like an extension of the company and the marketing team."

## HIS MAGIC MOMENT

Magic cast a spell on Kramer, who grew up in Wantagh, at age 9 when a neighbor taught him how to cut a deck of cards in half using just one hand. From then, he began learning more tricks, and by 12, he was entertaining at children's birthday parties. "I started charging \$2 for 30 minutes," Kramer says. "Then I



**WATCH VIDEO**

Seth Kramer's magic tricks have proved highly popular at trade shows. "We couldn't handle the volume of people he was getting," one client said about the crush of attendees when Kramer performed.

had a big jump to \$5 a year or so later."

He also performed at talent shows in middle and high school. At Stony Brook University, he worked out an arrangement to perform magic at

campus events, such as freshman orientation, in exchange for room and board. Though his major at Stony Brook was theater arts, after graduation he opted to attend Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at

Yeshiva University. While there, Kramer's uncle, who worked as an engineer at Union Carbide, introduced him to the company's marketing manager; the two clicked. Soon Kramer was spending less time

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KRAMER FAMILY

Despite his hectic travel schedule, Kramer always makes room for time with his family: daughters Samantha, left, and Melissa, and wife Julie.

studying legal statutes and more time performing at corporate retreats, golf outings and hospitality events for Union Carbide.

During this time, he met his future wife, Julie, whom he married in 1985. "She thought she was marrying a lawyer," Kramer says.

In an average year, Kramer works 20 to 25 trade shows in the United States and in Europe, which can last from two to 10 days. "I knew what I was getting into," says Julie, 54, a personal trainer and group exercise instructor. "He always worked weekends performing at private parties and events while we were dating. He sold me on going out during the week; no crowds and better service in restaurants."

Despite his heavy travel schedule, Kramer has always made it a point to be home for important milestones of daughters Samantha, 25, and Melissa, 21, though one was a close call. In 1990, he was set to perform at a large trade show in Chicago around the same time Julie was due to give birth to Samantha. "My daughter was born on Dec. 9, 1990," he says, "and on Dec. 10, I was on an airplane" to Chicago.

His schedule was especially challenging for Julie when the couple's daughters were younger, and they hired a live-in nanny to help. "Early on, I did institute a rule when Seth was traveling," Julie says. "If he was gone more than three days,

he had to bring me a gift."

Family celebrations such as birthdays, anniversaries and even holidays are sometimes celebrated a day before to two weeks after the actual date. "But when I'm home, I'm home, since I don't work out of an office," Kramer says. "I may be gone for a few days, but then I'll be home for a week, then gone for two weeks, and then home for three weeks. So it somehow works out."

**A FEW MORE TRICKS**

Kramer books gigs for himself through Seth Kramer Productions, his business providing entertainment for weddings, bar mitzvahs and Sweet 16 parties. The business also hires out DJs, musicians and caricaturists for private events. He's written a guide, "A Modern Trade Show Handbook," for magicians who might want to follow him in doing prestidigitation for the corporate world, where he has made his niche.

For all the time Kramer has been involved with magic, he has never entertained any illusions about performing in show business. "I never really had the desire to have a show on Broadway or in Las Vegas," he says. "I always was drawn to sleight-of-hand magic. I find that people are more intrigued by that. It happens right here, it's not like you're 20 or 30 feet away. It's the most challenging type of magic, but the most rewarding for the performer."

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