



## CASE STUDY

◆ By PAULETTE THOMAS ◆

### *Attraction, Follow-Up For Trade-Show Success*

**THE PROBLEM:** Lackluster trade-show results.

Stephanie Burgeson is an event manager with CGI-AMS, a Montreal business-software company. Her job includes getting traffic to its booths at the 100 or so trade shows a year. How does a business stand out among hundreds of booths, lined up like old-time state fair hucksters?

"In the past we've tried all kinds of different things," says Ms. Burgeson, such as booth "themes." They'd have a Mardi Gras booth when the event took place in New Orleans or a race-car theme if the show was in Daytona. "You want them to step in and watch the demos, touch and feel the products," she says. "It's hard to get them there. You have about 10 seconds."

**THE SOLUTION:** In 2000, CGI-AMS was taking part in the Telestrategies Billing World Conference. Her company's director of communications pointed to a crowd at another booth. "Watch this guy," he told her. A man in crisp business attire was standing on a platform laughing with an engaged crowd. Bob Garner of San Luis Obispo, Calif., was doing card tricks, sleight of hand, "mind reading," but deftly inter-

persing his firm's sales pitch, and contriving ways to get attendees' badges scanned for sales leads.

Mr. Garner worked in radio in a Cleveland suburb as a young man, and performed at comedy clubs and cruise ships. At one performance, a man suggested a gig at a corporate function. "I made more money at that event than at a week of headlining," says Mr. Garner, and corporate speaking was his new career. Ms. Burgeson signed him up.

With new clients, Mr. Garner looks for ways to go beyond getting bodies to the booth. When a company books him, he gives executives a detailed questionnaire about the specific benefits of their product that he can weave into his routine. His seemingly off-the-cuff banter is scripted to find the qualified sales leads among the crowd.

His act might include a cheesy card trick that winds up with him stabbing a card through a paper bag. "CGI is right on target too! Is any one here looking for speed and flexibility for platform solutions?" People, still laughing at the gag, actually raise their hands. An assistant quickly scans their badges for sales follow-up.

Ms. Burgeson hates to have a trade show without him now. At one recent show her target was to give 100 demos of the software. They gave 161. They forecast 200 visits to the booth, and got 600. "He'll still be there talking to the crowd when they're turning the lights off," she says.

**THE LESSON:** The point of a trade show is to spark sales. If you don't have a solid system to attract leads and follow up, why bother?



**Journal Link:** Paulette Thomas answers small-business questions at [StartupJournal.com](http://StartupJournal.com)