

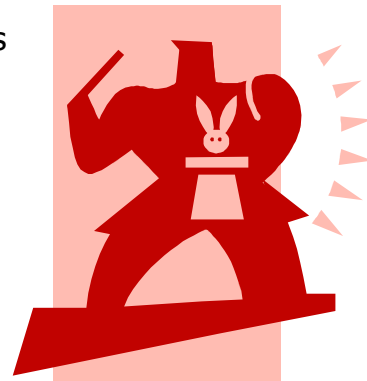
How We Magicians Can Keep Our Secrets - Answer a Question Without Answering a Question

Submitted for publication to Mobile Tech News August 2006

I was in Las Vegas recently and took a break from spending my children's inheritance to go to a magic show. The performers did a great job, and it was surprising to see such a level of performance on a small stage – many of the illusions were as spectacular as some of the TV specials I used to watch (like David Copperfield, etc).

What surprised me even more was the conversation of the couple sitting behind me. The elderly couple was obviously as impressed as I was with the show. It was interesting that each time that the magic troupe pulled off a major illusion, the man would ask his wife, "I wonder how he does that..." and then would spew some halfhearted guesses until his wife would "SHUUSH" him. After the finale as the lights went up, the star of the show lingered on stage to meet the crowd and sign autographs. The man was still guessing on how the trick was done until his wife snapped at him, "Why don't you just go down there and ask him? You're driving me crazy..."

I suppressed a snicker at this point. Ask a magician his secrets? What was she thinking??? The man agreed with me and told his wife it was silly and he was ready to go. I found it interesting how both the man and I instantly knew that it would be useless to ask a magician how he does a trick. As I left the show and headed to the ATM, I found myself laughing at the woman's suggestion.



Later, while I had some time in my holding cell, I thought about this incident again. It seems that it is almost a social rule that magicians do not give out their secrets – why isn't it that way in other professions? In professions such as ours, each person is responsible to protect their "secrets" on their own.

In our industry, this takes the form of the inquisitive business owner, or even a competitor who takes the time to watch you work while trying to drive you insane with banal banter. In a perfect world, we could relax and talk openly with anybody, not really worrying why this person is taking time out of their busy day to hang around (maybe it's my dazzling personality?).

In the real world, the fact is there is a good chance that at some point and time, someone will watch you work or question you to figure out how you are doing a

technique or what products you use for a particular repair for a solitary purpose; so they can perform this repair without your expertise. And...your bill.

We have all been there, that uncomfortable moment when we are asked a question that we know we shouldn't answer. It goes something like this: "Wow, how did you get that ink out so easy, what's in the bottle?"

At first your feeble, ketone-pickled mind almost blows it and tells the truth "Uh... I just use isopropyl alcohol, it takes the ink right off, any idiot can buy it" before you remember the difference between your inside and outside voices, and hopefully, the difference between being paid and not being paid in the future.

Ok, it sucks, but here is the point. Not unlike Colonel Sanders or Coca-Cola, we need to learn to protect our secrets. To me, what makes this OK is that when we are hired, we are not hired only for what we carry in our trucks or shops. If our business is structured right, we are paid primarily for what we know and the experience that we have (or have learned from). No matter how principled a person I am, I would not give away my shop inventory for free – neither should I give away knowledge.



Sometimes the attempts to learn what you know can range from the extreme to the bizarre, such as in the case of one Aesthetic Technician I know that had the owner of a car lot watch him with binoculars from across the lot to learn his techniques. In another case, a business owner found a single discarded bottle of a product that an Aesthetic Technician had left behind after a job. The

business owner found a telephone number on the bottle, called the product company for information, wound up sending his staff to training, and the Aesthetic Technician eventually lost the account. Believe it or not, it happens everyday in our field.

Let's revisit the scenario with that in mind. After the question is asked, you recover in time and say something like "Actually sir, it's a special blend of solvents and surfactants that dissolve and suspend ink. You see, there are over 500 different manufacturers of ink, and ink is a glycerin-based dye and finish, thereby posing a difficult problem for us technicians..." By this time you will start to see their eyes glaze over, mission accomplished.

You see the object is to respond to your client in such a way that he feels that his question has been answered but not at the cost of revealing your closely guarded secrets. If performed correctly you avoid that awkward moment where you have to be a jerk, acting like a dog snarling over his bowl of food when an unwelcome visitor places his hand too close. Instead you now have answered his question - *without answering his question* - and re-affirmed your position as an expert of your field.

Let's take another example. A question like "where do you get that stuff to fix the holes?" should be answered like this: "I belong to a special association of industry professionals that acquire products through this exclusive organization." (I don't even know what I just said). However, again I have answered the question without answering the question, and protected my expertise.

Taking pains to protect what we know is not only beneficial to us. How many times have we been called upon to save a repair from a "Do-It-Yourself'er"? Remember that a little bit of knowledge can be a dangerous thing – when a person tries to learn what you know through watching a single setting or situation, they may be learning just enough to really complicate the situation. It is a fact that the knowledge that we use everyday depends upon a multitude of variables; some as basic as what kind of light we work under. The ordinary layman that watches us perform wonders with rubbing alcohol may not understand that under another setting, that might be the worse thing to do. The knowledge itself is almost useless without the practical experience to know when the knowledge should be used.



So, let's follow the K.I.S.S. principle (see box below) and protect what we know from the general public, and specifically, our customers. Each dollar you earn pays for your overall knowledge and experience as well as the products you use, so don't give it away. After all, they will enjoy our "illusions" more that way anyway.

K.I.S.S - KEEP IT SUPER SECRET

CAMOUFLAGE PRODUCTS

You must camouflage your products. Some Aesthetic Technicians print their own company labels to re-label products. However, before doing this make sure you take steps to research and comply with all local, state and federal business laws (including MSDS).

**NEVER USE ANYTHING THAT SOMEONE CAN IDENTIFY
OR PURCHASE AT HOME DEPOT**

If you are hired as a professional Aesthetic Technician with advanced training in the use of super-secret chemicals, let's try not to advertise that the polymeric surface activation agent is Acetone, or your super special leather cleaner smells and looks remarkably similar to Simple Green.

DO YOUR BEST WORK IN SILENCE

Guard your most complex work by doing it without anyone watching. Treat it like you would your PIN number – be careful who's watching.