

## Introduction

Since the magician Harry Houdini stunned the world with his death defying antics in the early 1900's, magicians have remained a source of intrigue and wonder to many people. The 1970's and 80's brought about a huge public interest in the magic trade. Performers such as Paul Daniels ruled our television screens as millions of people tuned into his show week after week and gazed in wonder at the tricks and illusions that were performed before their very eyes. This era of magicians reached its peak in the early 1990's as viewers soon began to bore of the same tired tricks and the glitz and glamour that was attached, came to be seen as tacky and cheap.

However, the twenty-first century has brought about a revival of a new era magician chic. As recently reported in the Munster Express: "Suddenly folks, right before your very eyes - it's magic, and it's cool again. Gone are the bald geezers, the toupee and blonde assistant blocks and we have the young set." Magicians such as David Copperfield have shot to stardom, famed equally for their celebrity lifestyles as their daring new magic skills. David Copperfield's relationship with supermodel Claudia Schiffer caused a media frenzy and this high profile has led to him being hailed as one of the greatest magicians of all time.

More recently a new star has emerged in America in the form of David Blaine who has received critical acclaim for his illusionist and magical skills. Both these American stars have together monopolized the international magician and illusionist market for many years. It is only in very recent times that Ireland and the UK has begun to produce their homegrown magical talents. The UK has now got several leading names in the magician field such as Uri Gellar and Darren Brown.

However, at home in Ireland only one individual has emerged with the new style magician talents necessary to compete on an international level. Waterford's Keith Barry is equal to each of the above stars by merit of his illusionist and magician talents. All he currently lacks is the high profile which has propelled the others into the international limelight.

## Background

Keith Barry was born in Waterford; took up magic at 14; studied for an honors chemistry degree in Galway and worked his way through college entertaining in clubs and restaurants. In 1998 he relocated to Dublin, as he believed the demand for corporate entertainment was at it's highest in the capital. For the past 2 years he has gained himself the reputation of being the 'Magician to the Stars' performing at functions like the MTV Music Awards, the Brown Thomas Fashion Show Awards, etc. He was also the resident magician in the VIP lounge of the U2 owned Kitchen Niteclub below the Clarence Hotel

### (a) Goals and Objectives

Keith was relatively unknown to the general public until the beginning of this year where his rise to fame has been nothing short of amazing. In recent weeks, the Irish public has been left awed by Keith's outrageous stunts and illusions on his new show Close Encounter with Keith Barry. He has become a current topic of conversation and with the right strategy behind him, can continue this meteoric rise both at home and abroad.

In the up-coming year if Keith wishes to gain strategic advantage over his many competitors he must carve out a place in the magic market by having a unique aspect to his show that will catch the public's attention. This must be combined with a clear set of objectives, which should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic and Time bound). With this in mind we have prepared the following list:

- \* Keith most successful venture to date has been the RTE show Close Encounters with Keith Barry. This show is on Sunday evenings at 6:30pm which is prime time viewing and ensures maximum exposure. Currently in it's fourth week on air, this Midas Co. production has pulled in excellent viewing rates. Today FM reported the day after the first show was aired, that over 1.5 million people had tuned in to watch Keith catch a bullet in his mouth. Keith has currently been using Irish stars such as Niall Quinn, Pat Short, Shirley Temple Bar and Dave Fanning as his guests and he will be continuing with this style show for another season as it has raised his profile so enormously in Ireland.

- \* Keith is also featured in ITV's Astounding Celebrities (Granada), which airs later in 2003. This will be Keith's first major TV appearance outside Ireland and will be the perfect opportunity for him to gain a following in the UK. As Keith will be in the British public's eye, he must immediately follow up with a number of public appearances to ensure he is not immediately forgotten such as performances at awards ceremonies and celebrity parties.

- \* In September, Keith returns to LA where he has been developing a new show with a US network. This show is called Druidmaster and will be aired on MTV early in 2004. This will be a huge break for Keith in his bid to achieve international recognition. MTV's huge cult following has previously seen low-profile stars such as Aston Kutcher shoot to fame through his show P'unked. Keith is hoping to have similar success and achieve in America what so many Irish stars before him have failed to do. By appearing on MTV a huge window of opportunity will be presented to Keith. Once again he must immediately start following up with public appearances.

#### (b) SWOT Analysis

##### Strengths

- \* One of Keith's main strengths as a magician is his ability to perform close up magic, which only a handful of magicians in the world can perform close up magic, the most well-known of these being American magician Paul Dee. Close up magic is not only very entertaining, it also gets people much more caught up in the show and leaves them talking for days about what they have seen. Many close-up magicians have said their main reason for opting for this type of magic is to witness the expression on people's faces as the seemingly impossible happens right in front of their eyes. Close up magic is also ideal for festivals, and this is where you may have seen Keith in the past couple of years. Keith has

performed close up magic at a number of festivals including Slane, Witnness, and more recently the Lisdoonvarna festival in the RDS.

\* Another of Keith's main strengths is that "Principle Management" whose only other clients are U2 and PJ Harvey are spearheading his progress. Keith's stint as the resident magician in U2's Kitchen nightclub where he performed to many celebrities in the VIP area, convinced Paul McGuinness and Sheila Roche, of "Principle Management" to work with him. Principle Management has already made U2 stars in America and with the US market being Keith's main target for 2004, this is an invaluable strength.

#### Weaknesses

\* One of Keith's main weaknesses is that he is still relatively unknown in his own country. The recent RTE show Close Encounters with Keith Barry has both put Keith in the limelight and also revived an interest in magic in Ireland. Although some daring feats, such as catching a bullet in his mouth and a bungee jumping card trick, have already been performed on his show, it does lack a specific theme, and, as it is not recorded in a proper studio a lot of the camera work and lighting make the show quite hard to follow at times. The overall effect of this means parts of the show, particularly during the card tricks, can be quite bland. The show would benefit greatly if it were to be recorded in one of the RTE studios in front of a live studio audience. This would add a lot more atmosphere and comedy to the show and Keith would also be able to interact with the audience and do some of his tricks on them, thus adding to the suspense of each trick performed.

\* Another weakness of Keith's is that he has been having considerable problems with his website in recent times. When users are actually able to get on to the site, there is very little information available on it. With so many people watching his show on TV, this is a particularly critical time for his website as fans wish to log on to find out more about him and learn more about magic. Unfortunately this is not always possible.

#### Opportunities

\* Overall Keith has already created several opportunities to achieve international fame both in the UK and the US with his up-coming shows. If these opportunities are used properly and coordinated with carefully planned marketing, he can become a universally renowned magician competing equally with David Blaine and Uri Gellar.

#### Threats

\* Keith must ensure he does not over expose his magic, or his audience will get bored of the same tricks and illusions. People got bored of Paul Daniels and his repetitive and dated magic so Keith will continuously have to produce new original material to keep his audience interested.

\* There is also the threat of FOX TV's "Masked Magician" revealing all Keith's magic secrets. Leonard Montano, aka the Masked Magician, has become famous for leaking the science behind some of the most famous magicians in world's tricks. Montano has said that by exposing the secrets of magic to the public it forces magicians to come up with newer, better ways to mystify an audience. This might not be too damaging for world-renowned magicians like Copperfield and Blaine, but for a young magician starting out and trying to break into the world's elite it causes considerable difficulties.

### (c) Competitive Environment and Macroenvironment

Keith Barry currently stands on his own as Ireland's premier illusionist and magician. However in order to retain this title he must remain acutely aware of his surrounding competitive environment and be aware of any up and coming new talent which may pose a threat to him in the future. In the UK and America however, Keith himself is the up and coming new talent who is trying to create a name for him in both these intensely competitive markets.

Firstly, we will look at the UK and what it takes to make or break a magician over there. Keith's two strongest competitors in the UK are spoon bending illusionist Uri Gellar and the controversial Derren Brown.

> Gellar's slumping career was completely revived last year after taking part in the jungle survival show I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here. With the huge exposure Gellar received from this he managed to salvage his career and became a huge celebrity in the UK once again. However his career seems to be hitting another slump after his recent claims of being David Blaine's closest friend backfired when Blaine claimed Gellar was nothing more than a "hanger on" and a "nuisance".

> Darren Brown's quick rise to fame also seems to have hit a slump after his recent Russian roulette stunt with a loaded gun on Channel 4 was badly received by the British public. The media, politicians, police and many parent's groups all condemned Brown for trivializing gun violence and suicide. He has received extremely bad press for this stunt especially after it emerged that the whole thing was a scam once police in Jersey, where the stunt took place, confirmed that the bullet loaded into his gun was a blank. However, although the stunt was badly received, three million viewers had tuned in to watch Brown fire the gun!

(Darren Brown performing his outrageous stunt Ref: [www.mirror.co.uk](http://www.mirror.co.uk))

If Keith Barry wishes to succeed in the UK, he must be aware of the boundaries which must not be crossed and stick to stunts that are entertaining and exciting, while at the same time being socially acceptable. If he were to perform any stunts that are in the same bad taste as Darren Brown's he will immediately feel the wrath of politicians, the media and the general public. The damage caused by something like this could be irreversible to his fledgling career.

In America, magicians have got a lot more leeway with the types of stunts they choose to perform. The more daring the better for TV shows in the US. However the American magician industry consists of intense competition and rivalry. The downside of this is the vast array of competitors Keith has such as "The American Magician of the Year", Charles Reynolds a title that was presented to him by the Society of American Magicians. Like Keith, Charles does many card tricks, the most fast, direct and baffling being "Force of Thought" also used by Chris Angel and David Blaine another two of Keith's competitors. Shown to only a few top professionals who added it to their act, Keith must use this type of trick as the set standard he will have to achieve to be competitive in the US.

Another main competitor to Keith Barry in the US is Keith Leff, a magician well known for vanishing and appearing through amazing illusionist feats. Leff has won the coveted International Brotherhood of Magicians, Close Up Magician of the Year contest and various other awards and has also made several TV appearances

including WDAF Channel 4 live morning news talk show. We can see from this that unlike the UK and Ireland, magicians in the US are actually rated by award achievements and TV appearances.

However on the international level that Barry is hoping to some day achieve he must use David Blaine as his main role model. Blaine is the magician who came out of "no where" and rose to unbelievable heights of stardom. On 5th September this year the world witnessed David Blaine's latest television special, where he spent forty-four days in a Plexiglas box 7ft by 7ft by 3 feet suspended over Thames River, with only a set of clothes, blankets and water to survive on. Blaine's most powerful asset is knowing how to catch the public's attention. His audience wants fast and powerful magic and David provides it with his simple but effective tricks and illusions. His deadpan approach during his presentation is probably his greatest weapon. This is something that Keith Barry could really draw on, as his own deadpan approach on Close Encounters With Keith Barry is very similar. Some of Blaine's other television specials included "frozen in time" where he was buried for one week, under 6 feet of Plexiglas tank filled with 4000 pounds of water. In another stunt called Vertigo he stood on a circular platform only 22 inches in diameter, for two days and two nights, with no food, water, sleep, and nothing to sit or lean on. These amazing stunts are ensuring Blaine's continued phenomenal success rate, as the public can't seem to get enough of his life-risking feats. It is his innovative approach and original ideas that Keith must try to incorporate into his act.

#### (D) Marketing Strategy

As we have already outlined our goals and objectives for Keith in Part A, we will cut straight to specifying the core marketing strategy, i.e. specific target markets, competitive positioning and key elements of the marketing mix (Product, Price, Place and Promotion).

##### Target Markets and proposed Market Mix

In the short-term, Keith's main target market for the up-coming year is a national Irish audience and a cult following in America and the UK, through shows such as MTV's, The Druidmaster and ITV's Astounding Celebrities. In the long-term, we hope for Keith to be able to reach international stardom and compete with the likes of David Blaine.

Firstly, where it comes to the Irish magic market, Keith is trying to achieve an eclectic mix of Irish fans ranging from young children to old age pensioners. His tricks are designed to suit people of every age and during his show Close Encounters with Keith Barry, he picks people of differing age and gender in each trick he performs for a member of the public. His dress code for this show (black leather jacket and sunglasses) would indicate that he is trying to attract a younger audience but his easy charm is used in the same way on each guest on the show, young or old.

In America however, Keith is clearly going to be playing to a younger audience initially. His show The Druidmaster will be aired on MTV America, which would have a much younger viewing audience than RTE, where his Irish show is aired. Currently 82% of MTV's American viewers are aged 12 - 34 years (MDM website). To this end Keith must ensure that his show caters to the needs of a younger audience. He must keep his American show exciting and dynamic with new, daring material if he wishes to hold the interest of the young American public.

After the up-coming year of intense public scrutiny is over, Keith will have the opportunity to both raise his profile further and also cash in on some of his newfound stardom. A Video / DVD should be made on time for release before next Christmas, detailing his most outrageous stunts and tricks while also offering some insight into Keith as a person through a series of interviews and in-house documentaries. However this video should only originally be released in Ireland and the UK as it's promotion will involve a major publicity drive. If Keith was to include the US in this marketing drive the costs would be huge and he may be unable to recoup all these marketing costs should this venture not be a success in the US.

#### Competitive Positioning

As previously discussed in Part (c), The Competitive Environment, Keith has got a complete monopoly on the Irish magician market. Whilst he must remain aware of any threats to this monopoly, Keith is free at the moment to concentrate on his energies on target markets overseas. Keith is already receiving quite a bit of recognition in the UK and is currently being ranked alongside Darren Brown by the media. In America however, Keith has received very little recognition so far. The Druidmaster will not air for another few months and then can we clearly monitor the success rate that will come through that show.

#### Crisis Management

"Plans are nothing planning is everything"

Dwight Eisenhower

Every company may hope that a crisis will never occur within their organization and some are lucky enough to never experience a true disaster. However companies should be prepared in the event that a crisis does occur and have a disaster recovery plan in place. For example, Shell were prepared for the events of September 11th long before they ever happened as their potential crisis plan had incorporated an event as huge and damaging as that occurring. In the same way, we must have a plan in place should a crisis occur which would see Keith lose public favour for any reason. Our crisis-plan is short and direct and its main point involves dealing with the problem head on and not waiting for the storm to blow over.

This plan is simple and efficient: Stop the problem at the source, minimise damage and begin repair work as soon as possible. Below is an example of how this crisis management strategy would be put into action:

Potential crisis - Keith has recently been invited to appear on a well known American talk show. During this interview Keith is asked his opinion about events of September 11th. In his answer he talks about the tragedy of it all and how he remembers the day so clearly. He then goes on to talk about the fire fighters and the brilliant work they had done, but makes a comment about the fire fighters who died that day receiving almost more recognition than the civilian victims who died in the buildings that day. The comment gets picked up on and quickly blown out of all proportion by the media. The next morning all the newspapers run the story strongly criticising this little-known Irish magician for his inappropriate comments.

In order to rectify this situation we need to ensure that Keith has the opportunity to explain his side of the story and redeem himself to the American public. It has become such a huge story that we have little trouble convincing another well known talk show host to agree to have Keith on his show to give his account of what was actually said. On the show, Keith replays a video of the original interview and shows that it was a completely innocent comment which was taken up the wrong way and apologises sincerely to family members of the

deceased fire men for any pain his comment may have caused. As there was no malicious intent in the comment and this gets clearly conveyed to the public, the source of the problem has been found and damage minimised and repaired. The overall effect of this, turns out not to be the ruin of Keith's budding American career, but in fact results in a raised profile and leaves him in favour with the American public.

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Keith Barry - Project Brief

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