

Profits appear — it's magic

By VIRGINIA RANDALL

In the summer of 1970 in Larchmont, a 14-year-old selling Fuller Brushes door-to-door closed a sale by making a quarter materialize from the straws of a broom.

That early success led Bill Herz on a path that eventually ended in forming his Magicorp Productions. The Manhattan-based company started in 1981 originally performed at corporate functions and organized magic theme parties. But in 1987 he pulled another idea out of the hat — teaching executives to use magic in their own speeches and presentations.

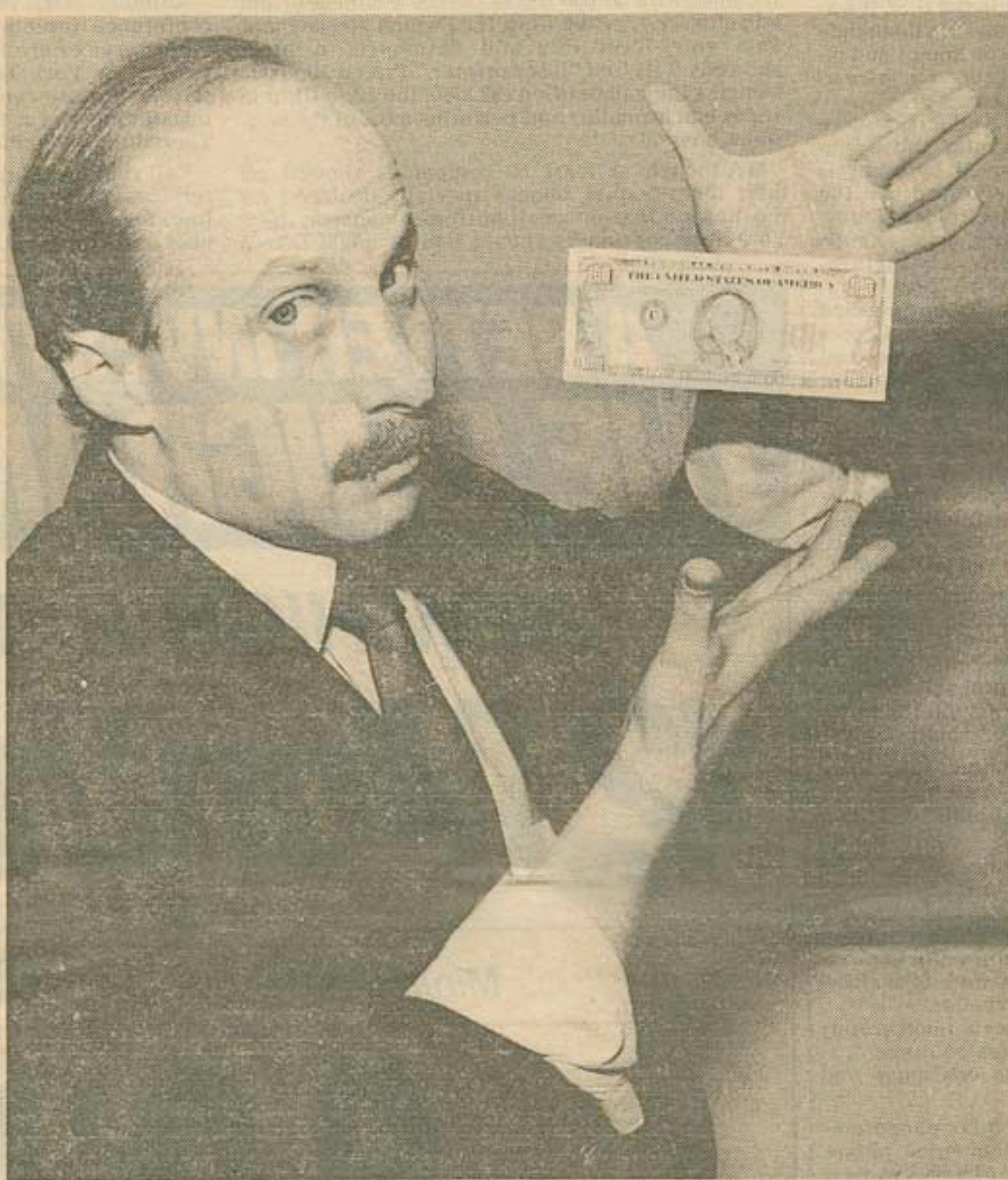
For an insurance company that had to present its sales force with new policies, Herz taught the vice president how to rip the old policy to shreds and reassemble the torn paper to reveal the new policy. "The audience was entertained, but they also got the point."

He has taught executives at Chevrolet how to make new cars appear and bank personnel how to illustrate the concept of "float" by levitating stacks of dollar bills.

These illusions, among the many he teaches 100 to 150 executives a year, require as little as 10 or 15 minutes of practice. "I understand that these are busy people — they don't have a lot of time to prepare, yet I give them illusions that look like it took hours of practice."

For elaborate tricks, he commissions special props costing \$10,000 or more. His rates for corporate magic can start as low as \$750. Major productions can run into the tens of thousands.

Oddly enough, the illusion's sophistication depends not on the ability of the



MAGIC MAN: Bill Herz shows bank personnel, among other business people, how to illustrate the concept of "float" by levitating dollar bills.

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speaker, but on the size of the room. "The bigger the illusion, the easier the lesson. But you can't make someone levitate or disappear in a boardroom with 20 people in it."

When he plans larger events, Herz turns to his Rolodex, which includes the names of specialists in comedy magic, illusions, stage manipulation and sleight of hand. Many of these magicians are long-time friends, met during Herz's childhood,

when he would take the train into New York from Larchmont on Saturday afternoons to spend the day at Tannen's, a magic supply shop on Broadway.

His business acumen was learned while at Cornell University's MBA program. He says he took in nearly \$500,000 last year.

Magicorp's client list ranges from Fuji and Citicorp to Revlon and IBM. In addition to "Participatory Illusions" and theme parties,

Herz still manages to perform about 300 times a year.

As a magician in good standing, he has all his clients sign secrecy agreements, promising not to reveal how the tricks are performed. In return, many times, he must sign secrecy agreements with his clients, promising not to reveal confidential information such as new products or sales projections.

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