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# TELEGRAM & GAZETTE WORKPLACE

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MONDAY, JANUARY 7, 2008

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## On the job

**James G. Burke**  
Founder/Principal  
Elevation Exhibits, Shrewsbury

Age: 46  
Family: married, four children  
Town of residence: Shrewsbury  
Native of: Duluth, Minn.  
Time in current job: 18 months

### What do you do?

"I try to keep the energy of the place going in the right direction. I try to promote the business and I'm constantly in touch with the clients. I still really lean toward the creative side; that's my background. It's still important to cultivate the relationship between design, internal sales and the clients."

### What makes a successful exhibit?

"You have to create. I've always likened it to a midway or a large carnival. They're beauty contests in a lot of ways. You've got to have good branding and a good message. It has to be tiered well and include the company name, tag line, the product and what the product is about. If we can do all that you're on your way to a successful trade show."

### What are the purposes of exhibits?

"The branding effort is so important. People want to test drive the product. Exhibits are an armature to carry a message. You're trying to intrigue somebody and build instant confidence. You want the overall presentation to exude confidence. The networking at trade shows is also so important."

### After the terrorist attacks of 9-11, some speculated trade shows were down and out for the count.

"I never thought it was going to go away. There's way too much money involved. They definitely weeded out some shows. In the 1990s, there was a tremendous amount of money spent in this industry. Today, it's much more smartly spent."

### What role does a building or the location play in a trade show exhibit?

"There are certain cities we like. Chicago, Las Vegas and Orlando are the best. In Chicago, you have great labor. Orlando is a right-to-work state. And in Vegas, they are truly built to do conventions."

### What's the natural life span on an exhibit?

"It depends on how long a company or the person wants to recreate itself. You could have a booth five to 10 years if it's kept up well."

### How long does it take to create an exhibit?

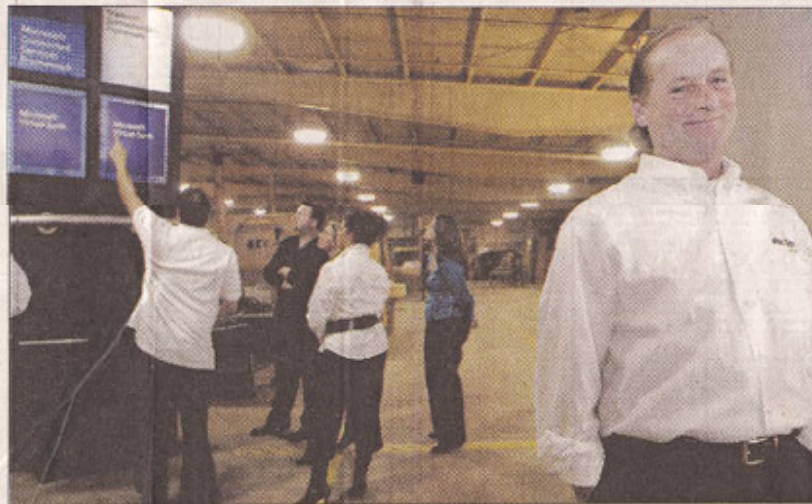
"If you want a whole custom program, it takes two weeks to design, two weeks to draw and then eight weeks to build. It's almost three months at a minimum."

### What would the budget be for an average exhibit?

"For a 20-by-20 exhibit, it might cost between \$50,000 and \$90,000."

### How did you get into this field?

"I used to make bronze statues. I did that from the time I was 25 until I was 30. I did a lot of restoration work in Providence. I was a fine arts major in college and I did painting and print-making and later on I got into the exhibi-



T&G Staff/TOM RETTIG

James G. Burke studied fine arts and says his artistic background led him to the exhibit design business.

tion design business. I'm continually doing concepts. I do a lot of painting at home. I did my first nude when I was 14. I always liked to draw. My mom cultivated it in me. She encouraged me."

### What are some of your best exhibits?

"Obviously, we're very proud of our work for Microsoft. They're here today looking at their exhibit. I'd say the most glamorous one was for a booth that was never built. It was for a Clairol hair product. It had a large stage for the models and I used big swatches of crushed red velvet. It was really sexy."

### Any not so glamorous?

"There was one for the World of Concrete show."

### What's the best part of your job?

"Definitely making the sale. This is a speculative business and we have to win every time we go out. We just had a big win. That's a great feeling and it follows for the next four or five months."

### What's the worst part?

"Learning that you didn't get the job. They never call you on Friday if you lost the bid. They save it for Monday."

### When you need an idea, where do you go for inspiration?

"I really refer back to my art books, the old standards. A good design is usually the first one. My first thought is usually the clearest."

Compiled by: Business reporter Bob Kieva

To have or suggest a job profile, send information to Bob Kieva, Telegram & Gazette, Box 15012 Worcester, MA 01615-0012, or send an e-mail to [kieva@telegram.com](mailto:kieva@telegram.com).