



Spreading the Love

By Patricia Mues



ALL PHOTOS COPYRIGHT © JUSTIN & MARY MARANTZ

JUSTIN & MARY MARANTZ

Finding Their Own Path

Their new approach would be to stop selling photographs. Instead, they would focus on selling themselves, their personalities, their quirks. “There are hundreds of great wedding photographers out there, but there is only one Justin and Mary,” says Mary. “We wanted people to get to know us—how we view love, how we view life. We want them to see and feel what we’re like as a couple, and trust that we could bring that out in them too.” Mary moved beyond the business side by picking up a camera and attending what she calls “The Justin School of Photography.” She was a quick study and began shooting regularly in June 2007.

Their new business model also took inspiration from Kevin Roberts, the CEO of advertising giant Saatchi & Saatchi Worldwide. His writing showed Mary and Justin they could choose to go beyond brand, beyond trademark and began to create what Roberts calls a “lovemark” company—a company that people are drawn to, want to feel a part of and will go out of their way to spread the word about. They decided to give up bridal shows and heavy advertising to focus on really getting to know the couples. Rather than work with everyone willing to pay the tab, they only said “yes” to those who were a good fit.

An appointment with Justin and Mary is planned to be a memorable experience that engages all the senses. The meeting room is more like a living room where you’d hang out with friends. It smells like caramel or vanilla, the music is something laid back like Matt Nathanson or Keith Urban. There are candles and lamplight as well as red wine and chocolates. “When clients arrive,” Mary explains, “we have what we call the ‘two minute drill’ where we don’t talk about their wedding or our photography. Ideally, two minutes turns into 20 minutes or two hours, and now we have a connection.”

Unveiling a New Web Site

Two years after their fateful trip to LA, Justin and Mary replaced their traditional Web site with one that focused on them (www.justinmarantz.com). They started with the name: Justin & Mary. No “Studio” on the end, just two first names. Gone were the pictures of brides and grooms. Instead, the opening page features pictures of Justin and Mary goofing around and being themselves. Mary writes their blog in a heartfelt, personal style that takes exclamation marks to a new level along with happy/sad stories that will bring you to tears. We learn Mary loves coffee; Justin loves Mary and their dog, Cooper, who loves to sleep on his monogrammed dog bed. Photographs of them, brides, friends, their dog, are all intertwined.

Want to see more photos? Galleries include: “Get to Know You,” “Engagements,” “Portraits,” “Day Afters” and dozens of weddings. Click on “Stuff We Love” to find photos of their favorite things or open “Pancakes Sessions” for food shots that will make your mouth water—all this coupled with a very lively, honest, ongoing Q&A about photography and business. They also feature contests throughout the year, such as “What are you thankful for?” in November and “What’s your favorite ornament?” to wrap up the year. Dozens of people respond to each posting and the winner receives a nice gift certificate appropriate to the occasion. This is a blog that shows, tells and connects.

It should have been an easy decision for Mary Bess. After growing up poor in West Virginia, she now had a shot at the American Dream: a law degree from Yale, job offers in London and New York that started at \$140,000 and an engagement to Justin Marantz, the man she loved. So why, in the fall of 2006, was Mary wondering what to do?

Justin grew up comfortable in New Jersey, an all-American boy. Played baseball, drove a Nissan 300z and listened to Bruce Springsteen. He fell in love with photography in high school and graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology. His focus was on commercial work, with a few weddings on the side. He was doing

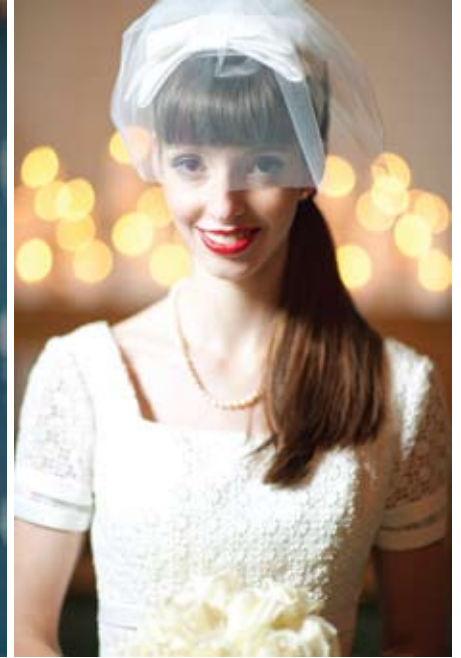
fine. He met Mary (Match.com worked) and together they were building his business while she finished law school. Come 2006, why not encourage Mary to climb the legal ladder?

It could have gone either way. Mary’s new job would certainly help pay off major student loans and the benefits package would be great. Family wanted them to make the smart decision. The right decision. The safe decision. Then, in late September, with the offers on the table, they flew to LA for a Pictage PartnerCon workshop.

Mary remembers, “Everything that we were seeing and hearing, we were seeing and hearing for the very first time. And we got set on fire. We barely slept for three days straight. We just

decided that in that moment... we were going to leap, and the net would appear.”

What struck such a cord with them was the idea that you could create a business to be what you wanted; that there were no rules and you could do what made you feel good about your work. This was a revelation. Until then, the couple had done the standard marketing for wedding photography. They had a Web site with a montage of pretty brides. They did a lot of print advertising and went to all the bridal shows. “And what we got were people price shopping for the best deal,” says Justin. “And that would have been what we always got if we didn’t change.”



They made sure their new Web site was consistent in the use of color, design and logo. A teal background with black and white headers combines with ribbons and tags. The logo, which has their names and a stylized “M” that creates two people holding hands, sits at the top. These colors and logo, along with ribbons and bows, become a part of everything they create, including the wrappings for presents to clients, vendors and fellow photographers throughout the year.

They also decided to work with other

photographers rather than seeing them as competitors. Toward that end, they created a Connecticut Pictage User Group (CT PUG). Its first meeting, in January 2007, brought together 17 local photographers. It was a place to get to know each other, talk about business, find ways to help each other grow and, on a regular basis, have a party. Today, CT PUG is going strong with 150 members. Justin and Mary also speak about their personal approach to business at Pictage conferences and are speaking at WPPI this year.

By being themselves and connecting with others, the two have seen their work published on wedding blogs like Style Me Pretty, which can lead to 10–20 new inquiries in a day. Recently, they’ve begun to see a second wave of momentum when they put up the photos from a wedding. “About 100 or so of the bride’s friends and family are coming to the blog and then going out and telling their friends and family about us,” says Mary. “So it’s word-of-mouth to the nth degree, and that’s a freight train of momentum right there!”





What is “Spread the Love?”

No one answers that question better than Mary, who writes about it on their Web site in her own unique style. “ :) :) Spread the Love is not a photography specific workshop. It’s a LIFE workshop. So anyone in a service-based industry or who works for themselves could attend!! The whole idea is to show you how to build a business that works for you (rather than always the other way around) so you can get back to having a life again. Seriously, when was the last time you felt like you had a life outside of your business? So we focus a lot on building up your business, but we’ll also dig into things like building your financial house, taking care of yourself and your relationships with the people you love, and giving back to the bigger picture. It’s the feel good movie of the year!!” For more information on Justin, Mary and their Spread the Love tour, go to their Web site.





So what does a Justin and Mary wedding look like? Mary hopes their images are beautiful and authentic; that what the viewer sees is the essence of each person. The father giving away the bride is one bittersweet moment, and there's also that happy time after the ceremony that leads

to a "Wow, we're married" moment. Justin wants their images to tell a story and be timeless. For him, the wedding ceremony itself is a favorite. "It's the most challenging, because you need to find ways to tell the story without being a part of it."

But don't think their images are all get-

out-your-handkerchief moments. They know how to make people smile, laugh and just act like themselves—something that Mary knows can be difficult. "We look for the moments in-between. We'll put the couple in a situation where they think we're getting a shot of one thing, but really we're






waiting for that moment where they crack up laughing and let us see the real them. That's the best!"

Justin and Mary also have a great eye for fashion; vintage in particular, and shoes. Sometimes it's all about the shoes. A vibrant pair of crimson pumps, perched on the keys of a piano beneath a crinoline-skirted wedding dress, was a hit all over wedding blogs. The Junebug Weddings blog named Justin and Mary's images (alongside those from Jose Villa, Elizabeth Messina and others) some of 2009's best wedding photographs.

The couple found out about the honor on January 4 of this year—a great beginning for 2010. It capped off a very busy holiday season. Along with celebrating Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, and shooting some amazing weddings, the two of them spent the end of 2009 packing up all their belongings for a move into a new house and studio that was still in the midst of renovation. They were also preparing to head out for their second year of "Spread the Love" workshops that would have them hop scotching across the United States for nearly two months.

Asked if 2009 had been a good year, they agreed it had. For Justin, "It's knowing that 2009 was a higher volume [year] than 2008 and that 2010 already has more bookings than last year." For Mary, those numbers are important, but what matters the most is recognizing how hard her parents worked to give her a better life. "My dad was a logger, he went out every single day, in the rain, the snow, in a full-on blizzard, to cut the trees to build my future. So for me, this year has been the chance to build the life unordinary because to settle for less would be to dishonor that sacrifice." 

Justin and Mary Marantz will be teaching a class at WPPI 2010 on Tuesday, March 9 at 3:30 p.m. in Rooms 304-305 in the MGM Conference Center.

Patricia Mues is a freelance writer living in Escondido, CA. Her work focuses on the creative arts has been appeared in HOW, Inspired House and Living in Style.

Justin & Mary's Equipment

Shooting:

- Nikon D700 (2)
- Nikon D2Xs
- Nikon 85mm f/1.4D (Justin's favorite)
- Nikon 50mm f/1.4G (Mary's favorite)
- Nikon 70–200mm f/2.8VR
- Nikon 17–35mm f/2.8
- Zeiss Distagon 25mm f/2.8 ZF
- Nikon SB-900 (2)
- PocketWizard Plus (2)
- 45-inch Westcott white shoot-through umbrella
- Calumet Light stands
- San Disk Extreme III 8GB cards
- Think Tank International case

Editing:

- Apple iMac 24-inch with 20-inch Apple cinema display
- Apple iMac 20-inch (2)
- Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch
- 8TB Drobo
- LaCie 500GB rugged HDs (5)
- Lexar Firewire 800 Card readers (3)
- Adobe Lightroom
- Adobe Photoshop
- Kubota Actions
- Totally Rad Actions
- Pro Actions

