

the adventures of meg simone

if you plan on attending any future IN[FOCUS], Re:Frame, or POSH events and you have yet to come into contact with New England wedding filmmaker Meghan Simone, consider yourself warned: She is highly contagious.

With an infectious smile and a joie de vivre you can catch purely by proximity, Simone is the one who looks as though she hiked right out of a Trek Travel catalog and into this industry's inner circle.

By expertly combining her love of the northeastern outdoors with her work, she has (perhaps inadvertently) cornered the market on destination weddings in the heart of Mount Washington Valley (N.H.), a resort community filled with restaurants, shops, ski resorts, quaint inns, and historic grand hotels.

What's more, in a "why didn't I think of that" move, Simone has become the first videographer to build a brand around elopements, private ceremonies taking place in and around her hometown, picturesque North Conway, N.H., involving as few as zero guests and 1 hour of video or photo coverage.

We wanted to know the story behind her success, particularly from her unique position as one of a small group of young women in the wedding film industry rising to prominence running businesses mostly on their own, as opposed to being part of a husband-and-wife team.

TAKEN FOR GRANITE?

While Meg Simone's wanderlust has pulled her in all directions around the globe—most recently to film a series of travel videos to complement the Lonely Planet series of guidebooks written by a friend of hers—Simone has arranged it so that her primary business of wedding film production never takes her more than a few hundred miles from home.

"I have extremely low overhead," she explains, referring to her choice to remove extensive travel expenses from the equation and not to have a physical studio in town. "So I can save more money to play, travel, and have fun at events like Re:Frame, IN[FOCUS], and POSH."

A country girl at heart, her success in the wedding videography sphere goes relatively unnoticed by the townspeople of North Conway. "They have a hard time 'getting' that I film weddings for a living!" she says. Mostly known simply as the girl who waited their table, the realtor who sold them their house, or the TV show host from channel 16, in this close-knit town, she says, "It's tough to go to the grocery store without it taking 2 hours to get out."

MEG SIMONE



www.megsimone.com
www.nhelopements.com

Meg Simone of Meg Simone Films and NH Elopements, one of a handful of women entrepreneurs moving to the forefront wedding filmmaking

But it's a calculated move on her part. "Truth be told, I like to fly under the radar at home. I know you are supposed to network your sphere of influence, the people who know you best. But the people who I want as clients are not typically from here."

WITH YOUR HOST ...

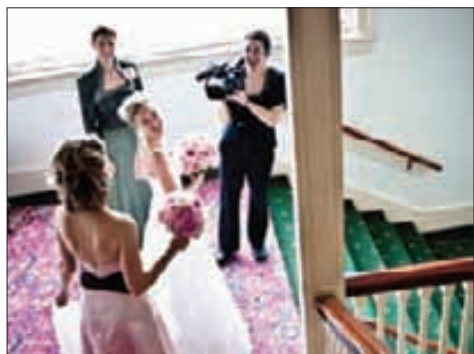
A self-described Katie Couric wannabe, Simone began hosting a local, 2-hour, live, unscripted TV show (then RSN, now OutdoorTV, owned by *Outside* magazine) in high school featuring tips on where to shop, dine, and play and featuring the local weather report, ski conditions, and three guest interviews. (She still hosts it to this day, when she can, early Sunday mornings.)

Acknowledging the experience hosting has had on her career, she says, "I've been interviewing people for 15 years. I think that helped tremendously, along with my general and honest curiosity for everything in life." (You've never seen anyone so psyched about soy candles!) "My current style of filming weddings is very interview-driven, and I have my TV background to thank for that."

Fascinated by all facets of TV and video production, not to mention still photography, from an early age, she credits her family for supporting her interests. Her uncle, a professional architectural photographer, bought Simone her first SLR camera. And in the early 1990s, her mother helped her buy her first video camera, a giant VHS camera, which she used to videotape her family skiing. "I feel like I always had some kind of camera in hand so that I could always relive the moment (thus the tagline of my business)."

In 2000, while working part time at the TV station and part time waiting tables, a friend asked Simone to film her wedding. "I filmed with a giant SVHS cam and edited it *linearly*, tape to tape," she remembers.

With that she created her first demo and took on a few more small weddings using whichever camera she had at the time. For the next couple of years, while living out her dream as a ski bum, Simone produced a ski and



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Destination weddings in the mountain resorts and scenic noches of the Mount Washington region can be extravagant affairs, involving multiday, two-camera coverage of elaborate ceremonies, dinners, and receptions.

snowboard documentary called *Echoes From the Valley*, which got national airtime via RSN. More importantly, she learned a lot from the experience—namely, nonlinear editing and marketing.

Meanwhile, drawing on her experience in still photography, Simone helped make ends meet as a wedding photography assistant. It wasn't videography, but it gave her exposure to weddings, which translated beautifully when she did set out on her own. "I already knew where I needed to be to get shots and what the feel of the wedding day was like. It wasn't completely foreign; it was a very natural transition."

With an Emerson-esque outlook on life, she says, "I was always told that in life, if you want something, you best find a way to get it yourself. I never wanted to rely on a business partner to help run my business. I wanted it always to be on my own terms."

Not that she was born with an entrepreneurial toolkit in hand. "I didn't gain confidence and skills overnight or just from reading others' blogs. It was a lot of implementation, trial and error, and going with what felt right—remaining true to who I am and how I wanted to be treated if I was in my clients' shoes."

KEEPING IT REAL

By 2003 she had her own setup—a Canon XL1S MiniDV camera, tripod, and wireless microphone—and she launched her website, www.megsimone.com. "Back then I was, to my knowledge, one of the only [wedding video] companies in New Hampshire with a website, so that helped tremendously and got me on vendor lists at the resorts I still do most of my work at today."

Despite her early success, in 2005, amid pressure to get a "real job," Simone took up real estate. By now she was somehow juggling a dizzying five careers: architectural photography, TV show host, photographer, wedding videographer,

and real estate agent. "Life was a bit nutty!" she says, to say the least.

Her plan, ironically, was to phase out weddings once she got into real estate, but that, of course, backfired. Instead, "My business started to explode." In 2007 she booked 16 weddings. She doubled that the next year. "Anyone who has remotely dabbled in real estate and is adamant about giving things in life 100% knows it's not something you can easily do part time."

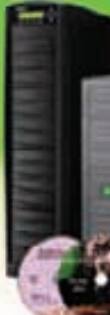
In 2009, her real estate career behind her, Simone produced 32 full-scale destination wedding films and 10 elopement packages.

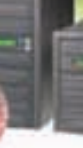
A NOTCH, A NICHE

Before long, it became clear that a line needed to be drawn between destination packages and elopements. Destination weddings in the mountain resorts and scenic noches of the

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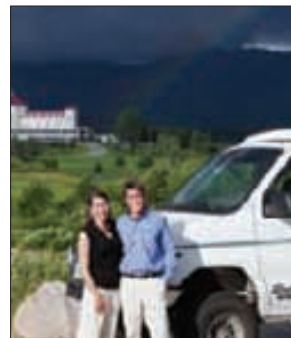
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With elopements, Simone says, "I get to really know each couple. I am essentially their wedding day. My goal is to make them feel as important as 200 guests would."



Simone's Sportsmobile, Blanca, is outfitted as a mobile editing studio, a home away from home, and an all-purpose travel vehicle. "We love the adventure of camping out after a wedding."

Mount Washington region could be extravagant affairs, involving multiday, two-camera coverage of elaborate ceremonies, dinners, and receptions.

On the other hand, elopements are private celebrations often involving no more than four players. She offers by-the-hour, one-camera coverage. Couples of the newest arm of her business, NH Elopements (www.nhelopements.com), typically are on a budget, on their second marriage, or blending their families. They are elated to be able to get a professional for just an hour on their day because, in the big picture, they are saving thousands by not having the "bells and whistles celebration."

"But the most important way elopements differ from a traditional wedding film booking," Simone explains, "is that I get to really know each couple. There is no pressure of the wedding day; I am essentially their wedding day. My goal is to make them feel as important as 200 guests would."

You get the sense that this is what motivates her most. She gets to play tour guide for a day, a position she relishes. "I want to show them some hidden gems in our area and to make sure they have the best wedding experience up here possible."

You might wonder if it's worth the hassle, booking a 1-hour event. But Simone is quick to point out that her busy elopement season is winter, so it's a perfect off-season complement. Plus, she says, "When you break down the hours spent on an elopement for what I charge, I will sometimes make more per hour with an elopement than on an actual wedding film. I only do these within about 20 minutes from my home and not on a busy weekend wedding day. Most of them are booked just 1 day to 3 months out, so I usually know if I can accommodate a Friday or Sunday elopement."

If you still think she's nuts for committing to such small booking, consider that she has, in her own words, "been there." "I've worked a lunch shift at the local restaurant for 8 hours and walked out with \$40. With the amount of times in life I've busted my butt, I can easily look at an elopement and say, 'Sure, I'll do that,' because I know what the alternative could be if I needed to make extra cash."

GOIN' MOBILE

Clearly, Meghan Simone is in the driver's seat of her career. But there is one time you'll find her in the backseat. And that's in her Sportsmobile camper van, her mobile office, editing studio on wheels, and home away from home,

which she purchased for her business and to use as a fun travel vehicle on her time off.

At the wheel is her trusty companion, Dave Eiermann, her chauffeur, "gear sherpa," second cameraperson, and, last but not least, life partner. Dave drives Blanca, as the van is affectionately called, "which is a huge help because a lot of our weddings are 3–4 hours from home. I can rest up on the way there, prep gear, or edit other films on the way. An extra 8 hours of work time that week is saved by being able to edit from the road."

Their Sportsmobile offers them complete onboard power, water, a two-burner stove, toilet, and refrigerator. And she sleeps four. It's the perfect vehicle, Simone says, for those who travel great distances for weddings, or do same-day edits. "I don't do SDEs, but I can only imagine how great it would be to have a controlled environment where one wouldn't have to depend on the venue's resources, power, and a quiet room to edit. We love the ease and piece of mind it provides us."

Forgoing expensive hotels for a crackling campfire and a starry night, "We love the adventure of camping out after a wedding."

STAND OUT AND KEEP MOVING

And that's just where you'll find her these days as she video blogs for IN[FOCUS] from a log in her backyard, lit by firelight. That's part of what sets Meg Simone apart the rest, and she knows it. "What is going to make you stand out and be loved by your clients is your personality, your work ethic, your dedication to excellent customer service, and vendor relationships."

A firm believer that she hasn't cornered anything, Simone insists that "there are more than enough weddings, markets, styles, and budgets to go around. Be aware of your competition, but don't be afraid."

Expecting to close out the year with 20 elopements and 25 wedding films, Simone is enjoying her success while allowing for future change. "You need to never become complacent in one area," she says. "I believe that's when you loose ground in your market." So find an industry event to attend and get "pumped up again" or work on a different type of project. If she's said it once, she's said it a thousand times: Step away from your computer and get out there and enjoy the outdoors. If you don't, life will pass you by.

Elizabeth Avery Merfeld (www.lizmerfeld.com) is a freelance writer based in Madison, Wis. Comments? Email us at eventdv@infotoday.com, or check the masthead for other ways to contact us.

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