

By Con Carney

Rochester, N.Y. – We reached out to Joshua Volpe because he was commenting regularly on Facebook DJ groups and sharing useful information. With his marketing background on display, it became apparent that Volpe was operating on a level beyond most DJs – yes, he's got an MBA in marketing.

We subsequently had such a great conversation that we asked Volpe if he'd like to contribute to our relaunched website. He agreed, and we are thrilled – we think you will be, too.

DJ Times: Interesting choice of company name for a DJ in upstate New York – Kalifornia Entertainment.

Joshua Volpe: The company name comes from my DJ name... DJ Kalifornia. So-Cal is very near and dear to my heart and where I've spent a lot of time. I have close family that live there and because of it being a part of who I am, it was only fitting to have a name that resembles that.

Tell us about the trajectory of your company. When did you start it, and did you have a business plan?

My DJ life started at the University of Buffalo for the college radio station and throughout the years, my DJ career started to build more and more. I went to school for music and, after my first semester, I realized that I probably should have a fallback plan in case a music degree didn't pan out. So, I doubled up on my courses, went for a dual major and graduated with bachelor's in music and marketing. I was accepted into the MBA program where my education in marketing went even further. Music was my first love though and I didn't want to give up on it. I ended up meeting some people and got into the rave scene pretty heavily to the point where I started DJing different electronic events. At the time, I was mostly into Florida Breakbeat, Nu-Skool Breakbeat and even some progressive house. Those were the days where there were no laptops, no Serato, no sync buttons and just good old-fashioned 12-inch vinyl records spinning on a couple of turntables and cheap mixer.

How did your DJing evolve?

Flash forward a few years and there were some openings at a cou-

DJ MIXES RAVE & BUSINESS BACKGROUNDS

ple of nightclubs where they were looking for open-format DJs to come in and play on Wednesday nights – the big night for Ladies Night around here. I was hired and got my foot in the door for the club scene. When I started, I admit that open-format was pretty new to me and I really didn't have much of a clue, so it took me a long time to really get the grasp of things and finally start to figure out how to mix somewhat without sounding like a total train wreck. Luckily, there were a couple of DJs who helped me out and taught me a few things.

How did that go?

People would come up to the DJ booth and say, "Hey, I'm getting married and I would like to have you DJ for it." At this particular time, I didn't know a single thing about mobile events or weddings. I turned down a lot of people because of it and would joke about how I was a club DJ – I don't play "The Macarena" or any cheesy stuff. The wild thing is, even though I turned people down, the requests kept coming in because people saw something unique in how I played, and people were really looking for that. There was a local company with some DJs with whom I'd worked in the club scene that did

weddings and events at the time. So, I had reached out to them to see if I could work for them due to the requests that were coming in almost every week. Sadly, that company totally ignored and snubbed me, so it didn't work out with me working for them.

But, that must've inspired you in some way...

Because of that, Kalifornia Entertainment was born. I thought long and hard about it before I made the decision to start a mobile-event company. I knew that I had two very specific skillsets. One was being able to read crowds and play a very unique way that wasn't really seen in my market, and the other, my strongest and most powerful skillset, was marketing.

Describe that background.

After college, my education in the marketing field didn't stop. I started working for a company as their Creative Director. The Chief Marketing Officer and the CEO both took me under their wings and took what I had learned in college and amplified by 100 times! The amount of knowledge they poured into me on marketing theory, PR, marketing communications, brand development, marketing execution, digital/guerilla/traditional marketing and marketing process was staggering.

How did that give you an advantage?

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Marketing-Minded: Joshua Volpe aka DJ Kalifornia.

Mobile

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I took all of the education and knowledge I had gained and put it into California Entertainment. I looked up demographics of the area – average income, average age that people get married, average wedding size, average locations, average wedding spends, competitive analysis, etc. All of that is what helped me put a proper marketing plan, vision statement, mission statement, value proposition and strategy in place. I then went out and bought sound, lighting, built a website, created a social-media presence, and I was off to the races.

How did you proceed?

My first couple of years were spent really understanding the wedding industry, the ins and outs, what people wanted, what people didn't want. It was a growth period. I watched a lot of YouTube videos, tutorials, gig logs, etc. I talked to lots of people in the industry near and far to gain more advice. The marketing side of things and DJ side of things were nailed down flawlessly. But I didn't want to just be another guy who showed up and did things like everyone else. I started to really think about how I did events and how everyone else did them. I wanted to stand out, be more unique, not do things so cookie-cutter. I took some risks while doing weddings and events and it paid off. By risks, I mean

by playing music a certain way, almost as if we were back in the club and not in some high-end wedding venue. I also started to come up with unique ways to MC and get the crowd really hyped up – things that I saw no one else doing in the local market. Those risks put the company and brand into overdrive and suddenly everyone wanted to hire me for their events.

Describe the Rochester market.

The market here is pretty much like any other area. You'll always have the companies who are at the upper tier of pricing, the guys who are low price and then the median guys who are in the middle – where I price myself. It's good to have an abundance of different prices and types of DJs because it means there's something for everyone. There is a lot of business here and there really isn't any reason for any DJ to not be busy if they're marketing and promoting themselves properly.

What's in a typical mobile rig?

My standard equipment is two turntables, either Reloop RP-8000 or Technics SL-1210 MK5, with Native Instruments Traktor Kontrol Z2 or Reloop Elite mixers. The RP-8000/Z2 combo is probably 90-percent of events with the Techs/Elite combo accounting for the other 10-percent. Software is Serato DJ Pro, using a De-

non DS 1 soundcard box and custom mapping for the Z2 mixer.

Lighting and sound?

Sound is always RCF ART series of active speakers, but I'm looking to add BASSBOSS this year for larger events. I use Shure wireless mics, Furman for power conditioners/outlet strips, plus Mogami and NLFX cables for everything. Lighting is a combo of ADJ and Chauvet units. I use ADJ's mydmx Go, Chauvet DJ's ShowXpress or Daslight 4 for DMX control, depending on the event or lighting rig. I use BenQ and Optoma projectors for static and motion monograms, as well as cake video projection mapping.

Where do you see the business in five years?

Weddings are constantly evolving and changing. You need to really stay up to date and on par with new traditions, new music, new ways of doing things so you can stay relevant. I see more and more weddings getting away from the traditional things, like cake-cutting, garter-tosses, grand introductions and other formalities. People just want a fun party and you're seeing it more and more now where they are erasing the traditional things. As for my business, who knows how long I'll want to keep doing events? I have formulated an exit plan for when the day comes. It would be easy to sell the business as a turnkey

to someone who wants to enter the industry and not work as hard to build something up from the bottom. I've already received offers to sell, but I want to remain in the industry for years to come. I've been blessed with over 400 five-star reviews in total and have been placed on 53 preferred vendor lists in the amount of time I have been doing events. In the next five years, I hope to have grown those numbers to 1,000 five-star reviews, 100 preferred vendor lists, a lot of awards and to be the industry leader in this market.

Any plans on turning into a multi-op service?

I've put thought into it, but I have such a strong quality policy and strict guidelines on how I do events, that it would be difficult to instill my reputation and those ethics and values into someone else. They would have to do things exactly how I do events and that can be pretty hard to do. So, I'm happy staying where I'm at, filling up my colleague's calendars and having the business where it's at.

Seems like it's working out.

I also want to mention that, currently, I book two-plus years out due to being in such high demand. So even if I never received another inquiry, I would still remain very busy for the next 24-plus months with no worries.