

From Lawyer To Boozy Baker with Dawn Belisle

David Crabill: Welcome to The Forrager Podcast, where I talk with cottage food businesses about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill, and today I am talking with Dawn Belisle.

Dawn runs a home bakery near Atlanta, Georgia called [Delights by Dawn](#), where she specializes in alcohol infused desserts.

In 2014, Dawn left her a lucrative career as a trial attorney to pursue baking full time and quickly became known for her cupcakes with an extra kick. In fact, a few years ago, she even competed on the food network in a [cupcake competition](#).

And with that, welcome to the show, Dawn. Nice to have you here.

Dawn Belisle: [00:00:40] Hi, I'm glad to be here.

David Crabill: [00:00:42] Yeah. Glad to have you. I know that you have experience in not only doing a cottage food business, but also you are an attorney and you've kind of made big transitions there. But let's start out with where you live and, tell us a little bit about your business.

Dawn Belisle: [00:00:59] Okay, so I live in Atlanta, Georgia, and my baking business is Delights by Dawn. I'm an online business and I specialize in alcohol infused cakes, cupcakes, and other desserts that I'm in development with. I have a website and online web store and people order. I also do a lot of festivals and popups and events around town.

David Crabill: [00:01:25] And how long have you been doing it?

Dawn Belisle: [00:01:28] I've been doing it, it's a little over five years now. July will be year six.

David Crabill: [00:01:33] Wow, quite a while.

Dawn Belisle: [00:01:35] Yes. And happy to have gotten over that hump.

David Crabill: [00:01:38] Yeah. The big milestone, and five-year milestone. I think only 5% of businesses make it to five years or something like that.

Dawn Belisle: [00:01:46] Yeah. It's easy to start a business, but what people don't realize until they get into it is sustainability. You can start a business, but can you sustain? Can you get past year two, three? And especially if you're increasing in profits or sales. So yeah, it's a big milestone and I'm happy that I've been able to pass it. I wasn't sure I would.

David Crabill: [00:02:10] And why do you think that your business has been sustainable? What did you do to make that happen?

Dawn Belisle: [00:02:16] I think for me, honestly, the fact that I niched. You know, I made a niche, for myself. I've always baked, I've always cooked and entertained. That's never been

a problem. But I also knew that there are tons of bakers, home bakers and bakeries and cupcakeries, and so I knew that if I was going to do this, that I would want to do something different to make me stand out from everyone else. And that's the reason why I did the niche of being alcohol infused. I think it's a concept a lot of people really don't know about so it's very few bakeries you will find across the United States, cause I've looked, where the Baker or the company specializes in it.

David Crabill: [00:03:02] So do you think that if you hadn't niched into the alcohol infused baked goods niche that you maybe wouldn't have been so successful or successful at all?

Dawn Belisle: [00:03:15] I wouldn't say that, cause it's just my personality. If I was going to do something, I would not step into that realm unless I thought that it would be something that would be successful, but I still think that no matter what you do, someone should have something different that sets them apart from their competition.

David Crabill: [00:03:32] Take us back to the beginning. How did you decide to do this business and choose the alcohol infused niche?

Dawn Belisle: [00:03:40] I've always baked, I'm a criminal lawyer. I've been a lawyer for over 25 years now, I think. So I always used to bake and one of my very first cakes was the rum cake. Now I'm of Caribbean and Spanish descent, so I grew up with infused cake. My mom used to make a specific cake that a lot of Caribbean people eat, which is a, fruit cake, but it's doused in alcohol. So I grew up knowing about that cake. So of course, as I got older and I started baking, the rum cake was one of the first things that I did, and people used to always ask me, Oh, can you make me a rum cake, I'll pay you?

At some point, I was like, you know, maybe I can make this into a business. So what caused me to do that and started developing other cakes that were infused. And then, what, I think 2011 or 12 cupcakes came on the scene. They made a big splash and everybody wanted a cupcake cause it was smaller, and I really didn't like cupcakes at the time, to be honest. And so you know, I had developed a website at that point. Really wasn't getting any orders, but less people were, you know, calling for the cakes. So a couple of friends who would want to do cupcakes. And I'm like, no. And then I thought, well, let me see if I can transform one of my cakes, alcohol cakes into a cupcake. I did some experimenting and I was an avid football fan at the time. I was a Falcons fan and used to go to all the games and tailgate, and I took some out to a tailgate. Folks loved it and they were like, Oh, you should try to get these in the dome. And I did. I've researched and I found the food people that I needed to connect with. And I told them what I had. They were interested in the because of the alcohol aspect of it. Had a meeting with them. And in 2014 I basically right out the gate, got my first contract and was selling my cupcakes at all the Falcons home games and any concerts that was, you know, that would occur at the Georgia dome, and it just went from there.

David Crabill: [00:05:44] So what was the process like of getting set up to sell inside the dome?

Dawn Belisle: [00:05:50] Oh my gosh. Well, first of all, the process for even selling, even online, people need to understand, you have to research before you decide to jump in. And I

did a lot of research. Are there 50,000 cupcake places in, your neck of the woods in California? If there are, one, do you need to get into that pool? And two, if you're going to get into that pool, what is everybody else doing? And is there something that you can do differently that will set you apart from all those other 50,000 makers. So research I think is the biggest thing that should be done from the get go.

David Crabill: [00:06:31] I think one of the hard things with the research is sometimes it can seem a little overwhelming as to how much information you could find online. So what do you recommend people focus on at first when they're trying to research their business idea?

Dawn Belisle: [00:06:48] I think one of the first things that they should do is I think they need to try to see, at least within 30 miles of where they are, go online, everybody Googles everything... Cupcakes near me or cakes near me. Literally I call it recon. I jokingly used to call it recon. I would go to cake shops and cupcake shops and I would see what their prices are. I would look at their presentation. I would see what they're offering. I would buy the products, I would taste the products.

So when I say research, I really mean research. I know your friends would be like, Oh my gosh, she makes such great cakes, you should open up... it's not that easy. It's not that easy, and you need to know what you're going to be up against.

With the internet the way it is today, besides Google, going and looking at their Facebook pages or the Instagram pages, you can get a wealth of information.

David Crabill: [00:07:43] When you started doing the alcohol infused baked goods, did you find any competition in your area?

Dawn Belisle: [00:07:52] No. I found a couple of bakers that their primary baked goods were not alcohol, but every once in a while they would do maybe an alcohol cupcake or maybe a rum cake, and when I started it really wasn't a big, big, big thing then yet. So in my immediate area, the answer to that question would be no.

Where there a lot of bakers? Yes. But bakers that specialize in alcohol infused? No. The closest people that I've found were some ladies out in Las Vegas, and I think they were called sin city cupcakes. And I looked them up. I read up on them, I looked at their menu, I saw what they were offering, looked at their prices. So sin city cupcakes was the only other place, so I was kind of fortunate.

David Crabill: [00:08:41] And are there competitors now?

Dawn Belisle: [00:08:44] In my mind, no. There are more people that are trying to go into that Avenue, but there are restrictions that people need to know about in regards to baking with alcohol. And it's just not as simple as just throwing a bunch of alcohol in the cupcake. I mean, you still want the product to taste good. So no, there's no one here in the Atlanta area that I know of that specializes.

I don't make non infused products, so if someone calls me for non infused cupcakes, I refer them to someone, cause I stay in my niche.

David Crabill: [00:09:18] That's funny because I was looking at your website and I see non-infused cakes and desserts advertised.

Dawn Belisle: [00:09:27] Oh! You know what, you're right. Let me back up. Those three items, I was threatened by friends that said you cannot not offer those. So those are the, like I've been making those since 1996 so those particular items, those three cakes, I think it's a chocolate cake, the red velvet cake. And then I have these things called sunshine bars, I did leave those up.

But other than those three that I have been baking for, like I said, since like 1996, I do not do non-infused items.

David Crabill: [00:10:03] Interesting. So you're really, really focused on your niche, which is great.

What about the person who is maybe in a big city, and just feels like there isn't any room left? There are just too many people doing too many things that they can't really stand out.

Dawn Belisle: [00:10:21] I have a favorite thing that I'm like, think outside the box. If you're in an area and you have tons of people doing the same thing, then you need to turn on your creative juices and think, what little twist or what one little thing I can do that would make mine different from theirs.

I would look at the trends. I subscribe to bake news, and every time I get my magazine, I look at what they say the next trend is going to be. It may talk about what the next pastry trend or baking trend may be, or spending trend.

People want an experience, and that experience can be them experiencing something they've never had before or something that's trendy and you've put a little twist on it. You just got to sit down and think, what can I do that would make me stand out.

David Crabill: [00:11:14] And this is a good example. You're showing us how you were able to listen to other people and figure out what the people around you wanted, which is quite different than what a lot of, entrepreneurs do. They just try to think of something and then put it out into the world. But it's amazing, you transformed your business quite a bit, because you said that you didn't even like cupcakes initially, and now you mainly sell cupcakes, right?

Dawn Belisle: [00:11:38] Yup. I, sell the, mainly the cupcakes. Yeah. And the thing about it is, when it comes to dealing with food and the baking, you really need to have focus groups. And those people, when I used to go out to the tailgating, I considered them my focus group. I would listen to them. I have taste testers all the time and I don't want them to tell me it's great if it's not great. I literally want them to tell me.

So if you just want to spit out cupcakes and, and just, they're there cause you just kinda like doing them, you're not gonna make any money. The purpose is to try to bring people in, and you have to listen to what consumers are saying. That is very important. You have to not be sensitive and be able to take open and constructive criticism without getting your feelings

hurt, if you're trying to get them to be your customer and a loyal customer at that. You want them to be a returning or send other people to you for business.

David Crabill: [00:12:35] Well, another side of this, you have been talking a lot about the niche and the cupcakes and focus groups to make sure your product's good, but earlier you mentioned that you as a person have a big impact on the business and that whatever you go into, you're going to make sure it's successful.

How much of your success do you think has been the enthusiasm you express to other people versus the product itself?

Dawn Belisle: [00:13:01] you know, I get compliments all the time on the product, but I would definitely have to say, I would have to give a little teeny bit more of it to me as a person, my personality, my passion for what I'm doing, the fact that I love it, my story, and people are drawn in.

In this day and age, it's more than just your product. You can have a great product, but if you don't brand yourself correctly, or if people don't feel the genuineness of you and your personality, they're not going to be your customer. They may buy from you one time and they won't come back.

So I know a lot of it has to do with my personality. I'm very straightforward. I'm very driven and I pull people in. and I do love it, I absolutely, there've been many times I've been like, Oh, I want to quit, but my spirit won't let me because I can't imagine myself doing some kind of baking in some form. I can't.

I can be very tired from pounding out, a thousand, whatever, cupcakes, but I want to bake something different. And I will have all the energy in the world to do that. So I think a lot of it is going to come from the personality of the person, the authenticity of that person, and being able to draw people into you, because if they're drawn into you and your story, then they're going to be drawn into your business and the success of your business. And they're going to want to, you know, feel like they want to help you be successful. So they're going to send people to you and they're going to tell people about you, and it's kind of like a domino effect.

David Crabill: [00:14:37] I noticed when I was selling my fudge at the farmer's market, I noticed many of the vendors who were not farmers, they're selling their specialty items were very dynamic individuals. They were often interacting with people who are walking by or making jokes, and you know, that you can't ignore that that's a part of it. I mean, you have to interact with your customers, and you are a big part of the business.

Dawn Belisle: [00:15:02] Yeah. And you have to be that part of the business in the beginning. And then once people kind of get to know you and, and they know your business and they know the quality of your product and they know your story, then you can maybe sit back a little bit, and then you have other people helping you out. But they're still going to love the business because they know you.

When I do the festivals, when I was at the stadium, you know, even if there wasn't anybody that would come up to the kiosk, they weren't there purchasing at the time. If I would see people kind of looking, you know, I'd say, Hey, you don't have to stay that far back to look, come on over here and, and reel them in. You have to do that.

David Crabill: [00:15:42] So take us through the history of the last five years. What have your revenue numbers looked like, and how has your business progressed.

Dawn Belisle: [00:15:53] Okay. So it has gone through many changes from what I envisioned it to be when I started, and because I had started out in the stadiums with football, and my goal at that point was I wanted to be in the stadiums, as many stadiums across the United States as possible. But the problem with that is the logistics of getting the cupcakes to the different stadiums across the United States because it's very difficult to ship them and it's not costly.

I was kinda tired of that because it's a lot of work and it's not as much profit as people think it is. You think you're exposed to 60 50 20,000 people? No, you're not. You're probably not even exposed to a 10th of that.

You have extremely high insurance. My insurance was almost \$600 a month. Cause when you work in the stadiums, you have to have extra insurance. So the minimum one or 2 million, no, I had to have \$5 million.

And certain stadiums will want your workers to be classified as employees. That's gonna drain your bank account. And it took my cashflow like you wouldn't even know. So I've gone through the roller coaster.

Started out in the stadiums, left the stadiums, was doing more online. Once I did that, then I'm like, okay, I got to get customers. I started doing popups, and just going to different places and trying to do like a, mobile store pop up, you know, we'll take the products, we'll sell them to people.

That seemed to work really well, and I started doing more and more of those. If I could try to do a pop up every Saturday I would, but I was averaging maybe two or three popups a month. They became more and more, and because I have my niche, I actually targeted places where I knew people like to drink, and would probably be, you know, head over heels in regard to adding to their drinking experience with cupcakes that have alcohol in it. So then I started doing popups at some of the distilleries and the breweries.

I've been on a couple corporate platforms. I did Uber Eats when they first got here, so I really tried pretty much everything. And I think that in the last couple of years is when I nailed it down and I started doing, a lot of festivals and we have a lot of drinking festivals.

I do two to three festivals a month. I have one coming up this weekend. I have 1200 cupcakes to bake.

David Crabill: [00:18:23] Wow. So you going to sell 1200 cupcakes and about how many people are going to be at that festival?

Dawn Belisle: [00:18:29] I averaged really about 350 to four, the other 1200 days because they have a VIP section. They want me to have some samples, but they're paying me to do that. So I'm getting paid that way and I'm selling. On an average, I sell between 350 and 500 at a festival. And it just depends on which festival it is. Some of them are extremely popular, and, usually the festivals I do, usually we're talking about four or 5,000 people that are coming through in a day in a matter of like six hours. So I don't do festivals where the numbers are small.

David Crabill: [00:19:03] One of the things that can be difficult about a big festival like that is just accommodating the demand from your home kitchen. How do you manage to make that many cupcakes out of your home kitchen right before a festival?

Dawn Belisle: [00:19:19] I'm on my second oven. My home became at one point a cupcake factory. Like I literally would not let anybody come to where I was living because it can become overwhelming. Once your volume gets to the point where you are producing that much, you know, you can do it for a minute, but I will guarantee you that after a while, you have to separate the business from yourself. You have to be able to take a break. And if you're working from home, you can never really take that break because you see everything, it's right there in front of you. Boxes and you know, hundreds of cupcakes on your table, and if it's something you do every once in a while, then that's fine. But if it's something that you do in a constant, like I do now, it's time to move, either into going to get into a shared commercial kitchen or trying to find your own, and that's kind of the posture that, I in right now, is that I'm actually looking for my own commercial kitchen.

David Crabill: [00:20:20] Okay, so you're potentially going to be moving beyond the cottage food thing relatively soon.

Dawn Belisle: [00:20:26] Yes. Yeah. I'm looking, I'm, fingers crossed, and I'm a little over aggressive, but I'm hoping that by the summer of this year.

I say it's best to stay cottage food as long as you can, that way you can not have as much overhead, and that money that you're hopefully making in profit, you can then do what you need to do to reinvest it in your business so that when you do get to that point, the business is established, you kind of know where it's going, where you want it to go.

You'll know your business. Like I think I know my business now more than ever. I've tried everything. I've done everything. I've networked like crazy and I now know what works. Not only what works for the business, but what works for me.

You went into this business probably for a couple of reasons. You didn't want to work for anybody anymore. the main reason you should probably go into it is, you went into it because it's something that you love to do. You can get burnt out, because if your business now seems more like a job than a business, you kind of get burnt out.

I've gotten burnt out. Like I said, there have been ups and downs where I'm like, do I really want to keep doing this? But it's something that I love. I really couldn't picture myself not.

David Crabill: [00:21:48] So you say this as someone who has held a job. Can you talk to us a little bit about your story, and how you have transitioned from a job into this business?

Dawn Belisle: [00:22:01] when I did get the contract with the dome, which was in 2014, that was when I pretty much said, I'm done practicing law. Now, if I knew then what I know now, I would not have done that. But I was tired and just like a lot of people are like, Oh, I want to get out of corporate America and they quit.

I went to a banker couple of years ago about opening or getting my own commercial kitchen. And what he said to me was, he says, number one, I want you to read this book. And the book is called the [Quitter by Jon Acuff](#). That book changed my whole perspective. He says, I have a client, works a full time job in the daytime and runs a full, his full time restaurant. He says you need to go back and you need to have that consistent money coming in because that's going to help you when it's time for you to decide if you want to do the storefront or whatever, that's going to help you to be able to get that.

And he's right because when I wasn't, with all transparency, I was making money, but the minute that I was making the money, I was spending it either back in the business or I was spending it to be able to, basically, pay myself to pay my personal bills. I didn't have any money left over to do anything fun, so my cash flow was pretty much in the negative most of the time. I just, you know, the next gig would make enough that I can get the supplies for the next gig or have a little bit of money left over, but then something would come up. And you start trying to do everything and go everywhere, and that's, that's not good when you're in that mindset and when you're in that hole, you're not going to make good decisions for the business.

So I went through that. And so, 2018, I went back doing some part time stuff legally with my legal skills. And then 2019, I've gone back to training. I'm not practicing in the traditional sense, which is great, but I'm now training young prosecutors.

But had I not gone back, I would've probably gone to a bakery, and I would've worked in a bakery part time, just so I can see how that bakery is run. Use that knowledge for me and what I was going to do in the future. So it's a transition. It was a struggle going from not working for anybody and in an office environment for four and a half, almost five years, to now going into an office again. It's definitely days that I'm like, Ugh, but I know what the ultimate goal is, and you just got to keep your mind focused on that if that's what your ultimate goal is, and it definitely helps because this was the best, 2019 was one of the best years in a long time, that I had with the business. I've been in the black all year. It's been great. It's been fantastic. I mean, I'm not going to give my exact figures, but 2019, I did make over 40,000 with the baking.

David Crabill: [00:24:56] Why do you think that transition happened?

Dawn Belisle: [00:24:59] I think the transition happened when I stopped being stubborn, and I did what that banker guy told me. And so I no longer had to worry about how I was going to pay my personal bills because that's what my job was doing. So all the monies that I made went back into the business, and even buying supplies, I was able to see profits

because I wasn't taking money out to pay from my personal expenses, you know, my rent, my light bill, my electric well bill, that's coming from the job. So the job is paying for that. And so I'm able to keep more of my business money. And until your business gets to a point where it's making enough money, that number one, you can pay the expenses that come up every month, have money in the cash flow for your supplies, and still have money left over. And you can pay yourself so that you can pay your bills, you need to keep either a part time job or your full time job. You just have to change your mindset at how you look at that part time job or that full time job.

David Crabill: [00:26:13] So is your part time job basically a means to an end to establish yourself in a commercial kitchen?

Dawn Belisle: [00:26:22] Absolutely.

David Crabill: [00:26:24] And are you hoping that you will be able to transition to commercial kitchen and grow your business to a point where that'll take over again and you won't need the part time job anymore?

Dawn Belisle: [00:26:36] Absolutely.

David Crabill: [00:26:38] See this is fascinating to me because, I think entrepreneurs always have to figure out how to balance the, you know, making money side of things with the momentum side of things. And it's amazing to me to see how you have been so committed to your vision of this business that you're willing to do anything, and that includes maybe putting the business on the back burner a little bit, right? And trying to make everything work so that it can be sustainable.

Dawn Belisle: [00:27:07] Well, here's the thing. The business hasn't been put on the back burner. Like that banker said, I literally leave the office environment in the daytime. I've never come straight home. I am baking pretty much five nights a week, and I am doing festivals two to three times a month on a Saturday.

So the only days that I have off sometimes would be a Sunday. So I am still doing the business, the baking business, full time, cause I'm not getting home till about 11, 12 o'clock at night after baking, after coming from the day job. So if you want something that bad, you work hard now with the plans and the goals of being able to work less in the future.

But I will definitely say having the day job, although it may be tiresome sometimes has definitely helped me to realize, and that book also helped me to realize, that when you do have an end, if you know what your end is, and there's always a means to an end, sometimes you have to do, and I used to always tell my son this, sometimes you have to do what you really don't want to do to be able to do what you want to do.

So I work at both full time, but I will say I'm very happy because my business financials are much better than they were when I wasn't, and now I feel like I am definitely in a place where, yes, it's time for me to move into a commercial kitchen. So that's pretty much the plan that I have.

David Crabill: [00:28:44] Okay. I got it. So you haven't actually compromised the business in any way. You're just hustling like crazy right now.

Dawn Belisle: [00:28:51] Yeah. Yeah. I have not compromised my business in any way. Cause this is what I love. I will not compromise my baking business. So if this job starts to compromise my baking business, then I'm gonna have to rethink that job. Maybe go do something else somewhere else, but I don't, I'm not letting anything compromise my baking business.

David Crabill: [00:29:16] Do you think that kind of mindset is necessary for someone to be successful in a cottage food business?

Dawn Belisle: [00:29:24] Yes. Yes. If you are doing this because you want it to really be a business with the goal of scaling it, then yes, but if you're doing it because, hey, it's something you love to do and it's just a little extra money for you, then that's great too.

But if you are trying to make this into an actual business that you want to scale. You want to now, you want to be able to get some corporate contracts or get into whole foods or get into Starbucks, then yeah, you are going to have to put all of yourself into it, no matter how tired you are, if you're trying to get it to that level.

And that may not be the level that every cottage food person wants to be, and that's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. And it's different too. You know, this is not a knock on anybody, but it's also different when you are a single person. The mindset's a little different because, you know, you're doing it by yourself. When you have a spouse or you have a significant other that's kinda, you know, into what you're doing, that definitely helps. It helps in a whole lot of ways. It helps financially, it helps emotionally, but when you're in it and you're by yourself, you are the only one that's gonna make it happen.

David Crabill: [00:30:48] And to clarify you're doing it by yourself, right now, right?

Dawn Belisle: [00:30:51] I'm doing it by myself. Yep. And I have been for the past, I have been since I started it. Yes.

Well you have to be dedicated if you want to scale it, but like I said, you may not want to, and there's nothing wrong with that. Your definition of success is different from anybody else's definition of success. People ask me all the time, Oh, do you have a storefront? No! Why do you think that having a storefront means success and not having a storefront doesn't mean success?

There are many people that have storefronts that don't want storefronts, and they'll tell you, I shouldn't have gotten the storefront. If you're happy baking at home and making your money, and you enjoy it, then that's success, cause you're happy.

David Crabill: [00:31:42] You're kind of touching on it, but what would you say, if you could summarize it, what type of person do you think should start a cottage food business like this?

Dawn Belisle: [00:31:54] You have to be driven. You have to be open minded. You can't be afraid of failure, which we all are. I mean, I was in the beginning. And you have to be the kind of person that's gonna put the work in. It's not going to happen if you don't put the work in.

I knew nothing about marketing before I started this business, not even with the legal business. I didn't have to market myself. But with this business, I had to learn to market.

I had to go to a lot of webinars and networkings and seminars on Facebook and Instagram and algorithms and, Oh my God, it's overwhelming. But you have to do it for you to be able to keep up. And Instagram for me is just great. I find that my followers on Instagram are more engaged, and they see my social media posts more than people on Facebook, which is horrible because I really do like Facebook, and it can be very beneficial, but you have to have the money to put that kind of money into marketing in Facebook. And you don't really have to put that much money into it, in Instagram.

So, you can't halfway do it. You've got to make up in your mind, good, bad, ugly. There's going to be a lot of tears. I do not cry a lot. I've cried more in the five years that I've been in this business than probably my entire life.

You're going to have that. You're going to have some doubts, but if it's really, really something that you are really, really passionate about, and it, it, it makes you happy -- the end goal is you still need to be happy doing it -- then that's the kind of person that should.

And start small. Everybody wants to start big. it needs to grow organically. Someone told me that whenever you do something that you love because of the love that you have for it, the financial part will come. Didn't say it was going to come easy, but it will definitely come.

You definitely gotta be driven. You're trying to leave that nine to five to come to a, definitely not a nine to five, you know, maybe a six to a one or 2:00 AM, so you're working more hours than you are in an office environment, as an entrepreneur.

David Crabill: [00:34:00] Initially, and with the hope, right, of maybe not working that much later.

Dawn Belisle: [00:34:06] Right. You know, my goal this year is to get a team of people that I'm not going to all the festivals, but I can trust them to send them out, that they're going to know how I like things done, how I want things done, and I can send them out to do the pop ups, I can send them out to do the festivals, and I don't necessarily have to be there every time. I like doing it, but I'd like to be able to not do it a few times.

Cause at some point you, can't keep doing it by yourself. You're going to have to spend the money, or you're going to have to find a team that can help you do certain things: marketing, PR, you know, administrative stuff. So that's another thing that I'm doing this year is I'm trying to build a team. Finally.

David Crabill: [00:34:47] And I think the difference is, you know, you're working more hours, right? But you actually own what you're doing as opposed to the job, where you don't own it.

Dawn Belisle: [00:34:57] Right. If you're at a job, and you're there with that mindset of, that job is a means to a much lovelier end, which is doing your thing, you're going to start to look at that job differently, and that job is not going to be as bad as it was to you before you changed your mindset.

David Crabill: [00:35:19] So I do want to touch on this a little bit, because you've been talking about how important this businesses to you, but you clearly have had to take quite a pay cut in order to do it, right? Because you mentioned, you know, 40,000 at one point as being a high number, but you're a lawyer, so I'm sure that you were making a lot more than that in your former job. How do you justify the business, and why are you so passionate about this business, even though it doesn't make as much money as your job.

Dawn Belisle: [00:35:58] Because, although I made a lot of money as a lawyer, I am happier. We all think we need a certain amount of money, or a certain type of house, or certain type of car, until you realize you don't. And I scaled back a lot once I stopped practicing law. My entire spirit was happier. People saw it in me. I was happier because I was doing something that I absolutely enjoy. It is a transition, but you definitely have to downsize. As an entrepreneur, if you're planning on quitting your job, you are going to have to downsize.

David Crabill: [00:36:38] I wanted to go back to something you said earlier. You talked about knowing nothing about marketing when you started the business, and that you've learned a lot about marketing. Can you share with us a little bit about what you've learned about marketing, and what somebody who's starting out needs to know to market their products?

Dawn Belisle: [00:36:57] Oh my goodness. Yes. And marketing is not just social media. One of the things that I learned when I very, very, very first started out, and I would suggest this to anybody.

I used to hate networking. I never liked to do it, never had to do it. But when I started this business, I realized that it was important.

Marketing is more than just being on social media, getting and going out and networking once or twice a month in different networking groups. I used to do way more than that, but one to two networking events a month. And you just go online, business networking events is what you're looking for, and going out there having cards and having your elevator pitch, and you tell them in a short period of time what it is that you do. I've met many connections that have introduced me to other people that have helped me, whether it's information or otherwise, through networking events. So networking for sure, I think is the first, big thing in regards to marketing.

And then of course, social media, definitely. Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn. And as a Baker, and people eat with their eyes and things are visual, definitely I would say Instagram and Facebook because you have the visuals.

And when I look at businesses, I look at whether you have a website or Facebook page or Instagram page, I do. If you don't have a website, my eyebrow kind of goes up, but if I, you know, if it's a startup, I would at least expect you to have a Facebook or Instagram page.

But you can do a little teeny bit more with the Facebook page, cause you can put your products on there for sale. So it can almost be like your storefront. And then, remember, if that's your storefront, if you had a physical storefront, you want it to be appealing to your customers when they come in. So you keep it strictly business, and the content you put on there should be content that would be appealing to them to make them say, Oh my God, I could just jump into this computer right now, and eat that piece of cake. Or, Oh my gosh, let me look and see. How much is that? Or let me call and find out. You know, you've got to make sure you remember that your online stuff is like your virtual storefront, if you don't have a physical location.

David Crabill: [00:39:12] Great. Well, so I want to go back to the networking thing as the first thing that you recommend. And you said that you have a lot of experience pitching, so I'd like to role play this a little bit. I'd like to,

Dawn Belisle: [00:39:25] Oh, no, let's not... (laughs)

David Crabill: [00:39:27] Let's say we're in the elevator, right? I've got a minute. I want to hear what your business is all about.

Dawn Belisle: [00:39:34] Okay. So, yes, I have an online baking business and I specialize in alcohol infused cakes, cupcakes and other desserts. We are in the Metro Atlanta area and we do pickups and deliveries, and they're great for birthdays, celebrations, or just something unique that you can have. And you can order online on our website, www.delightsbydawn.com.

Simple. But the thing is you've got to put your energy into it. Because then what will happen is they'll, they'll be like, Oh wow, that's really great. Then they'll start asking, Well, how did you get into that? And this is where they engage with you, and they like, if they like your story and your energy, then they're going to be like, Oh wow. And they're going to be like, take my card. If you ever need financial services, if you ever need an accountant, I've got a good one.

And then you are to always follow up when you go to the networking events and someone gives you a card, email them the next day. Follow up. A lot of people don't follow up. Follow up, that makes a world of difference when you do follow up

David Crabill: [00:40:45] Great advice. We've been talking for a while now, and I just wanted to see if there was anything else that we haven't covered that you think that someone new in the cottage food space should know.

Dawn Belisle: [00:41:00] Definitely know your rules and regulations. You definitely help a lot with that. Like I mentioned earlier, I rebranded my law practice, so I also help with that.

Make sure the steps that you are taking are the right steps, for you to be able to run your home business. If you can't find the information and the info, all information is not on Google, they need to reach out to people like you and like me that have that knowledge and we're in that sphere, to see how they can get the correct information.

There's so much misinformation out there. It kills me. And I see it in the baking groups that I'm in, and people are asking questions and saying this, and I'm just like, so much misinformation. People need to get it from the correct source.

David Crabill: [00:41:48] Well, oftentimes, even the health departments don't know what the right information is.

Dawn Belisle: [00:41:52] They don't. They don't. And they will say, Oh no, we don't have that. And I'm like, yeah, yes you do. So I need to speak to a supervisor.

But yes, there's a lot of misinformation, even from the people that just answer the phone and work in those agencies.

David Crabill: [00:42:05] Yeah, I deal with it a lot cause a lot of people reach out to me through Forrager and they say that they've just been through the rigmarole of getting passed from one department to the next. And because it's kind of a smaller industry, you know, a lot of the departments don't deal with the cottage food businesses that much, so they don't know that much about it.

Dawn Belisle: [00:42:23] Right. Your site is absolutely great, and people just need to reach out to the resources where they're going to get the correct information. But before you delve in and you get to signing stuff, you really kind of need to know exactly what the real rules are.

David Crabill: [00:42:38] Well, you can help somebody who is in Georgia. Can you just go through what you know is the right process of what's required to set up a cottage food business in Georgia, and what you need to do to maintain your cottage food business?

Dawn Belisle: [00:42:55] So in Georgia, unlike a lot of states, we actually get a license. So I have a license that says cottage food. And in Georgia, you have to renew that every year. So that's, I think \$100 that we have to renew that every year.

But there are several steps that need to be taken before you even get a cottage food license. And that's one of the things that people reach out to me for. But it involves business license, taxes, zoning, incorporating, the cottage food license in and of itself.

One of the things that people, it's not a requirement, but people don't do -- and I will give this piece of advice and say it should be done -- if you are starting to sell outside of family and friends, you definitely need to get general liability insurance. And a lot of people skip that step. And a lot of the farmer's markets, sometimes, even the festivals nowadays, they're requiring that you have, even if you're cottage food, they're going to require you to have insurance.

You have to take a Safe Serv. You can take the employee training. I think that certificate good for three years. If you take the manager training, that's good for five years. You have to have that before you can get your cottage food license.

David Crabill: [00:44:08] Well, thank you so much, Dawn, for sharing everything with us. Can you tell us a little bit about where people can find you, and how they can reach out to you.

Dawn Belisle: [00:44:18] Sure. So the baking business is [Delights by Dawn](#), and you can reach out to me via the website, www.delightsbydawn.com. And also, I am very active on Instagram and Facebook.

And then they can also reach out to me, via my, through my law practice. I have a Facebook page. It's the [Law Office of Dawn Belisle](#). And I post legal articles on there. Sometimes I also go on there, I may discuss legal stuff dealing with the baking world, and also deal with cottage food stuff, licensing, the alcohol, baking with alcohol. So I do have some courses and stuff that I do on there also.

So that's another way that they can reach out to me via that Facebook, via messenger, and also email. So there are two ways, the legal side and the baking side.

David Crabill: [00:45:08] Well, I'll put those links in the show notes so that people can access them easily. All right, thank you so much, Dawn. It's been a pleasure.

Dawn Belisle: [00:45:17] It's been a pleasure too. Thank you, David.

David Crabill: [00:45:20] That wraps up the third episode of the Forrager Podcast. Dawn is a true hustler, and she is clearly willing to do whatever it takes to make this business work.

If you are like Dawn, and would rather bake than work at your job, head on over to forrager.com to learn about your state's cottage food law.

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/3. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.