

Marketing Cake Art with Jennifer Lopez & Emily Blattel

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'm talking with Jennifer Lopez and Emily Blattel.

Jennifer lives in Paducah, Kentucky, and Emily lives in Scott City, Missouri, and together, they run their cottage food business, [The Cake Mom & Co.](#)

Over the past decade or so, they have sold dozens of custom cakes that run the gamut from elegant buttercream cakes to realistic cake sculptures. They are both truly exceptional cake artists.

And when Jennifer moved to Kentucky a few years ago, she actually spearheaded the creation of their new cottage food laws so that she could continue running her cake business legally.

So we have plenty to talk about today and with that Jennifer and Emily, welcome to the show. Nice to have you both here.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:00:49] Thank you for having us.

Emily Blattel: [00:00:52] Thank you David. It's a pleasure to be here.

David Crabill: [00:00:54] Now I did want to preface this episode just by giving people a little context, because sometimes people get on the show and are a little humble. It's my job to tell the audience like how good you really are. So I've seen a lot of cakes over the years because I, you know, just running Forrager. I come a lot across a lot of cake businesses is probably the most common type of cottage food business I see. And probably the most lucrative as well. And so I am always amazed by the creations I'm seeing, but that being said, your creations are consistently some of the best that I've ever seen. They are truly perfect, and sometimes look photo realistic.

So I just want to let people know that we're, we're not just talking to an average or even above average cake artists here, both Emily and Jennifer are truly exceptional at what they do. And if you look at [their Facebook page](#), you will see what I mean. Some of these cakes, you literally just go, wow. That is unbelievable.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:01:57] Thank you.

Emily Blattel: [00:01:58] Thank you.

David Crabill: [00:01:59] And I, and I know that there are like a lot of cake sculptors out there that, that do unbelievable things. Usually they're running out of a commercial kitchen though. So, um, I wanted to take it back to the beginning, cause I know you weren't born with these skills. can you talk a little bit about how you got started with this whole thing?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:02:19] Okay. So I got started making cakes from my house because my daughter's second birthday. So I have a 15 year old. And when she turned, I think it was two. I wanted to make her like a Dora the Explorer, birthday cake.

And I went and bought one of those, formed cake pans that looks like Dora. And I just used a box mix and, the store bought icing just kind of threw that together. And I was kind of hooked after that. I'd watched all those cake shows and really got into that starting with her birthday.

David Crabbill: [00:02:53] And what year was that, about?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:02:55] There might've been 2006 or seven, cause I think it was her second birthday. So I think it was 2007.

David Crabbill: [00:03:02] And I'm just realizing, this is the first time we've had two people on the show at once. So just to clarify for the audience, you're Jennifer. Right. And so I just want to let people know who's speaking and the other is Emily. So Emily, I feel like you had a part in getting this business started as well. What, what was your role in it?

Emily Blattel: [00:03:22] Well, Jennifer and I have been friends basically since we were born, we both grew up in Paducah. Um, our parents were friends and so we've. We've been friends. We're two, our birthdays are two weeks apart, so we've been friends forever. So, um, when she lived in, in Missouri, when she first started making the cakes or made the cake for her daughter, and she told me how much fun she had, how much she enjoyed doing it, we kind of joked around it.

You know, maybe she should. She should start doing this as a job. You know, she had a young daughter and, and, I was looking for maybe a chance to make some more money and another mutual friend of ours. She and I were having lunch one day and we're like, you know what, Jennifer just needs to start a business.

We're just going to do this for her. We're going to start it. We were like, here's her name: it's The Cake Mom. And then I grabbed a napkin and a pen and I sketched out a logo and I said, and here's what it's gonna look like. So we, we called her up a couple days later. We're like, Jennifer, we have a business for you. and she was like, okay. And that's what we did.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:04:13] You actually took me out to eat. I was eating with both of you. Yes. And you just kind of threw that on me. You were like, Hey, we've got an idea. Here's your name. And we've got a logo. So you had it ready.

David Crabbill: [00:04:28] So Jennifer, do you think that without their encouragement, you would have started selling your cakes?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:04:35] I don't think I would have, I was scared to even like, bring it up to my husband at the time. I'm not married to him anymore, but at the time I was scared to be like, Hey, I want to start this business. And so then they brought that up at the lunch that we had and that kind of. Gave me a little bit more courage to bring it up.

And he actually did help me out by giving me like 500 bucks to get started and we went and started a bank account. So then after that I started like, okay, I'm going to start a website and just kept going with it and kind of got excited about it.

David Crabill: [00:05:06] So, what was it like when you first started selling? Like how many cakes did you sell? Was it organic or what.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:05:14] Yeah, it was very organic. Cause, at first it was just like my ex husband's family. So his like aunt had me make a cake for her husband. And then I think I made a cake for free for his mom to take to work. And then in probably about six months after I like officially started that's when I got my first order.

And it was this giant like birthday cake with. bright, beautiful rainbow colors with like stars coming out of it and a big topper. And I think I even had Emily on the other line, cause I was terrified to call this woman back and talk to her.

David Crabill: [00:05:46] And what was that first order? what did you charge?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:05:49] Oh, I don't even remember. It probably wasn't nearly enough, but it was a 60th birthday. Yeah. I have no idea. I would have to go back and look at the... I think at the time I charged maybe around \$2.50 or \$3 per serving, maybe.

David Crabill: [00:06:05] and how does that compare to what you charge now?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:06:09] well, my last cake, I charged about \$6 per serving. So I've gone up quite a bit because I, at the beginning of, I believe it was last year, I made a bunch of cakes and then I realized that I wasn't even hardly making \$6 an hour. And I thought I've got to start charging more because it's not worth my time.

David Crabill: [00:06:28] Yeah. And you're the one who kind of had the passion for the cake making first. Right. But then I know. Emily, I've seen some of your cakes on the photos online and they are incredible as well. So is it also a passion of yours or is it just something that you learned.

Emily Blattel: [00:06:48] Well, I also loved watching the cakes. I mean, this was, you know, 2008, 2009. So Cake Boss and Ace of Cakes. Those were big shows at that point. So I loved watching them. I was not married then I didn't have any kids. I had graduated college and I was working, but I still had a lot of free time.

And I, at that point decided to take some cake decorating classes. So I took the cake decorating class at our local hobby lobby, the Wilton cake class. I took three of them. I think. Like the first three that they had. And I was like, this is really fun. And Jennifer had already kind of started, had stuck her toe in the water of decorating.

And I was like, you know, this would be kind of fun for us to do together sometimes. We could have parties and we can decorate together. And so I did it just to try it. I've always been very, very artistic, creative. I have an art minor. I am a graphic designer, one of my original jobs. I'm actually a marketing manager now, but, so art and creativity has always been something that I love doing.

And I obviously love to eat cake, so it was just a no brainer there. so I started, I started doing them too, and sometimes I would help Jennifer on some. She would, I'd go down to her house. There were a couple of cakes that I would go down and help her finish up. I know we did one for, was it for your baby shower, maybe

Jennifer Lopez: [00:07:57] Yeah, it was all of her.

Emily Blattel: [00:07:59] Yeah all over. Yeah. And so I came down and helped her finish up the cake. And then we did a couple other ones like that when she was really nervous about them, I would help her help her deliver and things like that too. So

Jennifer Lopez: [00:08:11] Yeah. You were like my support system.

Emily Blattel: [00:08:14] I was back up.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:08:15] Yeah.

Emily Blattel: [00:08:17] Well then, and then with, with me having the marketing background and the graphic design background, I was, at least starting out the one who's kind of like, Hey, let's, let's try this.

Let's look at some different ways. We can get the word out. Here's how we can advertise. Here's how we can get some good PR for this. And, and just looking for opportunities like that. Even when I wasn't necessarily making the cakes.

David Crabbill: [00:08:36] Yeah. So let's talk about that. What have you specifically done to market this business?

Emily Blattel: [00:08:42] Well, I mean, starting out a lot of it was, you know, establishing a website. So we built a website early on. She and I, neither of us had ever done that before, but we figured out how to. How to build a site using WordPress templates. We did that. We've rebuilt it. Who knows how many times now, which is really funny.

Cause now I work for a website design company. So I still don't design the websites, but that's where I work. so we did a website is social media became a thing where you could get a business page on Facebook. We did that right away. even before that we were always taking pictures of our cakes and sharing them on our own personal social media pages.

so social media has been a big part of it. Jennifer has always done a lot with, she'll write blogs about the, about some of the special cakes that we've done, and that helps with our SEO. So we come up pretty well on that. I think having the longevity of a, of an older site helps with that too.

It's been there a long time. We've kept the same URL the whole time. But I think that some of those things have really have really helped from a business standpoint. And then just making sure that we stay branded in everything that we do. So we always, watermark our images.

So if they're shared somewhere, someone can always see where they came from. They can't take them as their own. we created a Pinterest kind of a corporate business Pinterest page, and we share photos there and we get a lot of traffic on those every, every day I get notifications. I mean, there's hundreds of views on some of those cakes.

It's really funny cause some of them are really old, not even really that great, but those are the ones that people share and re-pin. Time after time again. and then we looked for local media opportunities. So doing things, we both had random features in different magazines and newspaper articles and things.

And then obviously your podcast too. So looking at those opportunities and making sure that we're telling our story And each time it's happened, it's always had like a little bit of a different angle because it's been a different time. It's been a different time in our lives.

It's been different time in the global economy. The, the, just the climate has been different each time. But, you know, I think, I think having that availability and making sure that we're looking for those opportunities has really helped.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:10:48] Yeah. And to me, like at the end of making the cake, like the most important part is taking the photo to make sure it looks nice and that when we're going to post it. It's bright. It's like I finally invested in the light. So that kind of makes my room a little bit brighter and I can see the cake really well.

And we've got the bakedrops in the background and we started out using like cardboard that you'd put up behind it. And, Oh my gosh, I wish I could go back and redo some of those pictures, but now we've got like the nice vinyl backgrounds and I'm using a light. And I just, you know, I want to keep doing better to get the pictures better.

Cause that's really what draws in the customers when they see that and they go, wow. You know, if you don't have a good product, they're not going to come to you no matter what marketing you do.

David Crabbill: [00:11:29] Yeah, well, and certainly your cakes impress, I mean, the, the pictures speak for themselves. what have you done to learn those photography skills? Do you take courses online or is it just through research or experimentation?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:11:44] Mine is more experimenting with it. Like, you know, starting out using just white, like cardboards. And then finally Emily's like, Hey, let's buy bakedrops. I'm like, okay. And then like seeing how much difference that makes and then, you know, trying to get the lighting right. And finally buying a light. So all of it for me has just been experimenting.

Cause I don't really know a lot about photography and half the time I just use my cell phone because it's just easier to edit it and get the watermark on there. I used to always put it into my computer and do Photoshop, but that just, I found myself like dreading it after awhile. So like the smartphones have made it just so much easier for me personally.

So I don't know how Emily's does hers, but that's how I do mine.

Emily Blattel: [00:12:24] Yeah, I'm pretty similar. I mean, I don't have any, obviously any photography training, it's just trying to, I look up things and like, you know, how can I make this better? I looked, I looked up different tips on how to do it. I did buy a portrait lens, not an expensive one, but just for my DSLR camera. So just a standard Canon, but I bought a portrait lens, a fixed length portrait lens.

That gives me some good depth of field that really did help. like Jennifer said, if you've got the right backdrop, you've got the right light. and then taking the time to take a good picture. It, it makes such a difference. So I have a couple friends who are photographers so talking to me about that.

And even, even sometimes having them we've, we've participated in some things shoots with local photographers doing like styled shoots and they will always share those photos with us as well. So, anytime we can get good photos of the cake,

Jennifer Lopez: [00:13:12] Yes. I love when we do those.

Emily Blattel: [00:13:15] Yeah. Those are fun.

David Crabbill: [00:13:16] With the smartphone technology these days with portrait mode and you can kind of simulate depth of field. Do you think it's necessary for, or helpful for people to go out and buy a DSLR camera to get that?

Emily Blattel: [00:13:27] Nope.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:13:28] No, I don't either. When I got the upgrade to the portrait mode, I was like, Oh yes, this is amazing. And I try to use that most of the time.

Emily Blattel: [00:13:39] yeah. As long as you still have good light, because I mean, lighting is still the most important part of photography. So. As long as your lighting is good. Yeah. That portrait mode is the bomb.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:13:51] Yeah, especially for a cake, like you don't really need a big fancy camera for a cake, unless you're doing some like artistic shots or something. Like Emily's really good at doing like these angled shots of cakes and stuff. And I'm always like, kind of jealous because I'm like, I can't do that. Like every time I try to do an angle of a cake, it looks ridiculous and I'm like, I'm not posting this.

Emily Blattel: [00:14:10] It's because I'm too lazy to take it downstairs where my backdrop is set up.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:14:17] Well, it's amazing.

David Crabbill: [00:14:18] Let's talk about the, the cake process itself. I mean, you've learned and improved your skills over time. Like, what have you done to improve your skills? Have you taken courses in that regard or is that also experimentation?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:14:33] I would say the majority of what I do is just experimenting, but then I also will watch, it's called Craftsy, but they've changed their name to Blueprint and now

it's Craftsy again, but they have classes that you can download and watch and you know, you buy them and keep them. So I will watch those from time to time.

And then I just downloaded, the other day I bought from Cakes by Timbo. He has a, an Etsy store where you can buy tutorials. So I made his, um, it's like a bagel breakfast sandwich cake. I don't know if you saw that one, but that's like maybe my favorite cake so far that I've made because it looks so realistic

David Crabbill: [00:15:11] I did see that cake. And it is like one of the most incredible cakes I've ever seen. It really does look like a bagel sandwich.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:15:20] Yeah. Well, his tutorial helped me because before that tutorial, I think like last year I made a burger cake all on my own. Just trying to figure out how these people are making these. And it looks like if I go back and compare the two I'm like that burger is terrible and now I want to remake the burger because now I know how to make a bun and I'm so excited. So there's like, you know, just like seeing how other people make theirs and I've seen cakes by Timbo in person, like two times now I even took one of his little, classes at the Show Me Sweets cake show, and just seeing what he does up close and stuff. And he just uses really simple things like straws to make little holes, to make it look like corn or to make it look like scales or something.

And it just kind of blew my mind. So now when I'm like trying to overcomplicate things in my mind, I'm like, wait, I bet he's just using a straw. So I would just try to like, think of ways to like, make it look real with just using stuff around me. So I'm just kind of like constantly just teaching myself basically.

Emily Blattel: [00:16:16] And I've, I've kind of done some of the same. I did, I've taken some classes, I did some Craftsy stuff and watched some YouTube tutorials and different things. And then, you know, sometimes people ask for a certain cake or a certain technique and I say, yeah, I'll figure out how to do that. And then I go look it up. And I figure out how to do it.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:16:31] Yes. Yeah. And the same way, like I get a lot of inquiries. I'm like, Oh crap. I don't know how to do that. So I'll have to go research it before I can even tell that person that yeah, I think I can do that. So I have to go find out like how to even make some of it sometimes.

David Crabbill: [00:16:46] So your skills, you are as good as you've ever been at this point. Right. But I want to know what does it take for you to make that bagel cake. Cause it looks so intricate. but like how much time did that take you to make.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:17:00] I would say if you combined all of the time that it took, it was probably 24 hours because I started on one day and then I finished the next day. But like at first, when I made the bacon, for instance, it looked horrible. Like, I don't know what I did, but I like over combined the, the fondant. And so the next day I got up and I was just like, no, this is not acceptable.

So then I used cakes by Timbo tutorial. But then I ended up looking at YouTube videos for like people that make clay models of like food. And so I like watched a couple of those and so I remade the bacon and had to let it dry. So it was probably about 24 hours total, but it's a lot of just little details that you have to make and let them dry and then add them to the cake.

Emily Blattel: [00:17:44] I think that that's a good point. Like why, you know, I think cake making is a wonderful, occupation for someone to do out of their home, because like Jennifer said, there are a lot of times that it's just waiting. It's waiting for things to get done before you can do something else. And, you know, if you were, unless you had, you know, 30 cakes to do in a day, that could be a lot of wasted time if you're in a, in a storefront potentially. So I think it lends itself well to that home-based, a home Baker environment.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:18:13] Yeah, because, well, and what I want to do is more of like, kind of the sculpture cakes, like the bagel. And I don't really have an interest in doing kind of like those birthday cakes, like little round cakes that people just pop out left and right. So that's why I guess to me being at home, I prefer that over maybe being at a bakery where I'm just cranking out like six inch, 10 inch cakes all day long.

David Crabbill: [00:18:34] I did want to ask about that. cause those cakes, you could sell more of those. You could probably make more money by selling more of those cakes. Um, and I wanted to know why do you, you, focus on these. Perfect cakes. I mean like very intricate cakes, but there probably is a level of diminishing return, right.

To the amount of time you're spending on these cakes versus what you can charge on them. And I wanted to know, is that a business decision? Is that, uh, actually a lucrative decision for you? Or is that just your own personal decision?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:19:07] I think for me, it's just more of a personal thing. Like it's definitely not lucrative because I'm not making cakes like every weekend. Like I have a, I run a Facebook page and there's these Kentucky home bakers and they're always making like 50 cakes a weekend basically. And I'm like, I don't know how they do that.

But to me, I don't really even enjoy baking. I just enjoy the decorating aspect of it. So to me, it's more of a personal thing where I just enjoy creating something. That's like a perfect bagel or like the one I did before that that was like a marble buttercream wedding cake. Like to me, that's just satisfaction and seeing that completed.

So it's not really as much about making, you know, tons of money every weekend. It's more about the creative aspect of it.

Emily Blattel: [00:19:51] I have to agree with that.

David Crabbill: [00:19:53] So then considering that, are there a lot of times where you will say no to customers?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:19:59] Yeah.

Emily Blattel: [00:20:01] yeah, we probably say no. We probably say no more than we say yes.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:20:05] Yeah, I think we do. Like I had a month awhile back where I probably told every person know that I was unavailable because I just didn't really have the time and some of the stuff that they want sometimes I'm just, yeah. I don't want to make that. I don't want to make you a, what is those characters?

Those little puppy dogs that everybody always wants. Paw patrol. Like everybody wants like that stuff and I just, to me, I don't want to do that every weekend. That's just not what I'm into. I want people that want stuff that's more creative, I guess.

Emily Blattel: [00:20:34] it's something we we've talked about this back and forth over the years, and there've been different times when we needed to, like you said, it is more lucrative to make those more, um, Kind of standard cakes and they're, they're easier to make sometimes. And they're usually faster, but, at what cost to you as the artist, I mean, there was a summer where, when, when I had kind of, taken the realm a little bit more, uh, Jennifer was preoccupied and couldn't take some and she had moved to Kentucky.

So we had all of this, this customer base in Missouri So I started, I started doing more of them and again, I didn't have kids, then. I had a lot more free time. and so, but I was still working full time, but, I was starting to do more and it was filling up every weekend and it gets to be where you start resenting having to get your mixer out, having to get out all those ingredients, having to clean up the kitchen again.

And once it's no longer fun. Then that's when I always have to take a step back and say, you know what? I don't need to do any for a little bit because I'm not enjoying this anymore. This is, this is my fun job. It's nice to make money with it, but that's not the purpose of it. Um, the purpose of it is to have fun, to be creative, to grow the skill and the craft.

But for us, I think right now, that's kind of where we are.

David Crabill: [00:21:48] So this is a part time job for both of you.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:21:51] Yeah. I also have a different job. It's more of my full time job, I guess.

David Crabill: [00:21:57] Well, do you think that, it could be a full time job if you wanted it to be.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:22:02] Yeah, I actually did. At the beginning of this year, I had kind of made a plan in my mind to get out of the job I currently have and try to do more cakes and then all the COVID-19 stuff happened and it kind of just. Threw a wrench in all of my plans and so for the longest time, I didn't even make a cake.

I was just like, well, I don't know. And then I started getting all these inquiries and stuff started opening back up, but I wasn't really ready to take them on. And I kind of told people, no, cause I was just like, well, I don't really know what the world's like. And it was hard to

even take on customers. Cause at the time, like I was going to the store, sending my husband to the store and there wasn't even butter.

He'd be like, well they've only got this brand or there's like, no, none of this butter. And I was like, well, I don't want to take a cake on and then not be able to even get the product to make the cake.

Emily Blattel: [00:22:44] And I don't know that I would want to do it full time. I've always, I've always worked full time the entire time we've been doing it. And, like, like I mentioned before that the summer that I worked a whole, I did probably at least two cakes every weekend, probably for several months. And, I made a lot of money.

It was, it was really nice. I actually, my husband, I wanted to go on a trip to Europe and my husband was like, Hey, I don't really want to go. He's like it's too expensive. So I said, well, I'll make a deal with you. If I can make enough money selling cakes then we can go to Europe and he's like, yeah, right.

You do that. We can do that. And so I did, that was like in March and the trip was in November. And so by July I had already made it up. And I was like, well, now we're going to Europe. He's like, great. But you know, that summer I worked really hard on it, but it really, it really did burn me out for a while.

After that, that there was just so much, um, your, your kitchen is always dirty. There's always dirty. Dishes in the sink, there's buttercream on everything. you know, so it gets you kind of in a funk. And then depending on if you're, if you're taking on a lot of cakes that don't necessarily have that creative aspect or the, the ones that you're, that you don't get to really experiment with the art side, the creative side of it. It does kind of wear on you.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:23:59] I would say that same thing.

Emily Blattel: [00:24:01] the, the business side of it has always intrigued me a little bit more anyway. I do enjoy making them. I love being able to, to devote time to it whenever I want to devote time to it.

I'm sorry, we sound very privileged when we're talking about this. I just want to make cakes whenever I want to make cakes and I want to make the cakes that I want to make, but, but it is kind of like that.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:24:20] Yeah. I mean, I've had a few weekends where I've had, you know, multiple cakes in a row and I get burned out too, because I don't enjoy the standing at my mixer and whipping up stuff. I just want to put the decorations on the cake. So maybe I should just work at a bakery. I don't know, but I just, yeah, I'd just be the decorator, like, but I just don't enjoy being burned out by it after a few. So I just kind of pick and choose, I guess.

David Crabbill: [00:24:46] Yeah, well, I mean, your skills are certainly good enough that you could be probably running a commercial bakery, but you've chosen to stay at home. Is that because of your kids or is that just because you're not passionate enough about it to be doing it full time?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:25:03] I think mine is more because over the years I've had a lot of personal things that kind of pushed me back. Like, I feel like I was getting ahead and then, Oh no, this has happened. So now you gotta, you know, I had a lack of money cause I went through a divorce and it just kind of ruined me financially, I guess.

So I had to start from the bottom and come back up. So I finally feel like maybe I'm at a place where I could start doing it full time from home. If the world will keep running.

Emily Blattel: [00:25:30] I think for me, motherhood has, has, has really influenced how much time I'm willing to give to the cakes. My kids are still very young. My son is three and my daughter's six months old. You know, I can do stuff when they go to bed and I do sometimes do that. But then, you know, a lot of times he is, you know, if you have, if you have young children, you don't get a lot of time with your, with your spouse when they're awake.

And so trying to have some time that we can still be together when both of us are working full time, plus having them in the evenings and then try to spend a little bit of time one-on-one as adults. It, it does tend to take more time. I think maybe eventually when they're older, that could be something that I would want to do more of.

So I keep all my stuff. I don't give anything away or sell anything. And my kitchen is still well stocked and ready to ready to go at any point in time. But, at this point in my life, I think it's more important for me to spend time with my kids while they're little than make a couple thousand dollars making a cake.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:26:26] that's a good point because most people want a cake on a weekend. So you spend your whole Friday night up late. And then all Saturday, like I had one cake that was like a 5:00 PM delivery. So my whole Saturday is just stopped because I have to finish this cake, take a picture of it, box it up and then deliver it.

And when I get there, I have to put flowers on the cake. So that's another hour of my time. So then my whole Saturday is gone, you know, so I have, I pick and choose too when I take them on, because I have children that go to their dad's every other weekend. So a lot of times I'll look at my calendar and be like, okay, are my kid's going to be here, or are they going to be gone? So my three oldest kids, if they're gone a lot of times, I'll take a cake on the weekend that they're gone and that works out pretty good. But I still like to have that time with my children because working on weekends, it's when everybody else is calling and going, Hey, why aren't you hanging out with us? And you're like, well, I have a cake and they don't understand that.

David Crabill: [00:27:17] Well, let's talk about pricing a little bit. I mean, what are you actually charging for your cakes? I mean, you've got different styles. I know of some that are very elaborate. Some that are more of your classic butter creams, but even still those, those, um, have some intricate elements to it, but like, How much do you get per cake typically?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:27:39] I started using, let me see. it's called BakeDiary. So I started using BakeDiary and it's like a software, but you don't have to download it. You just log in. And I

think it's around 60 to \$70 a year. And the last couple of cakes, I put it into that. And you put in kind of like how much servings and how much time you're going to spend.

And it kind of gives you an idea of like how much you're gonna actually make off of it. And I started kind of realizing that I need to be charging a lot more money than I was. Cause I was only charging around \$3 to \$3.50 per serving. And the last cake, I ended up charging around \$6 per serving, which ended up making me actually a profit instead of losing money.

Cause I feel like a lot of times I end up losing money and I'm in the kitchen for hours upon hours that I didn't calculate into the profit and I, I'm not coming out making much of anything. I think pricing is also sort of, it's so hard to navigate because you don't really ever know with each cake, how much time you're going to spend.

Like there's a lot of times I'll be in the middle of a cake and I'm like, wow, this was definitely not charged enough. Like I should have charged way more.

David Crabbill: [00:28:46] Do you feel like as you've gotten better, like as your skills have improved, you've become a lot better at estimating what the cost of a cake will be.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:28:54] Yeah, I think that's a lot of it is, you know, when you first start, you just kind of, you feel bad too to even charge too much because you're like, Oh man, they're not going to order it. And I've learned to just get over that. Like, you cannot care if that person orders from you, if they don't want to order from you and they want a \$50 cake, then they need to go to Walmart or Sam's and they need to call somebody who wants to work for free because I just, I'm not going to do that.

David Crabbill: [00:29:16] I mean, I imagine that you get quite a bit of inquiries because your cakes really stand out. I was just wondering, like, how far are people contacting you from? Like, are you serving a large area because your cakes are more expensive or, I mean, I just kinda wonder like how far you've gone to deliver or, or someone has picked up a cake.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:29:40] Well, I know, go ahead.

Emily Blattel: [00:29:43] Oh, I was gonna say my, my furthest delivery. I delivered a cake to Louisville, but that's really because it was a friend of the family. and I guess I did my sister's wedding cake too. And that was over in, About three and a half hours away. So Louisville is about five hours from here. most of mine usually stay within an hour, an hour drive of where I am.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:30:04] Yeah, my furthest, I think at this point was Nashville for a friend that wanted to order a cake for her mom. And she saw me complaining about pricing on my Facebook. And she was like, I'm going to order a cake from you. And I want you to charge me what it's worth. And I was like, okay, I did. And then I had to drive it on the bumpy interstate all the way to like Hendersonville, Tennessee. And it was terrifying, but it made it.

David Crabbill: [00:30:28] that's kind of an interesting point is that it's not enough to make the cake, but you gotta deliver it as well. What have you learned in terms of strategies or tips you have for delivering a cake?

Emily Blattel: [00:30:41] Include it in your time.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:30:42] Yeah, include it and make them pay for it because it's like I've delivered so many times for free. And then I've realized I've ended up spending like an hour at this person's reception place, you know, putting the flowers or the toppers or making sure it's stacked and leveled and everything. And then I haven't charged for that.

And so now I charge for it. And then also for like wedding cakes, definitely you need to get the proper support structure because that's the key, really. I was delivering a cake one time and it had these support structures in it. And so I was literally turning and driving as slow as possible. And I looked in my rear view mirror and saw the cake jump up and lay back down on the very top tier.

And I about had a heart attack. But it, it, it went back and it was, you know, it was sturdy enough that it was okay, but you have to have the right support structure or you have these horror stories.

Emily Blattel: [00:31:37] The scariest thing ever. And if anyone, if you do, if you have a client pick up a cake, Um, you make them, they have to sign that they got it and it was fine. And you have a picture of it when they took it and I'm sorry. And you have to tell them how to, how to keep it safe in their car. But at that point it's theirs. And if it falls apart, I'm sorry.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:31:58] I had a lady pick up a, literally like a one tier, eight to 10 inch cake. I thought, well, there's nothing wrong with this. I didn't really tell her instructions or anything. Cause I thought surely to God, there's no way this lady is gonna screw this cake up. So my husband's Facebook friends with her.

So after the party and everything, he shows me a picture and he's like, the cakes slid off of the base. And I'm like, well, how did that happen? And I guess she had just, you know, drove as crazy as she wanted and, you know, slammed on the brakes and made crazy turns and stuff. And didn't think about the cake sliding, but it now I'm like terrified to even give people a one tier cake.

Emily Blattel: [00:32:35] I prefer to deliver personally, cause I want to make sure it gets there in one piece, because people just don't think about it that they need to keep everything level. And even if, like you said, even if it's just one tier and it's really flat and sturdy, it still needs to be a level place that can't slide off and they've got to drive. Like a grandma on her way to potluck with a giant bowl of chicken soup in the back.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:32:57] right. I think majority of the time, if it's in my town, I will drive it to the house. And like, even if it's for free sometimes, cause I'm just like, I just want to make sure it gets there.

David Crabill: [00:33:08] Have you personally had any cake failures during delivery?

Jennifer Lopez: [00:33:14] Yes, but they always worked out amazingly, like the first cake, like the one I was telling you about the rainbow one the, my very first, like real order. I put the topper on the cake. Like, I didn't know, cause I never done this before. So I put the topper

on. It was like a 60 that I had made out of fondant and I put it in my car and I'm driving down the road on the interstate and I look in the rear view mirror and I see that the topper is like leaning forward on the cake. And I like, Oh, it's like, Oh my God. So I pulled over on the interstate and had to get out and remove the topper. And then there was this other time where I had this cake that had this strawberry bakery, pastry filling stuff in the middle of it.

And I didn't know to put like supports down inside of it. So it wouldn't slide. So I get to the venue. And I open my car and the cake had slid. So like the tier is separating where the pastry filling, you can see the inside of it. And the cake is kind of slid apart from itself. And I was like, Oh my God, what am I going to do?

So my ex husband, he picked it up and just like shook it and it bounced back into place. And I was like, Oh my God. And he fixed it. And I was amazed cause I was like freaking out, like, how am I going to fix this? Here I am. I'm in the middle of Cape with, you know, this cake and he fixed it. And so every so far, I've not had anything major happen where I got there.

Oh no, no, no. Wait. I did one time. I drove and it was the smallest cake ever. It was this little tiny golden rosette cake. And I thought there's no way that this won't make it. So I didn't even bring supplies with me. I thought this was this is fine. You know it was cupcakes and a six inch cake. So I drive it to the destination and I guess my car was too hot cause when I got there, I opened the thing up and the rosettes have like slid off the cake from where it got too hot on one side and I didn't have any supplies with me. And I called Emily and I was like, Is there any way you just happen to have some like buttercream icing? And she was like, no, I'm sorry. I don't. And I was like, Oh man. So I had to go inside the restaurant and tell the lady, look, I'm going to give you a refund. So it was thankfully only like \$35. And so I just gave her a full refund on the cake and she was so appreciative of it, but I was just glad it wasn't anything major, like a thousand dollar cake.

Emily Blattel: [00:35:25] Yeah, I think I too have been very fortunate that everything has been fairly minor and fixable on the scene. but it's something that every single time I'm like, maybe this is the time this is going to be my horror story.

I can remember one time. Do you remember the time we delivered the cakes together, where we, where you did the groom's cake, that Mario cake.

And I did that really, really tall wedding cake. And we had to deliver them and my husband drove in my car and we had both of them in the back of my, of my SUV. We're on the back seat, like hovering over the cakes the entire way we had to go down these bumpy roads and over railroad tracks. And we both had, I don't know how many heart attacks.

It was terrible that, well, that wedding cake was like four foot tall. It was huge.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:36:07] Oh, yes, it was enormous. But then I've learned from all those times too. Always, no matter how big the cake is, take the emergency bag with you. Like I have a bag stuffed full of anything I could possibly need from like, Scissors to like, even like one time I delivered a wedding cake and ended up having to go to Walmart to get something like a, it was like a bakery sheet, so I could pick the cake up.

Cause this was before I started putting feet on the cake. So I couldn't even get my hand up underneath this giant cake. So I had to go buy a cookie sheet that was flat so I could lift the cake out. Cause I didn't bring my little cake lifter. So yeah, it's just things you learn as you go.

Emily Blattel: [00:36:43] Yeah, basically just apply Murphy's law to it and be prepared for anything to happen. And it may or may not, but just be prepared.

David Crabill: [00:36:51] Well, okay. So those are some of the, uh, the bad stories. Get into some good stories. What are some memorable times that you've had with cakes? I'm sure you have plenty of them.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:37:02] Well, I think one of my favorite times, cause a lot of times I'll deliver these awesome cakes and like. I'll expect people to go, Oh wow. That's amazing. And half, okay, actually like 90% of the time, nobody cares. They're just like, cool. Send it over there. And you're like, okay, like I worked hard on this, but whatever.

And so I made this birthday cake recently. I think it was a couple of years ago, actually for a lady here in town that owns a florist. And I took it to Chuck E cheese and I walk in with it and she like had the best reaction ever. And she was just like, Oh my gosh, she just loved it so much. And I was just like, Oh, people do like the cakes after all, because you never know.

Emily Blattel: [00:37:41] Yeah. It's, it's always nice to actually get the reactions. I know a lot of times, like with a wedding cake, especially like the bride, who's been the one who's been involved with it the entire time, you know, she's not there when you deliver your cake. So, so you don't, you don't usually get to see that reaction.

So it's always nice to hear back from them and, and just hear from them. And a lot of times they'll send us pictures or, or just send us a little email that says, you know, we just loved it so much. And here's a picture of us cutting the cake or blah, blah, blah. there was one cake, actually, we did.

And we actually attended the wedding and we ended up cutting the cake for them. Cause it was a friend of mine. And that was really fun to do too, because not only did we get to have fun and go to the wedding, reception, everything, you know, everybody there is, they came and got the cake, they talked about it and then they were so excited to eat it and they loved how it tasted and everything.

So getting to be part of the entire process was a nice, nice change from what we normally get to do.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:38:35] I had a really tall wedding cake that I delivered, I think about two years ago now, and that family, first, they were like the most amazing people to begin with just to deal with. And then when I went and delivered it, I had to like, it was so enormous. I had to stack it all at the place. And so that always makes me nervous, because I'm like, what if they come in and they hate it, but then her family would come and go and they loved it. They were just like, Oh wow, this is looking amazing. And they looked at the grooms cake and they just thought it was amazing. And I was like, okay, I feel so much better now. But those are like the best times for me is when the customer sees it.

And I really enjoy more hearing back from them like, sometimes I'll get comments on Instagram and they talk about how delicious it was. And to me, that's the most important part. It might look nice, but it has to also taste good or people are going to say, well, that was pretty, but we're not going to go to that person and again, cause that was, you know, it didn't taste good.

David Crabbill: [00:39:27] Emily, do you have a favorite cake that you've made?

Emily Blattel: [00:39:33] I always, okay, so this is gonna sound silly, but it may not be one of my, like most advanced or anything, but I really loved the cake that I made for my son's first birthday. It was a three tiered cake. And we did like a, stormy rainbow theme for his birthday party.

So I had all the, you know, decoration stuff we did it at my house, but we have the decorations, and everything. And so I made three tiered cake and the bottom one, I obviously didn't need three tiers of cake for a small family party. So the bottom tier was a fake, a fake tier that I still decorated. So it's got storm clouds, and then the second tier was, I'm trying to remember now it was, it was like a blue sky with a rainbow stripes on it.

And then the top one had his name on it. And it was just really special getting to do that for his birthday party and how excited he was. And then even the next year, actually all the ones are nice for my kid. Cause last year for his birthday, I asked him what he wanted and he said he wanted a blue tractor cake. Mom, I want a blue tractor cake.

I want it to be, Like daddy's blue tractor. And so I asked him over and over to make sure because I was like, I don't want to make a tractor was Like, can't we come up with something good, but no, he just kept saying it. So, he told me he wanted this blue tractor cake. So we did it. And when I made it, I made it while he was, taking a nap.

I was finishing, and I let him help me a little bit. At the beginning of it, then I was finishing up the decorations while he's sleeping. So he wakes up and he comes into the kitchen. He looks at me and he goes, Oh, mama, it's Daddy's blue tractor, look at it! And he was so excited, and so as everybody came in the house. He ended up showing them, he would take them over to the cake and show them, look, it's my blue tractor. So that was just something really special.

David Crabbill: [00:41:08] What have been some of the most unique requests for cakes that you can recall?

Emily Blattel: [00:41:15] Like, I need to pull up some of our cakes.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:41:18] Yeah I'm thinking. A lot of the cakes I make that are kind of cool. I end up usually making just for fun or to give away. Like I made one that I gave away for teacher appreciation week. That was, it was like on a piece of cardboard, but I rolled out fondant to make it look like a chalkboard. And then I had a stack of books, an Apple that was made out of modeling chocolate and then like a post it note pad.

And then I had this pencil holder that looks like one of those Rae Dunn type of style with pencils coming out of it. And then I took it to the school and everybody was just like, Oh my gosh, wow. And so I ended up putting it on this little cart and having to push it through the school. And I had to surprise the teacher with it, and like, that was kind of a unique one, but a lot of times people just really want basic stuff. And I'm surprised that there's not a lot of people out there who really want something unique.

Emily Blattel: [00:42:09] I did. Actually one of my favorite cakes. I forgot about this one was, it was a fish. It was like a whole fish for a groom's cake. It was when I first got my airbrush and, it's sculpted and I still love that cake. I still am in awe that I was able to do it. Cause I didn't know what in the world I was doing at this point.

It was a long time ago. It was probably 11 years ago. And, it had like, it was like a rainbow trout, I think. But, that was a weird one. Like it's a strange thing. And I think groom's cakes are some of our weirdest, Oh, I did a toilet paper roll cake. I forgot about that. Yeah. That was probably one of the strangest ones, but it's come in really handy during COVID.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:42:45] Yes. Yes, it was, I guess one of my weirdest ones was the Mario castle because for a grooms cake. That was a unique one where they wanted this. There was this cake that somebody had made. I can't remember who it was now, but the very top there's like this peaches castle. So it's like a pink castle in the clouds.

And then Mario and peach are kissing. And so they asked me to make that and I was like, Oh my gosh, it was crazy. But I'm like, I think that's one of my favorites from like back in the day when I wasn't as good as it maybe I am now.

Emily Blattel: [00:43:16] Yeah, it was a cool one too.

I'm looking through some of our pictures and there's one too. Do you remember where the trend? A couple of years ago where people put like bacon on the side of their cakes. So I had a groom's cake that had like bacon

Jennifer Lopez: [00:43:27] Yes, I do like that, that one you did where it was like, you know, styled looking with all the different cakes and one of them had the bacon going up on the sides. That's one of my favorites.

Emily Blattel: [00:43:39] I love that whole set. There was two weddings, like right there together. And they both had like, A variety of cakes in different styles, and then they're all smaller and just a really pretty like tablescape. Those are some of my favorite weddings.

David Crabill: [00:43:54] Yeah, well, and I looked through your pictures recently and that fish cake certainly jumped out to me as well. and then also of course, the bagel, the hamburger, and then the Hocus Pocus cake was also something that I recall,

Jennifer Lopez: [00:44:08] that's my favorite. I think that's gotta be my favorite that I've made because I made that just, well, actually to begin with my neighbor has a Hocus Pocus book that she bought off Etsy. And that's what gave me the idea. And I was going to make it

for her. So I started making it, and then I found out on Facebook that she was going out of town.

So I was like, well, I'm just gonna make this anyway. So I went ahead and made it. And I loved it so much that I took it out and had my daughter do a photo shoot in her witch costume and she was holding it. Cause it was, you could pick it up and everything cause it had foam around it. So it was able to pick up and you could prop it up. And that's one of my favorites.

David Crabbill: [00:44:43] And then of course, uh I'm I forgot about your beach cake. That that's gotta be one of the most amazing stories I've ever heard.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:44:53] The seashells? Is that the one you're talking about?

David Crabbill: [00:44:58] Yeah. Oh yeah.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:45:00] Yes. Okay. So literally we were like the night before, before we were supposed to leave to go to Destin, Florida, I got this idea in my head that I wanted to make this seashell cake. And so for six hours, I sat at my kitchen table and it was a dummy cake so it didn't matter. Threw all these seashells on there and then painted it gold. And then the next day we hopped in the car and I held this cake all the way to Florida. And then it sat in my room for a couple of days. And I found some beach spots that I was, I went out and like took some professional, you know, for me photos on the beach and had all these people looking at me like I was crazy, but it was the best thing ever.

Like I just had this vision in my head of this seashell cake sitting on the beach and I like made it come true.

David Crabbill: [00:45:42] I read the blog post you wrote for that one. I didn't read through the whole blog, but I did read that blog post and that's when I realized you are the crazy cake lady. Because it looks like, I mean, it's an amazing cake and it looks like something that you would have charged over a thousand dollars for, or something, for some wedding, but just to know that you did that for yourself and held it on your lap for nine hours on your way to Florida, just is like, I just don't, I just don't know anyone else that would go to those lengths just to get a picture of a cake on a beach.

Emily Blattel: [00:46:18] I don't either.

David Crabbill: [00:46:19] That's why, I guess yeah. You put so much pride and perfection into your art.

Jennifer Lopez: [00:46:25] Yeah. It's like, I just had that vision and it's kind of like, why when I make a cake? I can just see it in my head, like finished. And I guess that's what pushes me to finish the cakes and why I like the creative ones better. Cause I can just have that in my head. Like this is what I want it to look like. And so I just want to see it completed.

David Crabbill: [00:46:41] That's the end of part, one of this interview with Jennifer and Emily, they had so much good information to share that I decided to split this podcast into two parts and I will be publishing [the second half of this interview](#) in a couple of weeks.

I also encourage you in the meantime to check out their photos on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#), As well as [Jennifer's blog posts](#) on [their website](#). I think you'll truly be impressed.

If you are thinking about starting a custom cake business of your own head on over to [forrager.com](#) to [check out your state's cottage food law](#).

For more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast/15](#). Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in [Part 2](#).