

Creative Ways to Market Cookies with Mallory Dies

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 Mallory Dies. Mallory lives in Stafford, Virginia, and sells gourmet cookie sandwiches with her cottage food business, [The Crassy Cookie](#).

I'm personally excited to have Mallory on the show because she started by selling basic drop cookies, like chocolate chip cookies, which is what I initially wanted to do with my cottage food business. I found a basic cookie business challenging for many reasons. And typically I recommend against starting one, but Mallory found a way to make it work well for her. And it's led to her focus on cookie sandwiches. So let's dive in and figure out how she did it. Welcome to the show Mallory. Nice to have you here.

Mallory Dies: [00:00:48] Thanks for having me.

David Crabill: [00:00:51] Mallory, can you take us back? When did you start this business and, and just, what, what led to you getting it off the ground?

Mallory Dies: [00:00:59] So I began the Crassy cookie, in the first week of March of 2018, I was working at a preschool teaching pre-K and I was very burnt out and tired from my job. And I just came home one night and I decided I was done. And so my boyfriend who's my husband now. He just said, well, what would you do?

And I said, I just want to do something that I enjoy. And I, I love baking. I want to bake cookies. And so that's kind of what happened. I gave my notice and that was that.

David Crabill: [00:01:30] And so like what did it take to, to start selling the cookies? Did you just go ahead and start selling the family and friends, or did you try to go out and get licensed or anything like that.

Mallory Dies: [00:01:43] So, I mean, I left my preschool classroom and I went part time as a nanny. And during my free time, I just started a Facebook page. I set up my Instagram. And, I just decided I was going to bake the cookies that my family enjoys the most. And I started from there. And so neighbors found out friends of friends found out and they started to buy first. All of our families out of state, so we just kind of rely on neighbors and old coworkers and friends. And it kind of went from there.

David Crabill: [00:02:12] Okay. So you're focusing on the people around you locally, which is, awesome. I think that's one of the best ways to start. And what kind of cookies were you selling?

Mallory Dies: [00:02:24] So what I started out with, my first cookie, which was a chocolate chip cookie, um, in a variety of flavors, which is now known as the darn good chocolate chip cookie. and those sold really well. And then I had an oatmeal cookie and some short bread. And then what really took off was this banana cream pecan cookie sandwich.

I had everyone, uh, raved about it and they started wanting to, you know, buy more of it and I'd have repeat customers. I'm like, wow, this cookie sandwich is really, you know, doing well and people love it. And so that's, it's kind of how it got going on cookie sandwiches.

David Crabill: [00:03:02] How long did it take for you to start selling the cookie sandwiches? You said it started in March of 2018, right? Part time.

Mallory Dies: [00:03:10] Yes, and I, well, I would say it took a few months to get a hand selected, like customers in my neighborhood, were regularly, regularly coming around. I, they didn't, I would say it was very slow at first. And then, we actually relocated, we bought our house in Stafford. We were in Alexandria, Virginia at the time.

So just when it had kind of picked up, we decided to move. so that kind of threw a wrench in there for a little bit.

David Crabill: [00:03:38] Right. Yeah. Cause you had to relocate and get another customer base. Um, and so what do you mean by slow?

Mallory Dies: [00:03:45] I would say like, I was probably getting one to three orders a month, on average for the first six to 10 months. But then sporadically, like really great opportunities would come in with that. So I wasn't getting consistent orders, but then some would ask me like, you know, can you bake for my bridal shower?

Can you, uh, you know, bake for my son's graduation party? And yeah, so I wasn't getting a bunch of numbers. Like I might be getting now consistently, but I was getting like big orders. So it started to kind of catch up on its own.

David Crabill: [00:04:21] Okay. So yeah, it was really slow and needed to be part time at first.

Mallory Dies: [00:04:26] Yes.

David Crabill: [00:04:27] Yeah. And what were the size, cause you were just selling the drop cookies at first. What were the size of the cookies you were selling and what price.

Mallory Dies: [00:04:37] Oh, I would say that, um, the, the cookie, the chocolate chip cookies that I originally had were probably about three to three and a half inches in diameter. They were probably like \$12 a dozen, which is considered low around here. and I still have those and I do offer those on my menu, but I've just, I charge different prices for them now. And they're much bigger.

David Crabill: [00:05:03] Like how much bigger,

Mallory Dies: [00:05:05] probably two to three inches, more. They're bakery size. They're probably the equivalent of four servings per cookie.

David Crabill: [00:05:15] so yeah, a large cookie for sure

Mallory Dies: [00:05:17] It's a big cookie. Yes.

David Crabill: [00:05:19] And what do you charge for those now?

Mallory Dies: [00:05:22] So the original flavor, which is just chocolate chips and white chocolate chips are \$15 per dozen. and then the red velvet and, double chocolate cookies. And I can customize them. they're probably, you know, up to 20 to \$21 per dozen. so I would still say it's fairly low for our area, but it's also competitive and reasonable to what my clientele I would, I would say would purchase

David Crabill: [00:05:53] And how much are you, how many of these cookies are you making in one batch?

Mallory Dies: [00:06:01] one. Batch is 12 to 14 cookies. So one batch per dozen, one dozen per batch, I should say. Sorry.

David Crabill: [00:06:09] Yeah. So, and then how long would you say that a batch takes you to make.

Mallory Dies: [00:06:15] Probably 20 to 25 minutes.

David Crabill: [00:06:20] Okay. Does that include cleanup?

Mallory Dies: [00:06:23] Well, I would add, it depends on what kind of day it is. Sometimes those specific orders can get very large and sometimes it's just a quick batch for, you know, one customer.

David Crabill: [00:06:35] I'm asking about this because you know, it's like with cookies, it's hard, right? Cause if you're doing one batch and. Yeah, your prices aren't super high in my opinion. And so it's just like, that takes a good amount of time to create, but I could see how, if you have many dozen in an order, then it would, you know, you could optimize it and do 20, 25 minutes each and just keep turning out the cookies.

Mallory Dies: [00:07:04] Yeah, I would say that that's kind of how it goes more with my cookie sandwiches rather than my, uh, you know, drop cookies that I do have.

David Crabill: [00:07:11] And so \$12 a dozen. Do you think that you should have charged more back when you were getting started?

Mallory Dies: [00:07:19] Yes. And no, because I see where my growth has been since I started three years ago. my packaging has improved. The taste has improved. The quality of the ingredients have improved. So for just starting out and really not knowing what I was doing, um, I guess you could say it was reasonably priced, but now I would price I could probably price them even more, but also I know we live in a small town and so I also want to make things reasonable for my customers.

David Crabill: [00:07:53] Yeah, one thing I've talked about on my blog is just the perception issues with cookies, right? Cause people go to the grocery store and they get them for like \$5. Is that something that you've faced and felt the pressure on, or is it, do people not really blink when they see the price of your cookies?

Mallory Dies: [00:08:14] once in a while, I get people who are like, Oh, that's way too high. I would never pay for that. But I do feel strongly that my prices are very reasonable. I could probably charge more if I'm honest. But they're reasonable. And so if they're the prices aren't for you, there's Costco, you know,

David Crabill: [00:08:34] Yeah, I would say your prices are extremely reasonable. And I want to talk a little bit more about that later when we get into the cookie sandwiches. but your, your trajectory obviously started out really slow, but can you give me an idea of like, you know, from when you started to today, like, what was that growth curve looking like?

Like when did you start to hit, um, inflection points where your business started to gain momentum?

Mallory Dies: [00:09:00] Quite honestly, when the pandemic hit back in March,

David Crabill: [00:09:05] yeah, it's funny. I've heard of a lot of, like baked good businesses in particular that did really well with this pandemic. So that's, it's just kind of interesting. And how, how it sort of jumped started some businesses in that way. Um, so what would you say your orders were looking like pre-pandemic versus maybe today

Mallory Dies: [00:09:26] Um, pre-pandemic, probably like one to five orders a week. And now I would say I'm averaging at least seven to 12 orders a week.

David Crabill: [00:09:39] and like what's the size of an order?

Mallory Dies: [00:09:41] It could vary some people just want like a dozen of drop cookies and some will order, you know, I have a large colossal box package that I offer, which is a hundred cookies. Um, so sometimes it's that it really varies.

David Crabill: [00:09:57] Can you think of like what an average would be?

Mallory Dies: [00:10:00] on average I'm baking, probably between 150 to 400 cookies a week.

David Crabill: [00:10:08] Okay. That's quite, that's quite a lot of cookies for sure.

Mallory Dies: [00:10:12] It is.

David Crabill: [00:10:13] And then I did see on your website that you're like booked through the end of the year for custom cookies.

Mallory Dies: [00:10:20] I am. those are custom buttercream, sugar cookies that I do for, you know, birthday parties and certain occasions. so I have like a menu item, menu ordering, and then I have custom orders. sometimes that includes a cake sometimes not.

David Crabill: [00:10:36] Yeah, well, we're sitting here in August, so that's quite a long time to be booked up through for a cookie business. So congratulations.

Mallory Dies: [00:10:45] Thank you.

David Crabill: [00:10:46] But you, do, you still do, you do still take orders, right. But just your regular menu items.

Mallory Dies: [00:10:51] Right. So like cookie sandwiches, drop cookies, my sugar cookie rosettes, which are just kind of a signature, a sugar cookie that I do.

David Crabill: [00:11:00] Right. So, yeah. Does that kind of encompass most of what you sell or do you sell any other items?

Mallory Dies: [00:11:07] that's pretty much it. occasionally I'll get someone asking if I can make a cake and that's very, that's A, if I'm in the mood for it and if I have time for it, and B depending on how much, you know, time I want to devote to a cake,

David Crabill: [00:11:24] Okay, so let's get back to your cookies and the cookie sandwiches in particular. Can you describe what, what is this cookie sandwich?

Mallory Dies: [00:11:33] So, like I said, I started with the banana cream pecan recipe. and I kind of just thought, you know, what, if I could do this cookie, but in other flavors. And so that's kind of what I've done. And each cookie, it has the foundation of that banana cream pecan recipe, but certain things might change, you know?

Um, so my strawberry shortcake cookie sandwich that would have strawberries as opposed to banana in it. and so the measurements for certain ingredients are different in that. but I offer, I mean, you know, different flavors like chocolate, strawberry lemon, blueberry lemon, lavender. there's a sweet, sweet potato one, pumpkin.

David Crabill: [00:12:15] And are you adding flavors pretty regularly or do you, have you found your favorites?

Mallory Dies: [00:12:23] I have my favorites. I'm always thinking of new flavors to add. I kind of, I kind of look at what's selling and what's not, um, there are flavors I've made that have been complete flops. And, you know, just no one was interested in it. And there are some that like constantly get ordered and I'm like, you know, okay, I'll make it again.

And, and yeah, some that are just, you know, you wouldn't expect that people would like it. Like the blueberry lemon-lavandula, you know, I didn't expect that to go as well as it has. And so that gets ordered quite frequently.

David Crabill: [00:12:57] Okay. And are there other flavors, like what are, what are some of your best selling flavors?

Mallory Dies: [00:13:02] Um, my caramel mocha which is a chocolate cookie with a mocha buttercream, topped with a vanilla buttercream, and caramel sauce, the strawberry shortcake, which is that's that gets ordered a lot. and so that's just strawberry cookies and the strawberry buttercream, and then I roll it in crushed uh, sugar cookies and then I drizzle it with a strawberry cream. That's very popular. lemon poppyseed, choco fudge brownie, rainbow chip is a big one. and today I just released my seasonal special, which is an Apple crumble. It's half Apple, crisp half Apple pie inspired. and so far that's been received really well.

David Crabill: [00:13:44] Okay. And then what about the other side of it where you maybe have had some flavors that flopped.

Mallory Dies: [00:13:50] So I did, um, a chocolate peppermint chip, and I'm not a peppermint person myself, but, some people ordered it, but it wasn't really ordered enough. And I guess it just, not many people like peppermint, or maybe I just presented it wrong. I don't know, but that didn't go so well. And then I did do a Neapolitan one and I just think not a lot of people are into that. In terms of Neapolitan being in cookies, rather than ice cream, I guess.

David Crabill: [00:14:24] Well to give people kind of an idea of what these cookies look like. I've seen them on your Facebook page and I think of them, like kind of like a macaron mixed with a cupcake. I don't know. Like it's got that kind of unique newness and, convenient packaging of a cupcake, uh, but they're bigger than macrons, like a lot bigger. Um, what, what are the size of the cookies. I know you, you sell the drop cookies that are like huge, but what about the sandwich cookies

Mallory Dies: [00:14:56] the sandwich cookies are about two and a half inches in diameter, and they're probably about an inch or two high, depending on, you know, what's on top of it, ganache, dipped in chocolate, nuts, that sort of thing.

David Crabill: [00:15:09] and how many cookies are you making in a batch for these.

Mallory Dies: [00:15:14] probably depending on the recipe between 18 and 24 cookies per batch.

David Crabill: [00:15:22] Okay.

Mallory Dies: [00:15:23] So just about two dozen.

David Crabill: [00:15:25] So again, you would need to make a whole batch just to get a dozen cookies cookie sandwiches.

Mallory Dies: [00:15:33] yes,

David Crabill: [00:15:34] Yeah. And what are you pricing the cookie sandwiches at?

Mallory Dies: [00:15:39] they typically start between \$18. per dozen up to about \$27 per dozen.

David Crabill: [00:15:45] And what's the price difference.

Mallory Dies: [00:15:48] I would say like between the ingredients that are being used, um,

David Crabill: [00:15:53] So what would be an example of an \$18 one versus a \$27 one?

Mallory Dies: [00:15:58] Oh, okay. So the crassfetti, is very basic. And so that would be \$18 per dozen. but a \$27 one might have, additional sprinkles on it. Added ingredients to it, depending on what people want. I've done, like the crassfetti, I've had like people request, you know, you know, crazy things like, can you do this crassfetti, and then dip it in this and

then add these sprinkles. And so I would tell them, like, I might have to add on more for that because you know, some sprinkles can be very expensive.

David Crabill: [00:16:32] well, I think of like \$18 a dozen, I mean, that's a steal, right? You're getting 24 cookies plus filling. I just, I actually am a little bit surprised at that pricing just because it's \$1.50 per cookie sandwich, which actually seems pretty low to me.

Mallory Dies: [00:16:51] It is pretty low. Um, but I have found again, we live in a very small town. And so I had to, when I first started up here, I had to kind of figure out what would be most reasonable and based on what I was seeing in like the community, Facebook groups and what other bakers in our area were charging for.

Something similar to what I'm doing, at least drop cookies. that seemed to be reasonable. I do have plans to increase my prices in 2021. now that I've gotten more consistent with orders and such.

David Crabill: [00:17:30] Have you actually tried to increase your prices?

Mallory Dies: [00:17:34] when I first came, I had started the cookie sandwiches while we were still living in our old town. And people were definitely more willing to pay more for them there, but we were right outside of DC. and so moving here, a lot of people were like no way at my old prices. So I kind of changed, you know, my pricing a little bit to meet the needs of the neighborhood. but with that, of course I've also changed ingredients and that sort of thing. so I guess that's kind of where the loss or gain would be.

David Crabill: [00:18:15] It brings up a good point. Cause, you know, sometimes I think you need to educate your customers in some, in some instances and. I understand that they might have balked at the price, but as you get to be more known in your area, you establish a reputation. I could definitely see a larger price. I mean, I'm thinking about a macaron business, which can charge \$30 per dozen and it's a bit more complicated to make a macaron for sure.

But I'm still the size of that cookie is way smaller than what you're offering. And, um, yeah, it has that kind of higher perceived value. So, it's, I mean, if you're comparing to like bakery drop cookies and the prices there. I don't know, it's like different, cause you're offering a unique thing. You're offering this cookie sandwich and are there really any bakeries that offer that type of thing in your area?

Mallory Dies: [00:19:06] no, I quite honestly, I don't know that many people do make cookie sandwiches in terms of it being like its own niche, like its own thing. even like on Instagram and stuff, it's a very unique product. I think that I've made. which has also, I think helped me. In the beginning it was very discouraging. So I'm like, how am I going to get people to buy these? But if you're the only person that does it, it becomes like unique and special.

David Crabill: [00:19:35] It can also be a problem too, right. Because when you're doing something brand new that nobody's looking for, then they don't even know that they necessarily want to look for them. Did you find it difficult? To market it because it just wasn't on people's radar.

Mallory Dies: [00:19:53] You know, I really like when it comes to marketing, I didn't really know what I was doing at first. So I would just kind of post the cookies and hope for the best. but then I realized, you know, these cookies need a description. They need to be explained. And so I would start describing the flavors and the ingredients you use and that sort of thing.

And people would be like, okay, well I'm willing to try it. So they'd order like the safe flavors, like rainbow chip or strawberry shortcake. And, and then I'd throw a sample or two of the more oddball flavors in with their order. And then they would just keep coming back.

David Crabill: [00:20:30] Okay, so that's interesting. So you were actually adding a bonus to their order.

Mallory Dies: [00:20:35] yes. I mean, not nothing huge, but you know, kind of like a cookie here, a sample there type of thing.

David Crabill: [00:20:43] No, that's smart. I haven't heard of someone doing that with a cookie business. So like, did you start doing that from the get go? Or was that something you kind of discovered.

Mallory Dies: [00:20:53] kind of something I thought to do, I think. And just from talking with other cookiers and bakers, I think a lot of people are afraid. To, kind of give away things for free and it's scary. Cause I know my prices are already pretty low, but I think that's how I've built a really great customer base. And I have tons of returning customers.

I'm not afraid to add a little bit of value and I think people like that, you know, I'll do a giveaway not often, but I'll do a giveaway or I'll give free cookies away or a new sample of something. And I think people really like that.

David Crabill: [00:21:28] I did see the giveaways on your Facebook page. And I wanted to ask you about them. how, how are you structuring these giveaways and what are you getting in return?

Mallory Dies: [00:21:37] so the recent giveaway I did was a cake. I did a cakeaway, and I made a funfetti four layer cake. It was a lot of fun to make. but I basically. I did it cause I think everyone likes to win something. Right. And it increases and engagement on my Facebook page. So if I can do that more people will see what I'm making, you know, on a day to day basis.

David Crabill: [00:22:06] And at least the one I saw you actually did like a survey.

Mallory Dies: [00:22:12] I did. Yes. Well, I started, that was, for the new seasonal special, which I'm doing now, I had kind of taken a poll like Apple pie or Apple Crisp. And what they, what people didn't realize is every time they commented that was their entry into this giveaway for a free dozen of my cookies.

David Crabill: [00:22:33] So you didn't even tell people you were doing the giveaway. You just, you just asked for the survey.

Mallory Dies: [00:22:38] Right. And so my hopes are that people will kind of get the idea of like, well, if I comment more, give more feedback, then perhaps I'll win something next time. And it won't be all the time. Cause you obviously can't give away everything for free.

David Crabill: [00:22:56] Yeah, no, I think it's awesome. And also, I think when you start to do surveys like that, you're just getting your customer base more involved in your business and they feel like they're a part of it.

Mallory Dies: [00:23:07] right. It kinda comes off a little manipulative. Right. Cause they didn't know they were going to win, but, you know, they've, they continue to comment now because there's that hope

David Crabill: [00:23:17] I also wanted to ask you about how you gave it away. You did like this spin, the wheel thing, like what, what did you do to set that up?

Mallory Dies: [00:23:26] quite honestly, I just Googled like, uh, like giveaway wheel, and then I just clicked on the first one that popped up and yeah. It's a really cool feature. You just kind of type in the names. I could put my logo in the wheel and, uh, you know, you just enter the names of the people and then you click spin and it picks it out for you randomly.

David Crabill: [00:23:47] Yeah, it was kind of fun. Cause you could do it through a video. Did you do that through a Facebook live on your page?

Mallory Dies: [00:23:53] I've done it through. Yeah, I've done it through Facebook lives. I know people that pre-record, but I also want to be honest and forthcoming with it. So going live, I think is the easiest way to do it. And I've had mishaps with it where, you know, people have won twice or, you know, other fellow bakers who wanted to support me have won the contest. So, but I think it's fair to do it live.

David Crabill: [00:24:20] It is fun. I mean, if, yeah, if somebody. It goes onto your Facebook page and they see that it's just like, it's just a fun way of doing it because you're literally talking to your audience and then click the wheel and it spins and you select someone right there on the spot. And, um, yeah, I thought it was really cool.

And I did notice speaking of Facebook that you post every single day on Facebook.

Mallory Dies: [00:24:44] I do. I usually try to post twice a day, but like early in the morning and then at night. So you're kind of hitting. Your audience, you know, from different times of the day, some people are morning, people, others are not. And so I think it helps with engagement. It's, it's a tricky thing. That algorithm

David Crabill: [00:25:07] Is that something that you've like looked up or tried to learn about or tried to optimize? I mean, how did you get started doing this or know that that's something that you should be doing?

Mallory Dies: [00:25:17] well, when I figured out that, like, you know, I'm posting and no one's liking it. And no one's seeing it. And yet people are ordering like, so what's going on. And so I kind of learned a little bit more about, you know, sponsoring a post or boosting a

post, um, and that of course costs money. And then I kind of go on YouTube and watch videos about how to increase engagement. And so I learned a lot through that.

David Crabill: [00:25:44] And posting twice a day was like one of the big takeaways, I guess.

Mallory Dies: [00:25:49] yeah, so some people say don't do it and then I've read elsewhere that that's what you need to do. And for me, posting minimum of once a day has proven to be very helpful to me, um, in terms of getting engagement and. You know, sometimes I just want to share what I'm doing. I cross post between my Instagram, my Facebook account.

I've learned that, you know, people, people are nosy and rightfully so. I'm like, you know, I want to know what people are doing, you know, behind the scenes. So I like to share kind of, you know, what I'm doing in the kitchen, uh, when I'm baking or what I'm finding to be challenging. And so I think my customers enjoy that too.

David Crabill: [00:26:30] Yeah you do a really good job of sharing your journey on your Facebook account. And I mean, some of the posts are just pretty simple, like a picture, but then you do some really lengthy posts where you're really talking about what's going through your head. And I can imagine that your customer base probably loves, loves following that.

Mallory Dies: [00:26:50] Yeah, I think cause they see the person behind the cookie. It's not, I don't want to always hard sell people. I kind of just have this mentality of like build it and they will come and that's kind of what's happened. And so I kind of am in between like a rock and a hard place because I'm at the point now where I do need to increase my prices, like, as we were talking about before, but at the same time, consistency is also key.

So there will be some changes, you know, in the new year with pricing, But I think it's more about making that connection. Like know, like, and trust versus constantly trying to, you know, convince people to buy.

David Crabill: [00:27:29] Well it's interesting, because you've been so focused on building that relationship. And now you're developing these raving fans. I actually think when you go to move, when you go to increase your prices, a lot of people will say it's about time. You know, you might find that there's no resistance whatsoever.

Mallory Dies: [00:27:46] right. And that's my hope

David Crabill: [00:27:49] and so it's, it's a good idea to post every day on Facebook. It's a, it's a nice idea. It's not always easy to do so. And did you find it difficult to come up with something to post every single day?

Mallory Dies: [00:28:03] In the beginning. Yes. and even on Instagram as well, um, because I've kind of garnered customers through both platforms. It's very difficult for me because I'm typically very shy and introverted, although like a talker, I just like to keep to myself and so posting about my life or certain things that have changed, uh, was very difficult in the beginning.

But you just find things, you just have to realize you're not for everyone. Your cookies are not for everyone, but there are people out there that will enjoy it. And so the more I just started to share and find things, you know, from the mundane, you know, from doing dishes to like something more critical happening in my life, I share that. And people seem to, like, I think that they relate to it.

David Crabill: [00:28:51] Okay. I love talking to a fellow introvert because I also found it very difficult to start to take ownership of my business, start to put myself out there. And, um, how did you know that that's something that you should do or, um, You know, like, I think it's really hard for us introverts to put our face on our business in a sense, cause you might just want to be behind the scenes in the kitchen, just pushing out the cookies.

Uh, but how did you even get to the point of knowing that you needed to take ownership of your business and put your face out there?

Mallory Dies: [00:29:24] Um, I kind of was like starting to get uninspired, uh, recently, like not, I would say like towards the end of 2019. I was just like, I don't know what I'm doing wrong. I don't know. And my husband was like, you have to, you have to show them who you are. And you know, if you look around at other Baker's accounts and stuff, you'll see that like people go live and they show their face.

I'm like, I don't want to show my face. I want to show my cookies. but I really just kind of had to bite the bullet and do it. And it's something I'm still working on in terms of being comfortable with. But, you know, I, I recently changed my profile picture to like me holding a tray of cookies. you know, it's trying to kind of like brand it more.

And I think that it has helped because people see who's behind it. So they get to know me better. Um, but also know my cookies and what I bake.

David Crabill: [00:30:20] Yeah, I think it'll definitely help and it gets easier over time.

Mallory Dies: [00:30:26] It has gotten easier. I agree. it's not my first thing on my list that I love doing, but.

David Crabill: [00:30:32] Yeah. It's not your favorite thing, but it is. I think it's funny. Cause you said that the pandemic really pushed your business forward, but it sounds like there are other things that you started to figure out right about the beginning of this year that have also contributed to your momentum.

Mallory Dies: [00:30:50] yes, like, uh, ways I post, um, creating like certain Facebook events for a particular popup sale. You know just how I would market, I guess you would say, my cookies and that sort of thing.

David Crabill: [00:31:04] I noticed another marketing tool that you have is your monthly calendar. And, um, this is like showing how booked you are, when you have availability. When did you start to do that calendar?

Mallory Dies: [00:31:19] probably in April, March or April. I was kind of like up to my eyeballs with orders and I'm like, well, what do I do? And so I kind of created a system that

would have to balance my orders with, you know, my time. And so I just would write down, like, you know, I'm booked at this many orders.

And once that happens, I would just write that on the calendar. I do it through like, I'll download a calendar off of Google and then I just kind of fill it out and then I save it and then upload it to my website. And then my Facebook page.

David Crabill: [00:31:55] Yeah I should have clarified that these calendar images are like pretty nicely designed, right? They look, they look really good. And, I think that it adds an element of scarcity cause people can see, Oh wow. She's getting booked up. I need to order now.

Mallory Dies: [00:32:09] right. It, yeah, it kind of does that, especially, um, something I recently did to kind of catapult my sales and get people kind of introduced my, my customers to other cookies I make and provide variety is my monthly boxes. And so I kind of include that on the calendar as well.

David Crabill: [00:32:31] Okay, can you describe what your monthly boxes are?

Mallory Dies: [00:32:34] Sure. So my monthly box will have like a crassy sampler and that's a sampler of one dozen cookie sandwiches. So I choose everything that goes into the monthly box. so I pick out the sampler I want, and then, I'll add in like four to six drop cookies off my menu. And then I do kind of like some sugar cookies that I find are fun.

I kind of go with a theme. So like August was like endless summer and I picked out some great cookie sandwiches that are, summer flavored. And kid friendly. And then I did some sugar cookies, like a beach ball and a Popsicle. And, uh, for September it's kind of like Apple themed. And so my sampler will include the new Apple crumble cookie and, my cinnaboom cookie sandwiches, which is like, um, I snicker doodle meets, a vanilla buttercream, and my choco fudge brownie is in there as well.

And then my crassfetti, which is my version of a funfetti. So the flavors will rotate every month. And I found this monthly box thing to kind of be a really great heavy hitter with customers. Um, a lot of people order them. So I have to prepare ahead of time and do a lot of planning and that's kind of where I profit the most, I think.

So the monthly box, depending on what cookie sandwiches go into. The sampler and what kind of other cookies are included? The monthly box could be \$30. It could be \$50. but it really depends on what's included. Some boxes are smaller than others. so like this month's box is probably going to be around \$50.

I haven't quite priced that yet for September. But there's always one full crassy sampler in there, which is typically around \$25 per dozen.

David Crabill: [00:34:23] And have you noticed that like at the end of the month, when people aren't going to be able to get this monthly box anymore, do the sales go up?

Mallory Dies: [00:34:34] Well, I would say what I typically do is at the very end of the month to the first week of the month, I open the sale for a week. So like, this is the monthly box.

This is what's available in it. this is the, the sales will be open for a week. It'll close on this date. And then towards the end of that week, people are like scrambling to make their, get their order in.

So yeah, in the beginning of the sale, it's a little slow, I'll get a couple here and there. And then by the end of the week, I've got a list of customers. and then pickup for the boxes are usually in the middle of the month, like the 13th or the 14th.

David Crabill: [00:35:14] Okay, so this is cool, you're doing a launch basically for these monthly boxes. So you're opening up, the launch window of a week, and then you're closing it and doing a hard deadline. How are you communicating with people about the monthly box?

Mallory Dies: [00:35:32] through my website, through my Facebook page, through stories on Instagram and Facebook stories as well. I just let them know ahead of time. This is what's going to be in it. So I'll make, a quick batch that I know what's going in the Crassy sampler. So I have cookies on hand that I put in the dozen and then I like set up like a picture of it.

So like, I show them visually what's going to be in the box. And I found that to be very successful versus just saying, Hey, X, Y, and Z is going to be in this box. People have a visual of what to look forward to. And so that's helped. And then I just promote it. And then people, you know, order through Facebook or they order right through my square website.

David Crabill: [00:36:19] And also it's nice, because you're getting all the orders at the same time and then you know exactly how many to make, to fulfill them all.

Mallory Dies: [00:36:28] that's exactly. And so I didn't want to do it for a while, I was like that's a lot of work and it is, it's a lot of work, but I found that this, you know, yes, my prices are low, but when you bake at such a large quantity, I could, you know, if no one bought anything the whole month, but the monthly boxes did really well. I'm kind of set

David Crabill: [00:36:52] Yeah I could see how these monthly boxes could work really well. Um, do you use email to communicate with customers?

Mallory Dies: [00:37:02] I do. In the beginning, I tried like a newsletter and those were not very successful for me. I was consistent with it. It just didn't quite, I didn't get the feedback that I was looking for from doing newsletters. Occasionally I'll send one out.

David Crabill: [00:37:19] I wonder if you just use the email to just do the monthly box. I wonder if that would be more successful than, than trying to do, just because like, not, everybody's going to see the Facebook post. Right.

Mallory Dies: [00:37:32] Yes. And no, I also, I post in our community Facebook page every Monday. Um, they do kind of like a merchant Monday. And so I'll post in that and advertise the monthly box. so that seems to work as well.

David Crabill: [00:37:48] Okay. Yeah. So that's cool. You're, you're using the community page. And you also said that at the beginning of the year, you were focusing in on Facebook groups, how did you kind of focus on those.

Mallory Dies: [00:37:59] I just, I joined like local groups that were around my area. So there's one for my immediate neighborhood. And then there's one for, the town in which we live and then the County. So I joined all of those and I just started, um, advertising in there and kind of getting to know, you know, and I'll see like people post, like looking for someone to do these cookies or.

Looking for someone who can make a cake for this. And so it's interesting because you can see what people are looking for and what they expect to pay. and so it makes it interesting to see what people like or dislike.

David Crabill: [00:38:38] I think the Facebook groups could be a little tricky, because like, if you just jump in and you start promoting right off the get go, that can be a little off putting, like, did you, did you contribute for a while or just jump in and listen and become a part of the community before promoting your stuff?

Mallory Dies: [00:38:54] I did. I did. I, we moved here, um, in the early fall of 2018. And. Or 2019, excuse me. And so I started to kind of get to know my neighbors. I started to get to know the people. And then when I decided to pick up the pace, uh, with my business, then I started to kind of advertise very slowly, but most of my business comes through Facebook. And it comes through word of mouth.

David Crabill: [00:39:24] So you've got the Facebook groups, you've got this community page that you post on and you have your Facebook page that you've been posting every single day and that's been successful. And your Instagram account. Are there any other local venues that you've used to or online venues that you've used to increase awareness about your business?

Mallory Dies: [00:39:48] I have done craft fairs before. And outdoor art festivals and those were fun. Those were very successful as well.

David Crabill: [00:39:58] How did you plan how many cookies to make for those.

Mallory Dies: [00:40:02] I didn't. The first, the first craft fair I did. I just kind of was like, okay, there's going to be a bunch of people. So I'm going to make a bunch of cookies. And, it was the first one I had ever done and it actually proved to be very successful. We didn't have many extra cookies left, but. Now knowing how much to make versus how much can I, I handle making is kind of what I go off of. It's you know, so if it's estimated that several hundred people will be there, I'll probably pick a selection off my menu and then just do like a batch or two of each.

David Crabill: [00:40:40] It's one of the harder things about events, right? Because I think cookies in particular have a very short shelf life, unless you're putting stabilizers into your cookies, which I assume you're probably not, and you were talking earlier about how, Oh, I might just have some cookies on hand too, to put together this little box to show people what they're going to get. And, or I'll just throw in an extra cookie here or there, but I mean, like, do you, do you freeze your cookies? Like what are you doing for shelf life with these cookies?

Mallory Dies: [00:41:12] So, I make everything made to order. So there really is no shelf life. the cookies I save to set up the monthly box, they're frozen and they're not for consumption. They're on hand in a Tupperware container simply to put in the dozen container to just give a visual. so, but in terms of shelf life, I mean, everything is made to order. Everything is made fresh. And so that's usually how I handle it.

David Crabill: [00:41:44] Yeah. I mean, it makes sense. Cause you're doing a lot of custom orders. so, you don't have to worry about shelf life as much in that case. And I think that you kind of have to do a cookie business that way. Right.

Mallory Dies: [00:41:57] yeah, I would think so. Freshness and quality control is very important to me. And I think it's easier because you know, if I were to just bake everything ahead of time. Then you're left, hoping that people will just order the stuff. And that's not usually how it goes.

David Crabill: [00:42:14] You said earlier that you you've gotten better at making your cookies taste better than they were at the beginning. And you don't need to talk about your secret sauce, but like, what was the process like for you trying to figure out how to make them taste better? Was it just, um, over the course of making so many cookies that you just started to tweak things and think, Oh, that's better? Or did you actually go through like, Like a scientific process to improve your cookies.

Mallory Dies: [00:42:44] A little bit of both actually. Um, I've pinpointed like really great vanilla. I use some of my extracts I make on my own and they're mine, but, um, I exclusively use like Rodelle vanilla is a great one. I think vanilla can really make or break anything you bake. so just make sure those are high quality, vanilla included, but, um, like for example, my cinnaboom cookie sandwich, it's like, you want that taste and texture of a snickerdoodle, but I have to make it fit the size and shape of my cookie sandwiches so that I have some sort of, you know, uniform appearance. And so that was very challenging. And so that was like a concoction of, you know, how much baking soda with cream of tarter, to measure out. And that was definitely trial and error.

David Crabill: [00:43:34] I also wanted to ask you about packaging and you know, you have nice packaging from what I see on your website. How did your packaging change over time? What did you start with and what do you have now?

Mallory Dies: [00:43:47] So I started with, um, like typical bakery boxes. And I would separate the cookie sandwiches with like cupcake holders, like, you know, the cute ones, the, the attractive, like muffin tin holders. And I realized that wasn't separating the flavors enough and it wasn't the best neatest, most protective packaging I could find.

And so then we were like, well, let's just use cupcake boxes. plastic cupcake holders. And I was like, thinking that that might be a good idea. However, my cookies are not small enough to be the size of a mini cupcake, but they're not big enough to be the size of the standard cupcake they're kind of in between.

So finding packaging, cupcake, packaging that could fit that was challenging, but we've, we've found it. so we just buy that in large quantity.

David Crabill: [00:44:45] Where do you buy that?

Mallory Dies: [00:44:47] recently we've purchased from plasticcontainercity.com

David Crabill: [00:44:52] and where were you buying the bakery boxes when you were just getting started?

Mallory Dies: [00:44:57] Oh, gosh, like Walmart and Michael's and Amazon. And I'm like, I'm paying way too much for these.

David Crabill: [00:45:03] And knowing what you know, now, if you had to go back in time, would you have purchased them at Walmart and Michael's or where would you purchase them?

Mallory Dies: [00:45:11] I would probably look for something more wholesale. Of course. Uh, I didn't realize how much money was going out on packaging. The packaging can be very expensive.

David Crabill: [00:45:22] So, you know, you packaging wise, you do these monthly boxes, uh, the crassy samplers. You've got your crassy colossal package. And I have to ask you about your business name, the Crassy cookie. Where does this word crassy come from?

Mallory Dies: [00:45:37] You know, we, I didn't really think too much about it. We were, uh, This is like right at the time before I started the crassy cookie and we're just driving around and, you know, we're, what would I call it? And I always thought like, you know, with my sense of humor and such, it's like, Oh, you're so crass.

And then, so there's that. And then I just was like, you know, I want to do something different and unique that no one else does, but I want it to be simple and classy and have elegance. And so I kind of just, it just came out of my mouth and I'm like, sounds good to me. And that's kind of how it came about.

David Crabill: [00:46:14] Well, you certainly haven't come across crass in the, in this podcast episode.

Mallory Dies: [00:46:20] I hope not.

David Crabill: [00:46:22] But yeah, I get it, it's kind of classy, but with a twist, um, so I know that business has picked up a lot this year. What are your visions or hopes for the future?

Mallory Dies: [00:46:34] I would like to expand. I actually am not interested in shipping. Tons of my family and friends from out of state have asked, you know, when are you going to ship? And I'm not. It's a lot of money to ship buttercream cookie sandwiches, and it's just a lot of liability, but, um, would I love a storefront? Yes. We are also trying to start a family soon. So, it's balancing that. So right now I'm comfortable working as a cottage food business, but I would love to expand one day.

David Crabill: [00:47:09] Yeah, you had mentioned to me like the Crassy cookie shop. What's your vision for that?

Mallory Dies: [00:47:16] you know, I would love to have cookie sandwiches. I'd love to have drop cookies and just kind of. Sell people on it. I think it's a very unique product. No one else I know of is doing something like it. So I think that's where I find that fulfillment is seeing people, you know, try them and like them.

It's, you know, it's kind of like if I can win them over, that these, they're not your average cookie, it's definitely a dessert. They're very decadent. They're not for everyone. They're very sugary. So I think that's where I find the joy in it. So if I could imagine, you know, even a very small storefront.

David Crabill: [00:47:55] Well, thanks so much for, uh, jumping on here. Was there any other advice that you can think of giving someone who's just starting out with, uh, with the cookie business or with any cottage food business?

Mallory Dies: [00:48:08] I would definitely say do all the math first and do it as you go. Um, so you can track how much you're spending. And how much you're making and profiting off of your cookies. And I would say like, don't be afraid to try something completely out of the ordinary that's different.

David Crabill: [00:48:25] Yeah. And if you do try something out of the ordinary, just throw it as a sample, into somebody's existing order, and then they can, uh, they can realize how good it is and then they can order more. Um, well, Thanks so much Mallory for coming on the show. How can people find you in reach out?

Mallory Dies: [00:48:42] we're on Facebook. [facebook.com/thecrassycookie](https://www.facebook.com/thecrassycookie) on instagram [@thecrassycookie](https://www.instagram.com/thecrassycookie) and the website is [thecrassycookie.com](https://www.thecrassycookie.com).

David Crabill: [00:48:51] Wonderful. Well, thanks so much for coming on the show. It's been great.

Mallory Dies: [00:48:56] Great. Thank you for having me.

David Crabill: [00:48:58] That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. It was great to hear how Mallory has turned her cookie business into a success. And I particularly enjoyed hearing about some of her creative marketing ideas like her monthly cookie boxes and the social media giveaways. Be sure to head on over to [her website](#), to see all of the flavors of her unique gourmet cookie sandwiches.

If you are thinking about starting a cookie or cottage food business 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/18. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.