

From Failed Kickstarter to Successful Storefront with Melvin Roberson

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 Melvin Roberson.

Melvin lives in Fort worth, Texas and owns a popular gourmet donut shop called [Dough Boy Donuts](#). Today his shop is bustling with customers and employees, but Dough Boy Donuts started from humble beginnings out of his home kitchen in 2014. Melvin used [Texas's cottage food law](#) for a year before expanding to a food truck and finally to a brick and mortar location.

I know that Melvin has faced plenty of obstacles along the way, and he has a wealth of experience to share with us. So I'm looking forward to learning from him today. And with that, welcome to the show, Melvin. Nice to have you here.

Melvin Roberson: [00:00:50] Yeah, thanks for having me.

David Crabill: [00:00:52] So Melvin, can you take us back to 2014 and, what compelled you to start a donut shop? And just, how did you get started?

Melvin Roberson: [00:01:01] Oh, yeah, it seems so long ago. I guess it kind of was, but it seems even longer with the way this year has gone, so I had actually, heard of this place in st. Louis, that did all these crazy donuts. bacon toppings had Oreos cookie Oreo, cookie toppings. And, what else did they have?

They had some really crazy, uh, pie, like pie, crust, and pie filling and compotes and all these wild things on top of these donuts. And at the time that was, that was the first time I had seen something like that. So I had done a little bit of research and. Uh, tried to look for something like that here in the area.

And then that's when I found out about, you know, the, the popular ones, like voodoo and places like that, that, that, that had existed. And this place was called strange donuts in st. Louis. I don't know. It's something about the vibe. That they had, this was all through a tumbler page that I saw them on, so I'm not sure if they were on Instagram or Facebook or anything like that, but I remember going through their Tumblr page and seeing these guys, they were these weird quirky guys that, had, you know, a really laid back feel great sense of humor and they made these amazing looking donuts and they had actually started out of their house as well. So I'd felt a little bit of a, like, you know, I don't know, it kind of inspired me like, you know, that's something that I can, I can do. So, but first, you know, I wanted to go and try something like that here in Fort worth.

And at the time, no one was doing that in Fort worth. So you just had your regular, Kinda neighborhood donut shops, you know, walk in, they've got the generic milk, they got the generic coffee, you know, they've got all the generic stuff and the, sausage rolls and donut holes, this, that, and the other sprinkles, uh, but nothing really, really crazy.

and so, but there was a place in Dallas that I ended up going to, my mom and I, we tried this place out and, um, they're really known for their, their donuts but, um, we, we, we sat there and the donuts were really good, but we could tell that they weren't too different than those regular donut shops that you would go to in your, in your own local neighborhood. So, and us, you know, my mom is an expert at baking at home baking, you know, she in the family, she's, she's the one, you know, so, was like mom, you know, I think that if you and I were to do something together, you know, we could do, we could put out a better product than this and, you know, she's all, you know, never made a doughnut before the sat and the other, but me, I just had this confidence that whatever I was going to do, whatever it's up to make that happen. So,

David Crabill: [00:03:34] Now why, why were you compelled to even start a food business?

Melvin Roberson: [00:03:40] So I've been in the restaurant industry, my entire life. So that gave me a little bit, that was what gave me a lot of the confidence. also I had just got out of a bad relationship with a business partner and which probably added to that motivation as well. And, with a prior business, that's not in the food business And there wasn't anything like that in our town, in Fort worth.

And that was kind of that aha moment where I figured I needed to get on this before someone else did. and lo and behold, someone else was doing it at the same time that I was so, this other, this other guy and myself, we were pretty much neck and neck with getting this thing started. And I didn't hear about him for a few more months later, but we had started within a few months of each other, but, um, It was one of those, I don't know.

It's just the, the, the combination of me having that experience of being in industry since I was 16. And then on top of that, me just being, you know, I've always been kind of a chubby dude. I just love sweets. And, it just seemed so popular in other areas of the country st. Louis or Seattle or New York, Chicago, even Miami that, I knew that it would just be a home run here.

So, that's really what drove me to, to get that, get that going. So pretty much the combination of all those.

David Crabill: [00:04:58] So were you looking to basically follow someone else's business model? Like, why didn't you try to think of something or invent something on your own when you wanted to start a food business?

Melvin Roberson: [00:05:09] I did. we, we, we are doing. Something different. It is it's donuts at the end of the day. But I found in my research that a lot of people use frozen donuts or they use donuts that aren't made from scratch or they're pre-made somewhere else and brought in on a food on a truck. And brought to their location every day.

and with the experience that I'd had grown up with, you know, us baking, everything from scratch, that was our angle is that these will be 100% made from scratch donuts with real ingredients. and none of the, none of the junk that people put in, or none other preservatives or fillers or nothing like that.

So we don't use any doughnut mixers. We don't use any premade, jellies or jams, none of that. It adds to the character of the donut and, and to the integrity of the donut. And it makes it a little more versatile as well. Which was, you know, down the, down the line, we figured we found out that it was a little bit of a struggle because people were not used to, The quality that quality of a donut, because it came out a little more dense with it being made from scratch, as opposed to this light, airy kind of super, super fluffy thing that you would get at a, at the, at your regular spot. So

David Crabill: [00:06:23] I saw on your website, it said the Dough Boy difference is that what you're referring to?

Melvin Roberson: [00:06:28] Absolutely. That's the Dough Boy difference made from scratch. Made you know, we roll cut and fry doughnuts fresh throughout the day. And also, we dress them to order. So I think only one. Maybe two people are doing that, that I'm aware of. I know one is doing it here locally, but they are a franchise I believe.

And there's another one that is a single location in, in, in the Dallas area. That's doing that as well as they're dressing donuts to order. So I don't, you know, you go to a place and you kind of pick it out, like it's in a fish tank. Hey, I want this one here. I want that one there. You know, give me that one, you know?

but I wanted, you know, we have a simple display. That's just one of each flavor that we do offer and then. Guests will say, Hey, I want a sriracha maple bacon, or I want a butter pecan or whatever. And then we'll actually kind of short order cook it, grab it out of a proofer it's still warm. Or even sometimes depending on how busy they are, they're really coming right out of the fryer, which is a blessing and a curse.

Cause they're hard to dress when, when they are so hot And we dress it, dip it in the glaze, dip it in the topping, toast the marshmallow or whatever needs to be done, or put the drizzle on top and it's in a box and it's, it's, it's in your stomach. So it's, it's something unique about having a donut being made for you as opposed to something being made probably before you woke up in the morning that's been sitting in there all day waiting for you to come in.

David Crabill: [00:07:47] So, is that why you felt compelled to move to food truck? Cause I imagine you couldn't do that kind of on the spot dressing when you were under the cottage food law.

Melvin Roberson: [00:07:57] Correct? Correct. What I did is we made them, up as close to the delivery time as possible, which, I'm self-taught with, the donut thing. So this is my specific recipe. I combined three or four different recipes and got help from my aunt. Who's a pastry chef and how to kind of, um, finalize the recipe.

So, it took me a while to figure out yeast and the water temperature and, proofing and all those things. But what I would do, you know, if you say like, you know, Hey, this is David, I got, I need a hundred donuts at this time. I would time it. So that. They were as fresh as possible. And I wasn't going to get up and make them at midnight and then have them done at 3:00 AM.

And then I'm bringing them to new at nine. Like I would try to be done by eight or eight 30. So that I can just load up and head right over and dropped them off to you. So, that, that was the plan is to get them to them as fresh and warm as possible, which, was a task because I only had one small fryer that I got at bed bath and beyond, and I was frying them two at a time.

So, I didn't even have donut sticks, which are, uh, Kind of the turning sticks they're these long wooden sticks. So my mom had given me this wooden spoon that I would use the handle of to turn the donuts. So, it was really, it was a really ragtag operation at first, but I did get smart and got another fryer.

So at that point I was frying six at a time, but still it wasn't enough for the amount of requests that I was getting.

David Crabill: [00:09:23] Right now you were operating under the cottage food law what if the cottage food law hadn't existed, do you think you would have still started from your home, just kind of under the radar, or do you think you would have tried to jump into the food truck immediately?

Melvin Roberson: [00:09:41] I probably would've tried to do some of it at home. Honestly, but it's, it's especially starting out. It's very, very expensive. There are a lot of hoops to jump through and there are a lot of rules that, you have to really abide by. So, you know, I did as much research as I possibly could, but you know, just starting a business out, I started the business with \$500.

it was expensive to go rent a commercial kitchen for 20 to 25 plus dollars an hour. And then you have to pay to have your things stored there and pay to use equipment, or supply your own equipment. And just at that time, with me starting out that that was the best, that was the best route. So I honestly, I probably would've just, I would've probably done it from the house anyways.

David Crabill: [00:10:28] Sure. And that's pretty common, you know, and that's part of the reason why those, the cottage food laws exist. Now you mentioned a couple of flavors earlier, but what are we talking about when we're talking about gourmet doughnuts? What did you start out with offering and what do you have now?

Melvin Roberson: [00:10:44] We have a lot of the same ones that, we started with actually. so I mentioned the sriracha maple bacon, which is our, our signature donut. So the gourmet donut shops that are hard. Around the country and they've all got a maple bacon bar or maple bacon donut with crumbles or whatever it may be. But, me, I love spice. I love spicy things and this is Texas. So I figured adding a little bit of heat to the bacon. And having it being offset with the maple that balance. So that would just be something that was very, very unique, it's something that, you know, not a lot of people are doing out there. So, that's another thing was, is that Dough Boy difference, you know, I may get inspiration from another doughnut shop or see a flavor combination, but I try to kind of up it a little bit and add our own little twist to it.

And, um, Make it unique to the Dough Boy experience so that you can't go anywhere else and get that particular thing. So there are people who don't like spice and don't care for it, and that's fine. But, um, that alone is, the reactions that you get from that. And the look on people's faces when they bite into it is, is worth it's definitely worth, doing things like that.

So, uh, the sriracha maple bacon was a big one. We got the last call, which, was my creation. It was, it's a spinoff of something someone else did. but it's, maple syrup. Nutella and peanut butter glaze. And it's got coconut chocolate chips, pecans, and Oreos on top. So it's like, you know, last call, we swept the floor and this is all that's left and we added it to the donut.

So, and then another one, which is a huge home run is the fairy dust, which is a lemon zest glaze with ground up Skittles on top. people usually wince when they hear that one, but it's really, it's got the perfect balance of sweet and tartness. And plus with our dough being as dense as it is, it's not like a bagel or anything like that, but it does have that have that balance in the dough.

It helps balance out the flavors on top. which helps, because I mean, ultimately the goal is to get people to eat and buy more donuts and, and knowing that it's not going to hurt their teeth after one is definitely what we're going for.

David Crabill: [00:12:47] Yeah, there's some very unique flavors. And I now you have many more unique flavors, I do want to go back to when you tried to start the food truck, cause I know you [started a Kickstarter](#) to try to get off the ground. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Melvin Roberson: [00:13:04] Yeah. we didn't do very well with the Kickstarter so we didn't get any money, but, my goal was to, help get some equipment for the truck. So, I bought the truck from a woman who had done, a different concept prior, but it had sat there for a year or so in her driveway. And, um, It was a super unique truck and I just fell in love with it at the time, but I knew it needed a little bit of work.

So, that, you know, that was, that's what that was for. Was to help get equipment, help get a donut fryer, proofer, all that stuff. And then a little bit of a working capital. So we could, you know, have a little bit of money to, to kind of figure out what, you know, navigate the food truck landscape, which, which is definitely rough.

David Crabill: [00:13:45] Yeah, and I, I really wanted to ask you about this. Cause I've had a couple people on the show who ran Kickstarters to take business to the next stage. And they were successful in raising money. And I know you, you weren't successful in the way Kickstarter works as if you're not successful, you don't get any money. So what do you think you did wrong? Or maybe in hindsight, what do you think you could have done differently to make that a successful campaign?

Melvin Roberson: [00:14:12] I think marketing was my big thing and I didn't hire anyone for marketing. Actually, I, I brought on someone. Who's a good friend of mine. he's been with me for a little bit over a year and that kinda changed the entire marketing. it, it changed the landscape when it comes to marketing because, he knew a lot of things that I didn't know.

And I frankly didn't have the time to look into and he's doing all that for me, which is a blessing at this point. But, I didn't market it the way I've probably needed to, I wasn't putting it on social media. I wasn't, I mean, I think the majority of the people who had donated, were actually just my friends and family, so, I didn't, I just wasn't reaching to people the way that I needed to. So I think, um, going back marketing would be something that I would invest a lot more into. back when I was getting started.

David Crabill: [00:14:58] And yet you didn't get the funding for that Kickstarter, but you persisted and you stuck with it and you still opened that food truck. So how did you get the funding for that? And why do you think that didn't stop you?

Melvin Roberson: [00:15:14] I got it from my parents actually. And I'm, I'm, you know, I'm extremely thankful for them and they, they gave me the money for the truck and all the upgrades and all that stuff, and they were there helping me. And then they, they, we got some friends together and. helped us, kind of lay it out and all of this stuff we did on our own.

So, I don't know. I just felt, you know, we were the first donut food truck and in North Texas there was, one in Austin and one in Houston at the time. So, it was just something. I don't know, I just had this faith that, that that's, that's the big thing. I just had faith in the fact that this would work out because it was so unique and such an experience.

And just so different. And I just knew that what I was going to provide would be different enough to be popular and be successful. I don't know, like I said, I just, I just had faith and, I never really been that headstrong about. Anything else in life and plus with, with my prior, you know, the way the prior business went and things like that.

And, that was motivation to get my act together as well, and to, to succeed. And also my, my current job, I was a kitchen manager at a, at a steakhouse and, that wasn't necessarily fulfilling anymore. So I knew that it would be something that. You know, if, if, if we did it right, it could propel us to that next level.

And plus, you know, I've got a family and my son, my son has autism. So, I just really wanted something for him and something for my other two children who were my girls, who, something they could fall back on and just do something to establish some sort of legacy in case something were to happen to me.

David Crabill: [00:16:59] I did see that your son has autism and you're talking about some kind of intangibles where there's this deep drive in you. And I think that can help carry you through some of the tough times. Can you talk a little bit about some of the obstacles you've faced and do you think it's necessary to have that? You know that deep rooted need to, uh, persist and keep going.

Melvin Roberson: [00:17:24] Yeah, I think, I think there is a, you always need to have some sort of drive. You really have to love what you do. I know that's a super cliché thing to say, but you, if I didn't love this and I would be done with this, I'd be doing something else. I mean, I could, I've got enough connections in the town that I could go on and work somewhere next week if I needed to.

And it's you, you've got to have, especially with a food truck and with like a cottage business, you've got to know how to hustle. You've got to go out there and get it type mentality. You can't wait for things to just come to you. And, even with our brick and mortar, I've still taken on that same attitude where, you know, I'm going to go out there and make this happen because, because of my son and because of my, my wife and my, my, you know, my children and my parents, you know, I still, you know, I just want to prove to everybody that. You know, this is going to work and this is working and you know, it can be successful in that. yeah

David Crabill: [00:18:28] you talked about the hustle and that can come with sacrifice sometimes. Can you talk about some of the sacrifices you've made to get this business to where it is today?

Melvin Roberson: [00:18:39] Yeah, for sure. I mean, with my family and my, you know, my wife, you know, our relationship has suffered at times because you know, I'm locked into Dough Boy or even with my parents where you, you know, we're all in this together, we're in here every single day together. You know, they, they work here now and we don't always see eye to eye, so that, that leads to issues.

And that's, that's affected our relationship at times as well. And. You know, I don't get to go. And you know, my, my daughter, my youngest is cheerleading football games right now. So I'm not able to, I haven't been to one yet. You know what I mean? I'm probably not going to get to go to one before the season's up.

Cause you know, Saturday morning, you know, I'm going to be here. so a lot of things like that, special events and family events, I mean we've missed funerals because you know, They are most likely on the weekends and, things of that nature. And it, it sucks, but it's, it's, it's I, I'm a big picture guy and I know that I can see, I can see the day that I'm not necessarily needed here.

Every single day or every single weekend or things like that. And that's not me trying to, you know, get off scot-free and just not work. But you know, I started this with the hope of having a little bit of freedom with my time, and I'm not quite there yet, but I can, I can definitely see it on the horizon. So that's also another thing too, is, is, is that adds to that drive as well.

David Crabill: [00:20:08] was there ever a time that you considered giving up?

Melvin Roberson: [00:20:13] Oh, yeah, probably every other week. to keep it, to be honest with you, I mean, yeah, it's hard. Um, you know, you're fighting with your wife or you go out to an event on your food truck and you know, you do. You know, people walk by and make these stink faces. And it's tough when you've given up so much or you've invested your, all your energy and your time and your, and your money and your family's money into something.

And someone walks by your truck and turns their nose up, or it makes a rude comment. Or, you know, you, you walk out and. If you're walking to the restroom, or walking around at an

event. And there was a lot of people there and you see your product in the trash with like a bite taken out. You know what I mean?

There's, there's definitely that, that definitely kills your spirit a little bit, but you've got, you've got to have that drive and that, that persistence and it took me a while to realize this, but everything isn't for everybody. I mean, if you're doing all you can, then it's, you know, there's not much else you can do then, you know, at the end of the day, you know, you did what you could and they didn't like it. They just didn't like it. You know what I mean?

David Crabill: [00:21:19] I would imagine that the positive experiences that you have far outweigh the negative ones though right.

Melvin Roberson: [00:21:27] A thousand percent, a thousand percent. And when people are, you know, you see people, so we do online orders now. With COVID and things like that. And you see people, those orders come through, you see the same names every single week or every other day. And then you get the reviews online, Yelp and Google and Facebook, and the things that people say, or that are just like, Oh my goodness, this is incredible.

And you know, there are people out there that value the value. You have a good donut and they know they can taste it or see. What went into it and appreciate that. And, I appreciate those people a lot, you know, it's a small group of people who don't care for the products as opposed to the other. And that's definitely what keeps me going.

David Crabill: [00:22:16] I want to go back to the food truck. And can you share a little bit about what it took to get that food truck off the ground? And maybe what if somebody is interested in starting a food truck, what they should be thinking about?

Melvin Roberson: [00:22:31] Yeah. Um, layout is important. Y'all would get what the health department. That was what we did health department and figured out. What was needed as far as, you know, the sink and refrigeration and things, whatever their requirements are and here in North Texas. it's unfortunate, but we've got, County regulations and also city regulations.

So it's do your homework and your research on what specific counties need versus what other cities need, which it sounds kind of confusing, so, figure out what you need as far as, the regulations and whatnot.

generator is another big one, which is something that we didn't look into, properly. uh,

David Crabill: [00:23:13] this process like much harder than you initially envisioned it to be when you started out?

Melvin Roberson: [00:23:19] It was, yeah, hands down. It was. And a lot of that was due to those rules and regulations and not really understanding, differences between, you know, who allows what and who, you know, who doesn't allow that. And, and they all want your money as well. So, Oh, I need to pay my Tarrant County permit or I need to go look into Fort worth or Arlington's our own separate thing and figuring out, you know, another thing is, you know, if you're going to do more than three or four events in a particular city or County,

it's probably best to just go ahead and sign it for the annual permit, as opposed to getting a temporary permit every single time, because that money does add up, I think another struggle was figuring out events, and things like that as well.

Some people will want you to pay to go to their event versus some who will pay you to come. So, that was a huge struggle, especially initially and not, you know, trusting people with, their guarantees of how many people would be at these, at these events. some cities will also allow you to park anywhere you want.

that's not the case here in Fort worth. So I think you can park there as long as you have, a written letter from the place that you are parking. Like if there's like a gas station or an apartment complex, you've gotta be within so many feet of a restroom, which that doesn't apply to. all cities are all counties, which again, it's just, it's doing the work and figuring out those rules.

I wish that there was some sort of, uniform law across the state that would make things a lot easier, but unfortunately there's not. So.

David Crabill: [00:24:48] Yep. There's nothing uniform about starting a food business. That's for sure. Even with the cottage food laws, it's always County by County, sometimes neighborhood by neighborhood, but you've started a food truck. And a storefront and you just chose to go into the food truck first, looking back on it. Was that the right choice? Is that a decision you would make again, instead of perhaps just going straight into a storefront?

Melvin Roberson: [00:25:15] Yeah. I think it was a good decision. It helped establish our proof of concept, which was huge. And at the point that when we opened up our brick and mortar, we knew that the doughnuts were liked by a lot of people. And it wasn't just like a, Hey, I'm going to open this up in hopes that. You know, people like this, you know, we've heard, we've gotten feedback across town from people that enjoyed it.

So we had also had a bit of a following too, before we opened up, which was also helped. So, I just knew it had to be in Fort worth because we had started in Fort worth and it's a consistent place for people to come to as opposed to on the food truck. I could be down the street or I could be an hour away on any given day.

And. you know, you have a lot of messages from people, where are you going to be at today? And, you know, I'm bummed that you're not going to be here in town and things like that. So, starting the truck beforehand was definitely, I think I, I would definitely do it again before I opened up the brick and mortar.

Um, and also it worked out because, you know, like I said, I got a family and I knew that, you know, I hadn't, I was still working my job and as a kitchen manager and I hadn't, My wife wouldn't let me quit. So, the food truck was, was the next best option of having that flexibility of working whenever I could, as opposed to having to be here every single day, which is what you would need to be open more frequently and more consistently with a brick and mortar.

So, and also when, when, when things got a little bit tough at the brick and mortar, and we're trying to figure out, the traffic situation and the flow inside of the shop, we could always get back out on the food truck and do an event or, a catering gig or something like that, or a corporate something so that, you know, we could bring in some extra revenue. So it definitely helps.

David Crabill: [00:27:01] So you said that you were still working a job while you started the food truck and, you know, sometimes people wonder, should I quit my job and go full-time into this? Or should I keep my job and keep that, you know, revenue stream going? What would you say to that? Was it a good choice for your wife to force you to keep your job while you started this business?

Melvin Roberson: [00:27:25] yeah, I think so. I think so just with, especially with my son being, you know, his needs and my other two girls, you know, having three kids and, you know, that we were all on the insurance plan and the, the company I worked for was based in Canada. So the insurance was amazing. So, that was, that was a huge deal with making sure that, that my son was covered, but at a certain point, I, you know, I just got too busy to, to be a husband, to be a father, be a business owner and to be a kitchen manager.

So, I had to make that sacrifice, I think it's situational. With certain people, I think that, you know, just outweigh the pros and cons, and study that pretty hard before you make that decision. because it is a huge sacrifice, letting go of that income because, things don't always go as planned inside of food trucks.

there are a lot of different factors if it's, you know, your truck breaking down or. Or the weather, you know, that's, that's even a bigger one, you know? not everybody's going to stand out in the cold or stand out in the rain or snow or whatever to eat your food. And you've really got to be creative, or you've got to have some, something to fall back on financially, if, things aren't, you know, going so well at times.

So, and it took a while to build some sort of consistency with revenue, which, I didn't expect it to take as long as it did, but also, you know, our donuts it's a lower price point, you know, they are pricier than, than your average donut because of the level of labor. And that, that, that does go into it.

But, uh, it's a lower price point. It's basically dessert. So it's, it's got lower margins and. We're quantity based for sure. So we've got to sell a lot to make any sort of money. So, going back, I would probably ride it out a little bit longer with my job. figure out what I needed to do to break even, and to be profitable and then wait for it to be a little more consistent before I actually jumped ship. So.

David Crabill: [00:29:18] And so you're talking about pricing. What are the prices of your donuts and what were they when you started?

Melvin Roberson: [00:29:25] Yeah, they're the same actually, which is pretty high, but, our plain glazed doughnut is \$2. we have what we call OGs, which are, um, \$3 and our deluxe options, like the sriracha maple bacon and the butter pecan, the last call, those items are \$4. So again, on the food truck, people get to watch it.

It's an experience, you know, you're paying for that experience. you can see someone behind, in the window, you know, they're rolling out dough, they're frying donuts. and I didn't know this at the, I didn't notice at the time, but people weren't really. There's not really a donut place. where you could see the process.

And again, that added to that experience of people like, wow, like they're actually fried and not baked, or, you know, Oh, they proofed them. They put them in that box and then they brought them out and then they fried them. Oh, that's how they turn them. Or look at those donut holes or whatever the case is.

And then knowing that that donut's still hot and it's being dressed and you know, I'm going to put it in the boat and, you know, the glaze is going to be nice and, and runny and warm. And, you know, when you bite into it, it's just an experience unlike any other,

it's it's scratch-made it's, you know, my dad, everybody refers to my dad as pops. They call him pops. And so they see pops. He was always behind me rolling out donuts and cutting them and frying them. And, just, you know, I have people to this day who ask about him and, and they're like, wow, you know, I remember seeing your dad on the truck and rolling those out and, you know, I'd never had anything like that before, that type of thing. So.

David Crabill: [00:30:58] And was your family ready and willing to help out with your business. did it take any convincing to get them on board with your vision?

Melvin Roberson: [00:31:09] Willing, yes, but ready. Probably not. it, it turned out to them working a lot more than what they. wanted to or thought that they needed to, but, um, I'm super thankful for not just their financial investment, but their investment in time. You know, them getting a little bit older, you know, they're here, you know, a lot and you know, I'm thankful for that, but, The fact that they're still here and they're trying, and they're willing to learn, you know, they're not restaurant industry people.

My mom's got, an accounting background and my dad had worked, for, he had a city job for 20 plus years and he's actually retired. So, their involvement really, really means a lot. And that's also a part of what drives me is knowing that. They had invested in me in more ways than one.

And, that's the extra motivation also that gets me up in the morning as well.

David Crabill: [00:31:57] So when did you know that we're ready to jump from the food truck to the storefront?

Melvin Roberson: [00:32:06] probably we were, we were getting to the point to where we were a lot of requests to do, a lot of different things as far as. caterings or special events. I would say that we had an opportunity to get into another food truck and have multiple or open up the brick and mortar, but the brick and mortar was always the goal because, it would bring a lot more consistent revenue to the business and we're being in the same location every day for people to come and enjoy them.

And, I want it to translate that Dough Boy difference experience to the shop as well, and have, that lounge seating area and have, you know, we had a jazz pianist come on Saturdays and play music, things like that. But, um, we just got busy. we were working. Events six, seven days a week, sometimes multiple events, multiple events a day.

And at that point I was just like, man, like let's break some of this up and with the brick and mortar always being in play and the location and the space that we're actually currently in now, a friend of mine was here and she was leaving. And so it just kinda, it just kinda happened also. So, I guess you can call it fate.

David Crabill: [00:33:25] And take me back to opening day and maybe even opening day of your food truck. I feel like that's always a memorable day. What was it like to open up your food truck and what was it like to open up your storefront?

Melvin Roberson: [00:33:37] So the food truck was really cool. Uh, it was a pretty cool brisk morning, uh, Saturday in December of 15, I believe. Where, we were outside of this place here in Fort worth called Kent & Co, which is a wine bar. And, I had posted, you know, Hey, we're going to know our food trucks going to be here and things like that.

And we had already built up a little bit of a following on social media. I probably had a thousand or so. Or, or 1500 or so followers, which, at the time I was so excited about, but people knew me as the cottage guy and the guy that did the deliveries and, met people, you know, on the street and transaction for donuts and things like that.

But, we had a line. It was, it was really, really, amazing to see people lined up outside of the truck, like waiting for us to open and. It was my mom and I that day working that event. And, uh, I don't know it was this. I can see it now, but again, we weren't fully prepared for that. I guess. I'll I expected it to be a little bit busy, but I didn't expect it to be that busy, where we had a line the entire time and we were still trying to figure out.

The flow of things with, you know, without stepping or bumping into each other on the food truck, because, you know, it's limited space. And we had issues with our generators where we're cutting unplugging things and plugging other things back up, or turning this off and cutting that on it, you know, so we were complete blowing our generator, but, it was definitely, um, I would say it was pretty incredible to know that everything I had done up to that point was, people were paying attention.

And, and, and coming to support. And, well, I think back on that a lot about that day, and I don't know, it it's, it's, it's humbling for sure. and the same thing with the brick and mortar, we actually got delayed. A few months, with permits or things like that. So we couldn't open when we wanted to and we actually ended up opening the first week of school, which was pretty terrible.

But, the first week or so, it was just, it was crazy. It was balls to the wall. it was busy and we stayed busy. and I had a pretty big team at that, at that point. Cause we were open from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM. So, that alone was a long excruciating day, but I wanted to. Be able to get you that sugar rush or that sugar fix in your middy or in the afternoon or after school or, or after work, whatever the case was.

But, that actually didn't work out. I think it was due to the location. we weren't bringing in people pass a certain past three or four o'clock, no one was really coming in. And so we're all kind of sitting on our hands, but, It, it, it was again, a humbling experience knowing that people were coming to support.

And we had a lot of people who came those first days, who are still coming to this day quite often as well. So.

David Crabill: [00:36:24] And I know when you start a brick and mortar and you're brand new, sometimes that can help, but also it can be a little difficult because you got a whole bunch of other established businesses around you. Did you find it challenging to kind of get noticed amongst a whole bunch of regular businesses?

Melvin Roberson: [00:36:42] Absolutely On this block, Camp Bowie in Fort worth. we're on the bricks, which tells you it's, you know, the bricks have been here for 100 plus years and, there are a lot of businesses, like there's a business across the street that does hamburgers, and they'd been there since I think the forties.

and there are a lot of other staples in town that have been there. You know, 30, 40, 50, 60 plus years. And it's with the way that our location is, it's kind of hard to see us. And, we definitely don't stick out enough or didn't stick out enough to, to kind of catch people's attention. um, but I knew that, eventually people would know where we were and, and, it would break, you know what I mean? And people would be, you know, we would be in the same talks with those other places. So unfortunately that didn't really happen, but we're actually relocating, it wasn't necessarily due to that, but we're actually relocating soon. But, to answer your question. Yeah. It was difficult to kind of. Uh, get noticed in the sea of those time businesses.

David Crabill: [00:37:40] And how many employees do you currently have?

Melvin Roberson: [00:37:44] I've got 12 right now.

David Crabill: [00:37:46] And I mean, did you have experience leading a team when you started out a bit, this business? I know you said you had a little bit of experience with, starting a business before, or was that a big learning curve? Like what have you learned about managing a team?

Melvin Roberson: [00:38:02] Yeah. So, at the restaurant I was at prior, I was a dining room manager. Then I was bar manager. Then I was kitchen manager. throughout the time that I was there, I'd managed a few hundred employees, so that wasn't necessarily difficult. but I think there, there was a little bit of an adjustment with being a manager to being an owner, for sure.

dealing with a lot of internal issues. Kind of head on being that owner and being that person where I couldn't just say, Hey, let me ask my ops director or ask my general manager. It was, you know, I was the person that needed to, to make those calls and those decisions. So it was, it was a little tough.

Um, I think hiring was the big thing. I never had an issue hiring people until I started this. I had always done pretty well with that, but, um, finding the right people to fit the culture or to, yeah, that, that, that was a tough one, but I had led people for years and years and years, but it's, there's definitely difference in doing it as a manager, as opposed to being an owner.

David Crabill: [00:39:06] And can you think about, try to imagine if you didn't have your service industry experience. And you just thought, you know, maybe you were in a different industry and you thought maybe one day, Oh, I want to try starting a donut shop. Do you think you would have been able to figure it out or do you think that that prior experience in your jobs was invaluable to getting this off the ground?

Melvin Roberson: [00:39:31] There is no way I could do this if I didn't have experience. Um, yeah, having that prior experience is definitely, is definitely key in being a service industry lifer and just having, the love for people and the love to serve. you've really got to have that to be in the food business. like I said, when you've got people who throw your stuff away or send you messages that are crappy or the negative stuff would be enough to kind of tear you down, if it weren't, if you didn't have that experience, you know, and that's, you know, like particularly in my, my, my parents, you know, they're not in the industry.

And then when I'm like, Hey, this person said this, or like, You know, they get super offended, you know what I mean? And, and that's natural, you know, but it's, it's man, I, I, there's no way I could do it. And it's, it's, it's, it's having dealing with multiple personalities. like even when I waited tables, even when I was a manager, dealing with people, having the experience of

how do I word this? Dealing with jerks versus dealing with some nice people as well. knowing that there's a full reset, every time someone comes in and when they leave, if that makes sense, kind of like wiping the slate, clean with every person that comes in here, uh, having the vision of, of knowing what you want and knowing that you're not in the donut business, but you're in the people business.

I'm not selling donuts, but I'm selling experiences. I don't think I would have had that mindset if I wasn't in this industry, because I know I've worked in concepts, that didn't necessarily have a culture. And it didn't sell the experience like they sold food and working at a place at the last job I worked at knowing that it wasn't just food, but experiences and people.

it just changed my mindset. even I've got, I've got friends that I waited I used to wait on them. You know, they were my regulars and people that I still talk to. And this is over a decade later. Um, it's just a difference.

David Crabill: [00:41:33] and I just wanted to ask you a little bit about marketing and, you know, what are the challenges or opportunities that you've face with marketing a home business versus your food truck versus your store? Are they kind of all similar? Are they different animals?

Melvin Roberson: [00:41:51] Yeah, they're pretty different. the food business, you know, if you're working out of your house, people want to know, you know, is not just, is the food

good? But you know, is your house clean? You know, you have animals in there, you know, what are you doing? Like, what are you, what are you the precautions you're taking to ensure that this product is safe for me to enjoy? Market it as being safe.

market it on the food truck. the big thing with that is the availability. I think for me at least is where we're going to be at and what times we would be there. having some sort of consistent schedule if possible, was key. and then I think with a shop is a staying relevant.

nowadays, you know, everybody follows all these people, a million people and just staying at the forefront of their minds. Um, With, with the consistent posting, but not being too consistent with it. You know, we don't post more than once a day, unless there's something major going on. we try not to post twice, and, and being consistent with the time that we do post, the things that are said and that, you know, throwing in those analytics as well.

New products is another big thing that we've done, especially on the food truck and in the shop is, Hey, we've got this new donut or, what we had done in the past, is do like a Saturday special, which was huge for us. As far as marketing was putting that out there and having a savory sandwich special or a savory dessert special, we did, um, The most successful one we had done was a princess peach, which was a French toast doughnut.

It had this peach cream cheese, and it had a browned butter pieces, cinnamon, frosted pecans, and a little bit of powdered sugar, pushing things out there that are that show you're different than everyone else. And, being strategic about the time of day you post to get people to come in and, um, the photo, I mean, there's a million things that go into it, but, I would say the big thing is just relevance.

In this day and age, people have short attention spans and to get them locked into your posts and to get them to actually read it, are definitely what we're, what we're pushing.

David Crabill: [00:43:53] And where are you posting?

Melvin Roberson: [00:43:57] Facebook and Instagram at the moment, I've got a Twitter page, but I haven't posted on Twitter. We didn't really get a lot of traffic on there, but the big ones are Instagram first and then Facebook right after.

David Crabill: [00:44:07] And one thing notice is, uh, know, I, I go to a lot of cottage, food, business websites, and sometimes you can't find anything about the owner and you know, these are businesses where there is only one owner. There aren't any employees, and yet you have a lot of employees and you go to your about page on your website and it's all about you.

I mean, your face is at the top. It says, hi, Melvin Roberson. It talks about your story. And can you just share about why that is or why you've chosen to make the brand very personal?

Melvin Roberson: [00:44:42] That's something I had to be convinced to do. my marketing person, he really, really pushed me. On that, because in his research, he looked at all these other local, smaller, small businesses, and you couldn't find anything about the owner. And, you know, he'd always told me, everyone loves a story. Everyone wants to, They want to see

that the person behind it, or they want to see. Or hear, what you've invested to get to where you are and they want that personal connection, kind of a pulling at heartstrings type thing. Uh, he really pushed me to do that because me, I'm not, I'm more of an introvert, you know, I don't care to really, do a lot of the things that, he suggest, I mean, that's just me personally, like on my own personal pages, I don't ever post anything or put up pictures or I very rarely comment on things. And people want to see that they want to have that engagement.

They want to feel connected to you and they want to, um, have that, that personal connection to that. And you don't get that with a lot of corporate type places, anyone with a lot of small businesses. So, it gives people that sense of, um, you know, like, Hey, I know the owner or, you know, I know Melvin or, you know, I can reach out to him and say, Hey, you know what I mean?

And I can get a response back. it's really worked wonders and, um, I guess I'm a little surprised at it, but it's, it has, it has definitely worked wonders.

David Crabill: [00:46:04] I mean, it's a great story and it's, I think it's super effective. I mean, I know a lot of business owners resist putting their face on their brand. I did personally, but, uh, you know, it's hard to ignore and it definitely establishes that trust and connection with you so I can understand why your marketing person wanted to do it.

and, um, I noticed that you like to give back to your community. What are the ways that you give back and how important is your community to you?

Melvin Roberson: [00:46:36] it's extremely important. right now I don't with us moving and relocating and. Trying to do all these other things. I don't. And with the, COVID just, I wouldn't say wrapping up, but with it being, I don't know if, even if we're in the middle of it or what we, where we are with that, but it's, it's, it's a lot of our uncertainty in the food and beverage industry with, the virus is still doing its thing.

So, what I'm doing now is not. Necessarily a monetary thing, but I'm shouting out other black owned businesses on our page every Tuesday. giving them a little bit of a spotlight. the reason behind that is, black owned businesses have suffered a lot more during this time as well. And, also with me and my platform, I'm hoping to give someone a little bit of, a little bit of a boost. these are things that not a lot of people had done for me when I was just starting out. So, um, a lot of the people that we are choosing and business, we are choosing are businesses that are relatively new or have smaller followings online, or that are just kind of, unheard of.

Um, I've got what, 21,000 followers, uh, on Facebook alone. And, just if I can get. Some eyes on some of these other businesses. And if I can help them boost their sales or get a few more orders or whatever the case may be, then, Then I've done my job, you know, so just shouting them out, sending them personal messages and telling them to keep it up and, you know, don't give up cause I know it's hard and it's even harder with, the virus.

So, yeah, that's what I'm doing now. I got a few other things in the works, but I'll wait on those, but I'm trying to do a, be a little bit more active, a little bit more hands-on but you

know, I am tied up in the business a lot, but I'm trying to invest more personal time to some other folks as well.

David Crabill: [00:48:27] and, and so where do you envision this going in the future? Are you at your goal or, or where would you like to see Dough boy donuts go.

Melvin Roberson: [00:48:36] Yeah. I'm nowhere near my goal have a very, um, like I said, big picture person and I could see this really blowing up, because of the Dough boy experience, having that made from scratch that handcrafted dressed to order donut, and having the savory side as well with our donut breakfast sandwiches, or sausage rolls, et cetera.

I can see it really taken off. I don't know if I would get to the point where I want a franchise, but I can see us having multiple locations relatively soon. Again, I don't want to say too much, but, you know, pre COVID, we had some really, really big plans and that really messed things up, with our growth and financially.

So we're trying to get right back on the right track so that we can, um, announce those plans and get things going.

David Crabill: [00:49:23] Very cool. well, Melvin, thanks so much for jumping on here and sharing with us. And how could people find you or reach out?

Melvin Roberson: [00:49:31] Yeah, they can reach out to us [on Instagram @doughboydonuts](#), all lower case. and [on Facebook, if you look at DoughBoyDonutsDFW](#) to get us to pull up, but we're based in Fort worth, Texas for now. We're about to relocate. at the end of the month, we'll be moving to Burleson, Texas and we'll be in a standalone building, we'll have a lot more parking and, it's about 20 minutes South from where we currently are, but, yeah, they can reach out to us on, on Facebook or Instagram. Those are the best ways or through our website, which is doughboydonuts.net. And you can send me send an inquiry if you have any other questions and, those all go to me. So I'll be able to see them all.

David Crabill: [00:50:10] Well, thanks so much for hopping on here. I've enjoyed learning about your business and yeah. Thanks again.

Melvin Roberson: [00:50:16] Thank you.

David Crabill: [00:50:18] That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. It's clear to me that a big part of Melvin's success is his hard work and the passion he has for serving others. I really loved hearing how he has transitioned from a home business to a food truck And finally to a brick and mortar storefront.

if you are thinking about starting a doughnut business or any kind of 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/21. Thanks for listening and I'll see you in the next episode.