

How To Start An Eco-Friendly & Socially Responsible Cookie Business with Barry Sherman

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 Barry Sherman. Barry and his life partner, Scott, live in Tampa Bay, Florida, and they sell cookies and gelato with their business, Urban Bakers.

They started out in 2018 by selling their cookies from home under Florida's cottage food law, and they have now grown into using a commissary kitchen, which allows them to sell gelato and also ship their cookies nationwide. Urban Bakers has a really fun and strong brand and is also very socially and environmentally conscious.

I'm looking forward to learning exactly how they've turned drop cookies into a legit business. And with that, welcome to the show, Barry. Nice to have you here.

Barry Sherman: [00:00:51] Well, thank you, David. It's nice to be here.

David Crabill: [00:00:54] So Barry, can you, uh, just take us back 2018 and why did you start this business?

Barry Sherman: [00:01:01] Yeah. So actually it extends beyond 2018. It's actually my life partner, Scott always had aspirations of owning a cookie and ice cream dessert shop. Um, Scott was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease 16 years ago at age 34. And we both grew up in the new England area. I'm originally from Vermont state and Scott is from like the Albany New York area.

And when we became a couple and moved to Florida in 2014, we. Kind of started looking at cottage food laws at that point, but didn't really do anything about it for several years. So knowing that I could help make a piece of Scott's dream a reality without having to have a brick and mortar store was really the driving force behind looking into cottage food laws and starting urban bakers as a brand.

David Crabill: [00:02:00] Now was this something that you had looked at when you were in New York as well?

Barry Sherman: [00:02:06] No. So I moved from Vermont state to New York city. And Scott was in Albany and we didn't really. Think about anything to do with the business, knowing that we were coming from two different locations. So it wasn't until we moved in together and decided that we wanted to move to Florida, that we thought that maybe it would be a possibility once we had a more permanent location in our future.

David Crabill: [00:02:35] Yeah, no, I did see the, the, kind of the special story behind you getting this going. And I was wondering I mean, let's say Scott was never diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. But he had had this dream, I believe he said he had this dream before he was diagnosed um, to start a cookie and ice cream business.

And so I was wondering if he hadn't been diagnosed with a disease like this, do you think you would have a cookie business right now?

Barry Sherman: [00:03:05] I would like to say, not only would we have a cookie business, but we would have the brick and mortar store that. Was always part of his, his dream.

David Crabill: [00:03:15] Okay, so it kind slowed you down

Barry Sherman: [00:03:17] Yeah.

David Crabill: [00:03:18] or delayed, delayed the start. Yeah. That makes sense. Well It's certainly notable that you guys have moved forward with it anyway. and it's, it's very special as well. So uh, congrats to, to getting this up and running and not just any kind of business, but a cookie business.

I personally, when I was, you know, starting to get into the cottage food space, I personally wanted to start a drop cookie business and um, Found that it's actually quite difficult to do. So I'm really looking forward to seeing what you've learned and how you've been able to grow a cookie business that is actually kind of on the high end of things, as far as I can see from pricing so can you talk a little bit about what you offer in terms of flavors and what your cookies are like?

Barry Sherman: [00:04:02] Absolutely. So our current lineup consists of 36 different flavors. And I usually say that it's it. A combination of unique or classic flavors as well, so we have anything from a classic peanut butter chunk and a dark chocolate chunk and sea salt all the way through to spicy chocolate chili. And we have a salt and pepper, butter cookie.

We have root beer float flavors. So the whole intention from day one, when we started, this was to have a. A large cookie, but not necessarily physically large in the sense of the size of the palm of your hand. But most of our cookies are heavy between three and four ounces. And there's no compromise on using as top quality ingredients as we can afford to put into our product line.

Um, The other thing that was really super important to us was to be individually wrapped and that's. Just a passion that we both had seeing other cottage food manufacturers out there, not necessarily doing an individual wraps standpoint. And we did not go straight for a dozen in a package or half dozen in a package, but rather individually.

David Crabill: [00:05:17] Why was individually, wrapped a really strong point that you wanted to focus on.

Barry Sherman: [00:05:24] First and foremost, and this is pre-COVID as well, but just from a like sanitary perspective, how often have you gone to a, a, farmer's market or a public place? And you've seen open food items out for sale and it's, from my perspective, not attractive to necessarily purchase something that has been sitting there in open space.

So I was really adamant about making sure that everything was sealed from the sanitary perspective. And then the other thing that was important was to allow people to pick like a

variety pack. Like why, why force someone into buying half a dozen of one flavor when they could mix and match each individual cookie.

And then if they decide to share, Hey, it's already wrapped and ready to go.

David Crabill: [00:06:14] Yup. That makes sense. And you know, another thing too, is the freshness aspect. Yeah. Which is a big thing for cookies in particular because they have such a short shelf life. Does that individual wrapping prolong the shelf life of your cookies?

Barry Sherman: [00:06:29] 100%. So out of the oven into the packaging, they go and if we happen to have a market and they are usually sold off the following day or I am fortunate enough to have a once a week pop-up experience where if the timing is right, I could feature them there as well. Or I also try to be smart about making cookies for whatever event I'm at, in conjunction with any orders I've received from individuals to fulfill. So they definitely do not hang around long.

David Crabill: [00:07:05] And you know, one of this is a really unique thing for your business. And I, I haven't, I haven't actually seen this with a cookie business, but with individually wrapped packaging, there's obviously a concern of waste, but you guys have definitely countered that pretty heavily. Can you talk a little bit about your packaging?

Barry Sherman: [00:07:24] Yes. So that was. A thought that we had in conjunction with a happy accident, meaning a farmer's market here in Tampa. One particular market requires that you have compostable packaging in order to participate. So we challenged ourselves to get into that market because it's really popular and we challenged ourselves to find the compost materials to do it.

And once we found them, we just said, Hey, let's stick with this and keep it, keep it going. To be honest with you, it's, it's amazing to be able to tell people that the materials are 100% compostable the bags, as well as the labels. You know, side note. If you try to bury the cookie, you're not going to grow a cookie tree, but you can definitely put that packaging back into the earth properly and add nutrients to the soil and start the cycle again.

David Crabill: [00:08:22] Yeah, that's very cool. And I mean, with the compostable packaging I think one of the difficulties there is not only the expense, but maybe a difficulty in sourcing. So how, how are you buying this? Like where are you getting the packaging from and how much does it cost?

Barry Sherman: [00:08:44] Yeah, I have had a difficult time looking for. Various vendors for compost packaging. So I have stuck with the same vendor from day one, and I get them from clearbags.com. And the unique thing about that is, you know, you buy in bulk, the more you buy, the cheaper they get. And for the labels I use purelabels.com.

I'm starting to see more companies that are offering the heat sealable compostable bags, but I'm still not seeing labels popping up anywhere, but I have been happy with both service providers, Clear Bags and Pure Labels have been phenomenal with shipping, with their discounts, offering sales at times.

David Crabill: [00:09:33] And yeah, I'm just curious. I know you're buying in bulk, so probably somebody who's brand new to the game can't attain this level of pricing, but when it all adds up, when you add the label and the individual cookie pouch, do you know what the actual per item cost is on that packaging?

Barry Sherman: [00:09:53] Yeah, we actually do have a breakdown of what it costs for each individual cookie, so on and so forth. But the packaging, you know, depending on whether or not I buy it in bulk, or if it's on sale, it all adds up to under 10 cents

David Crabill: [00:10:09] Okay. Wow. That's actually really good.

Barry Sherman: [00:10:11] Yeah. It is pretty amazing.

David Crabill: [00:10:13] I mean, it's, that's probably more than a regular plastic package would be, but that's very reasonable. I was expecting it to be higher than that.

Barry Sherman: [00:10:23] Nope, shockingly, what the quality of your ingredients, you know, or our ingredients actually plays a bigger part in the cost factor.

David Crabill: [00:10:34] Well, I can understand that as well. For sure. And can you talk a little bit about what you mean when you say quality ingredients?

Barry Sherman: [00:10:41] Yeah. So, I mean, I always use vanilla as an example, I can walk into a local grocery store and find several different companies that manufacture vanilla flavored extract or regular vanilla. Or if you walk into a specialty food store, you're going to see various kinds of vanillas there as well. So I use a Madagascar vanilla and on average, it's about a hundred dollars per bottle. So it's not a cheap vanilla that's going into the product.

David Crabill: [00:11:15] Yeah. I think vanilla is like the most expensive, you know, pure vanilla of course is the most expensive. Product per ounce of probably any ingredient that a Baker would use. But, um, can you go back to when you started this and what, what did you do to get your initial sales? Did you jump into a farmer's market were you just selling from home to family and friends? Like how did you get this off the ground?

Barry Sherman: [00:11:42] my primary job is not urban bakers and I talked about it so much at work that one of my coworkers finally said that his wife was in charge of buying food for a party. And she was looking for desserts and he put me in direct contact with her. And she was our very first order outside of just making them for a family and friends.

So I have to give the credit where credit is due getting a corporate order as your first big push really showed us that somebody else outside of family and friends wanted these cookies. So it was really exciting. And then through word of mouth, after that, it started to pick up more and more.

David Crabill: [00:12:29] How big was that order

Barry Sherman: [00:12:31] Um, It was 17 dozen So, I mean, I think that's pretty substantial for being a first order and not really getting things off the ground yet,

David Crabill: [00:12:42] for sure. Well, and so what about pricing? Like how did you come up with a price at that point for your cookies?

Barry Sherman: [00:12:49] Our prices really have not changed drastically. Since 2018, I think we've done a price increase once, but that's why, from my perspective, it's very important that no matter what, you're manufacturing, that you keep a. A log of what each individual, you know, item costs for you to make. Some of them are going to be more expensive than others.

And we had to factor in everything that was important to us, which was the top quality ingredients that we want to use as well as the compostable packaging. And then if you know anything about urban bakers, you may also realize we donate a portion of our sales to charity. So we've done that from the very beginning as well. And that helped determine all of our price points.

David Crabill: [00:13:40] Yeah, I noticed that, you know, you're not just environmentally conscious. You're also socially conscious. Can you talk a little bit more about What goes into the nonprofit charitable giving and what you would maybe recommend if somebody else is looking to do the same thing with their business.

Barry Sherman: [00:13:56] Yeah. So That was also a personal passion project as well, I guess. So Several years before even starting urban bakers. My partner, again, Scott used to make cookies for Parkinson's awareness month and not necessarily charge for the cookies, but would say, Hey, if you donate, you know, \$5, here's half a dozen cookies or whatever, and the money would just go right straight to the Michael J. Fox foundation. So when we decided to. Pull the trigger on getting urban bakers up and running. We wanted to carry through kind of that same. Thought process of, if you give to us, we can afford to give back to you and the charities have all been hand selected by Scott because they are things that are either important to him or have also affected people in his life.

So currently, for instance, it's the month of November and we donate to the pancreatic cancer network. And that is an honor of Scott's brother, Darren, who passed from pancreatic cancer at age 50. So every charity that is in the rotational list has meaning behind it as well.

David Crabill: [00:15:12] Do you Find that your customers really resonate with the fact that you're giving back.

Barry Sherman: [00:15:19] I believe that speaks volumes beyond the product that we make. For example, Fox 13 did a local news segment for us. I believe it was back in June. And we were donating at that point to Metro inclusive health, It was during gay pride month and Metro caters to the gay and lesbian community transgendered.

And after the news segment aired, a lot of people came to support us knowing that a portion of their sales were going back to Metro. It was. An amazing boost in sales, but it was amazing to see the community support and meet people that the charity itself meant more than, than the money they were spending on, on the dessert items.

David Crabill: [00:16:08] Yeah, I can definitely see that. Um, And let's talk a little bit about the, the money cause um, you know, I noticed that your cookies are on the higher end of pricing. Uh, but, I think a lot of people undercharge for cookies, so you're charging correctly, but how much do your cookies currently cost?

Barry Sherman: [00:16:27] Uh, We are \$3.50 each or \$18 for half a dozen or \$33 for a dozen. And then if, if someone was reaching out to us with bulk quantity requests, I do have it broken down of cheaper pricing at that point.

David Crabill: [00:16:44] Right. So if you're going in, even for a dozen cookies, you're, you know, just under \$3 per cookie, which is obviously a huge difference from a, a grocery store. Price, which you can't really compare it to, but does anyone walk in and balk at your pricing or turn around or have you had any pushback on the pricing that you have.

Barry Sherman: [00:17:06] Yes. And it's no surprise to me, I guess. Because again, like my primary job is customer service for a retailer as well. And the same thing happens there. So whether it's a globally recognized successful corporation or a local cookie dealer, I just expected that people would provide feedback in that respect.

But the difference is you're not getting a package of Oreos or store brand cookies. So if all you're looking is to satisfy that sweet tooth craving, then I understand that going to the local market and buying something cheap. But if you want something savory, something unique, something fun, something heavy and homemade, then, you know, nobody has really complained about paying our prices for the quality that they're getting.

David Crabill: [00:18:01] I don't typically see drop cookies being that successful of a business in general. And it's because people can't figure out how to charge the prices you're charging. But I think it's also because when people think about going out to get a dessert, they're thinking of maybe looking for a cupcake shop or looking for ice cream and they may not be looking for a cookie place.

Have you seen that be a, especially before you were offering ice cream? Was that a difficult challenge or hurdle to get over?

Barry Sherman: [00:18:35] No. So from the very start I think we've just been super fortunate with being in the farmer's market circuit. I have not seen a lot of people offering individually. Packaged cookies. Like, again, there's, there's plenty of people out there who will sell them either by the pound or by the bag or in large quantities.

But nothing individually wrapped, which means that it can be a grab and go item while you're walking around the farmer's market, or you can buy several of them to take home and enjoy any which way you'd like. Meaning crumble them up in your own ice cream, heat them up in the microwave, you know, have that cookie at midnight.

Although we do have one complaint that our packaging is too loud. The, the compost packaging makes a lot of noise, but there is a solution. Just use a pair of scissors.

David Crabill: [00:19:33] I did see that. And I saw that you kind of turned that on its head too, where you, you kind of showcasing the sound as a way to maybe allow people to realize. Why it's important to have the compostable packaging.

And, um, I really want to talk about the marketing and the branding because you have such a strong brand and a fun brand. Can you talk a little bit about your brand?

Barry Sherman: [00:19:56] Yeah. So that was also influenced by Scott's love of mythical creatures and anything that's uh, unknown, so to speak. So is the Yeti real? Is he not real, but yet he's legendary. So I actually ran with the marketing part of it and took his passion for big foot and the yeti and I turned to Fiverr and found somebody to vectorize it out for me. And. It's Mr. Crumbles. I mean, he's bringing legendary cookies to Tampa and hopefully all over the world at some point.

David Crabill: [00:20:34] Yeah. So you've got this Yeti as your mascot, and I did want to ask about the design cause you do a really good job with the design. And I notice even in your Instagram posts, they seem to be. Pretty well-designed even on a weekly or daily basis when you're promoting a market, do you have someone on Fiverr do all of your design or do you have a background in design? How does that work?

Barry Sherman: [00:20:59] No, everything is produced by me. So like if you scrolled back to the beginning of our Instagram, you would see the original Mr. Crumbles. And then I tweaked him over the years and had him turned into a plush toy from Budsies company. And we also looked at changing out the website because our original website was urbanbakers.bar, but people did not flock to the .bar extension.

So we kind of went with the theme of the Yeti, being the mythical creature, like findtheyeti.com And I just have a lot of fun with the marketing aspect of it. As if Mr. Crumbles is the one running the company.

David Crabill: [00:21:46] I can, I can tell. You have fun with it. And I encourage people to go to your Instagram feed cause you're always dressing him up according to the season or just for, for whatever. And it looks like you do have a lot of fun with the branding and I'm sure that translates into people loving to follow you.

Barry Sherman: [00:22:05] Yes, absolutely. And you know, it's also fun too. The fact that our logo is a Yeti and I have these fabulous stickers made by Sticker Mule all the time. And it's fun to tell people to put a Yeti on your Yeti. So you can just have so much fun with all of it.

David Crabill: [00:22:23] Yeah. Well, you do a very nice job with it. So congrats. Um, I want to go back to your cookies and I was just wondering, is this a recipe that Scott or you already had, and that's the reason why you went into this style of cookie or was it something that you developed when you were wanting to get this business off the ground?

Barry Sherman: [00:22:46] Our original cookie flavor was the peanut butter chunk and Scott and his mom. Used to make cookies for everyone in the neighborhood when Scott was younger and It just became such a popular request from him and his mother to make cookies. And we took a couple of recipes from her and modified them a bit and ran with it

from there. We started out with maybe six flavors at the time, and then just kept growing the flavors.

David Crabill: [00:23:22] So I know that you started from home, started under the cottage food laws, and then you now have moved into a commissary kitchen. What was that transition like?

Barry Sherman: [00:23:33] It was an amazing experience. Because it gave us the ability to ship. So under cottage food law for Florida, it was always from my understanding that it has to be within the state and it's like hand to hand transfer. No, no shipping capabilities. So. If we wanted to try to become an online presence and also, you know, grow outside of our immediate area, we decided to move into a commissary kitchen and try to make a go that.

David Crabill: [00:24:10] And what, what was the process like? Was it really complicated to get into the commercial space or was it really expensive?

Barry Sherman: [00:24:19] So each commissary kitchen is going to have its own set of rules and regulations and contracts. The upfront cost wasn't necessarily expensive because we had been saving for it and we knew. You know, when we signed the contract, that it comes with X amount of hours per week for you to use. And the biggest surprise at that point, from my perspective financially, was the inspection and licensing.

So having to carry like the one license for farmer's markets turned into two licenses. So you can also be a manufacturer. And then, you know, collecting sales tax and having that built into your, your price structure, which, you know, if you're not savvy, it could mean getting, getting an accountant. So it really upped up the game. So to speak.

David Crabill: [00:25:17] And is your commissary kitchen connected to, I think you sell at the bakery box. It's like this shared space, right? Is that all part of the same thing?

Barry Sherman: [00:25:27] You are correct. So the commissary kitchen that we're in is called pro kitchen hub, Tampa. And built onto the kitchen is a pop-up experience called the bakery box and it is a rotational dessert spot for folks who bake in the commissary kitchen.

David Crabill: [00:25:47] So this is really a lot better than just any regular commercial kitchen, right? You actually have potential customers walking in or discovering you through the pop-up experience. Did you have to make any adjustments when moving from the home? Kitchen to the commercial kitchen. Like, did you have to change how you produced your product or scale it more or were there any transitions in that regard?

Barry Sherman: [00:26:12] So experimentation was a big thing. Like I discovered that. you can't necessarily just take a recipe and multiply it by 10 and expect it to come out, tasting the same. So I choose to do things in small, small batches still, and it may just mean running two stand mixers rather than one large one.

And then oven bake times going from a home. Kitchen to a professional kitchen was definitely a longer, more frustrating experimental phase. Um, Lots of burnt cookies, lots of underdone cookies, lots of trash items.

David Crabill: [00:26:53] Why was it different in the commercial ovens, as opposed to your home ovens.

Barry Sherman: [00:26:59] So with the size of the cookies for urban bakers? Typically you could get six on a cookie sheet in your oven at your home, and then moving into the commissary kitchen. We can put 10 or 12 on a sheet times, two or three sheets all at once. So I just think like, The bake time and temperature was the biggest thing to figure out.

David Crabill: [00:27:24] I could see that. Yeah. So it's just a much larger oven and you have to. Get even baking across the entire oven space so I could see how that'd be a challenge. Now you talked about how you are now selling nationwide and shipping. What. Was it like to ship? I mean, a cookie seems like a pretty fragile item. So was there anything that you had to learn in that process and how do you ship your cookies without them breaking?

Barry Sherman: [00:27:54] We have boxes. I can't remember exactly what company that I get them from, but they are. rectangular shaped and they come in multiple sizes. So we have the ability to ship three, six or 12 cookies at this point comfortably in these mailers that we have selected. And if I am shipping more than a dozen, then I look at flat rate with the post office. I wanted to make sure that the cardboard was. Tough enough to withstand shipping. So everything that we send out is priority. Number one, through USPS, and number two, cardboard has to be really strong and we've sent, you know, test batches to multiple places around the country to, to make sure that they arrive in a timely fashion, as well as.

You know, arrive all in one piece. So packing the box and filling it entirely is part of the other piece to that puzzle, just lots of decorative tissue paper and make sure that nothing moves.

David Crabill: [00:29:03] Yeah. I was wondering about like packaging material and, you know, that's usually made out of plastic so have you gone totally compostable with that as well.

Barry Sherman: [00:29:14] So the packaging for shipping, we use cardboard, mailers and tissue paper for packing, but no plastic products go in there. Shipping tape, still an issue.

David Crabill: [00:29:28] I haven't found any uh, any compostable shipping tape. Huh?

Barry Sherman: [00:29:33] Well, there is paper tape with gummed back, but quite honestly, it's, it's super duper expensive to, to set up that part of an operation.

David Crabill: [00:29:45] Yeah. And how was it in transitioning to shipping? Like, did you find that a lot of people were finding your brand and buying online or have you been shipping across the country or is it mostly just locals that are finding and buying your product?

Barry Sherman: [00:30:03] it's kind of strange it comes and goes in ebbs and flows. So if it's around a holiday time, we get a spike in sales for shipping, or again, if we have a media piece, we tend to get more attention, which promotes shipping. And then 2020 has been a rough year with COVID. So we've seen more shipping. Even if it's just a couple of miles away from here or from the commissary kitchen, we have had a lot of local shipping lately.

David Crabill: [00:30:37] Yeah. So I did want to ask about the pandemic. I know most retail shops have been hit pretty hard. What has it been like for you guys to deal with the pandemic?

Barry Sherman: [00:30:49] The bakery box has actually been the one thing that has sustained us at this point. And so the farmer's market circuit was all completely shut down. And then at one point we had difficulty finding butter, eggs, flour. So we were able to do some bartering with other folks for like a bag of flour or for a bag of sugar.

And I'm able to still produce in the kitchen and still sell through the bakery box. Once the state of Florida lifted some of the restrictions. So that has really carried us through. And now the farmer's markets have started to reopen. So we are making in person appearances as well, which is nice,

David Crabill: [00:31:37] And you said that this isn't a full time job, right?

like you have another job as well?

Barry Sherman: [00:31:43] Correct.

David Crabill: [00:31:44] how are you able to manage your time between having a job and having this business?

Barry Sherman: [00:31:51] I think you just, it would be like words of advice to anybody who, wants to start any type of business. You just have to have the passion for it and realize that, you know, time is just a number on a clock. If you, if you have the passion and you want to do this, you're just going to do it. So even after my eight, nine, 10 hour full-time work days, I still just.

Go into cookie mode, as soon as I'm off the clock there and just get done what I need to get done without sacrificing quality or, you know, even, even thinking about it, it's kind of like autopilot because this is a representation of who I am.

David Crabill: [00:32:34] Have you ever considered, just going into the cookie business, full-time jumping ship and leaving the job.

Barry Sherman: [00:32:41] Well, again, 2020 has put a damper on any, any thoughts of going in that direction. I do feel very fortunate in the sense that. at the end of the day, if we had to postpone production or take a break, the overhead of a brick and mortar is not there. And that is, again, words of advice is one of the blessings of cottage food manufacturing.

If you can't afford to do it at the moment and you know, really what is your overhead costs coming out of your own household? So I am not looking at taking any kind of leap at the moment to, to do this full time.

David Crabill: [00:33:22] Has the pandemic actually caused you to consider maybe reverting back to the cottage food space.

Barry Sherman: [00:33:29] We have talked about that. However, we do have some. Exciting projects in the making for 2021 that may prevent us from having to do that. So we, we meaning urban bakers has been selected for inclusion in the Super Bowl LV business connect resource guide. So we were one of the 200 companies chosen as an approved supplier for Super Bowl.

David Crabill: [00:33:57] Wow. Now what would that mean in terms of like, do you have an idea for what kind of quantity you'd be looking at there?

Barry Sherman: [00:34:08] I do not at this point in time, simply because everything is so fluid and up in the air with, with COVID affecting every aspect of business.

David Crabill: [00:34:18] I just know when it comes to big events, like, and. If you think he'd been about a state fair, you go to the state fair, you see people selling and you don't realize like how difficult it is to sell at a state fair. And to prepare for that influx of orders. So is that something you're concerned about or thinking about in getting chosen for this.

Barry Sherman: [00:34:39] I'm concerned because time is running out. If Super Bowl does happen as predicted and as scheduled in February it would be nice to know with as much. Notice as possible to, to be able to start thinking about production. And that ties back to talking about things like getting the proper amount of labels and good quantities of heat, sealable bags.

And. Do I need to temporarily hire some, some help, you know, or get people through security clearance for credentials to help out the day of the event. So everything is so fluid at the moment. And then it makes it really difficult to think about what the future is going to be.

David Crabill: [00:35:27] Yeah, I can imagine. Well, you know, it's kind of amazing to just think about, you started with this idea and you haven't even left your job yet. Um, You've, you've been doing this on the side and. Look where it's leading you, right? I mean, you would have probably never imagined this kind of opportunity coming along and maybe it won't pan out because you know, who knows what's going to happen in the future. But just the fact that it's a possibility is pretty exciting.

Barry Sherman: [00:35:54] You are 100% correct? Because the journey started out at home. And then we had an invite to sell at an in-store experience with Williams Sonoma when they used to invite. Community members into their stores to, to sell, making their own products. And then we've been fortunate enough to do a pop-up experience with Lush Cosmetics.

And we've participated in Dessert Wars, and little by little we've just made it to the point where we are also a Diverse owned business. I am certified with the national gay and lesbian chamber of commerce, and we have been pushing forward and finally, one of the 200 select companies as a supplier, potentially for the NFL. So it has all happened quickly.

David Crabill: [00:36:47] Yeah, that's very, very cool. Now you mentioned, just mentioned talking about stores. Have you, I don't know if you were selling like at a table or something

or at a booth in the store, or have you actually tried to put your products into stores or on store shelves?

Barry Sherman: [00:37:04] We have experimented both ways. So the in-store experiences, I was there with tables. So you will see that like on my Instagram feed as well. So for Williams-Sonoma, Lush, I was there part of their woodwork. I have also tried wholesale experiments with a local shop. As of now it has not flourished into anything that is going to be ongoing, but it is interesting to see the success from both perspectives.

And I think. I say that because if I'm there and I have something to explain to people, then the excitement is there as well. And people are more apt to buy versus if they're just wholesale them on the shelf next to another product, it's not as appealing. Or you may just not even be thinking about buying the cookie.

David Crabill: [00:38:02] Um, You were just talking about Instagram and I did want to ask you about, I noticed that you seem to be focused on Instagram and not on Facebook. Is there a reason why you kind of promote on Instagram over Facebook or instead of Facebook?

Barry Sherman: [00:38:20] Yeah. I don't really know too much about the Facebook platform for selling. I'm the first person to admit that. And I always have to, you know, wonder if I, myself don't necessarily find the value in surfing it, why would I try to promote myself on there. So I probably need to change my thought process on that a little bit and do a little bit more research, but um, that was shocking to me getting into business in the first place is that, you know, I manufacturer cookies, but it probably takes 10 to 15% of my time to actually do the manufacturing. Everything else is the marketing, the promoting the packing up and going to a market. The, you know, bookkeeping it can be strenuous.

David Crabill: [00:39:12] for sure. I, I had to learn that as well. You know, when I started I had no idea that the marketing was like 75% of the job. Right. So it's um, something everyone has to learn at some point. But you've done a really good job with the marketing though. So um, kudos to that. And in regards to Instagram, it sounds like it, maybe isn't such an intentional thing, but I have seen a lot of business owners that do really well on Instagram.

And Instagram's kind of taking over Facebook, especially for this kind of visual branded space, like a food business. So I do see a lot of people, they try to get on everything and it doesn't work so well. So maybe it's working for you to be on Instagram. So you might not need Facebook or, to complicate your business and marketing plan.

Barry Sherman: [00:40:01] Yeah, and I feel like Instagram too is like the instant gratification through your own news feed, like of knowing. Oh, Hey, I didn't know Barry was there today, so boop. It pops up and then you're, you're good to go versus, you know, if you put all this work into advertising on a different platform and you put it out there for a week, somebody is going to forget six days later. So I just like the instantaneous notification.

David Crabill: [00:40:28] I did want to talk a little bit more about your products, so you have Cookies obviously. And you also have branched into vegan cookies. I saw that and it looks like you're moving into even some more specializations. Can you talk about that?

Barry Sherman: [00:40:45] Yes. So when we first started. We just wanted to do, you know, traditional good old fashioned fattening cookies. And then it literally took years to make the consideration to jump into some, some vegan options. So after being approached multiple times at multiple different farmer's markets asking for us to do a vegan cookie recipe, that's when we decided to actually do it and actually wasn't that difficult as long as you know, we still liked the flavor. So currently we have three vegan flavors in our lineup,

David Crabill: [00:41:26] So this wasn't from you, this really just came from listening to your customers.

Barry Sherman: [00:41:31] Yes, 100%.

David Crabill: [00:41:33] Or your potential customers, I should say, maybe, maybe the lost customers, the people who, who didn't want your product. And, I actually noticed that your vegan cookies are the same price as your regular cookies. And I was surprised about that. Why did you decide not to Mark up the vegan cookies?

Barry Sherman: [00:41:56] I don't want to Mark up any, any of the cookies. It's, it's kind of like a, you know, it's a love loss type of situation. Meaning I might make a really good profit on something as simple as a sugar cookie but I might lose profit on the vegan. Same thing with anything that has nuts in it.

Macadamia nuts are not cheap. So I make very little on that, but I might make. a good amount on like a snicker doodle. So I believe it all balances out in the end. And I don't want any one person to pay more than another. The only category of cookie that I think would change our price structure would be the CBD options. And that's simply because adding CBD is just so much more expensive.

David Crabill: [00:42:44] Now you obviously are mainly a cookie business, but you added on gelato and I think that's just. Based on your original vision. So what, what was the thought process or the experience like, or what did you learn from having to add gelato to the mix?

Barry Sherman: [00:43:05] Yeah, we experimented over the summer months, especially when foot traffic got really slow with COVID. The goal was to not ever have to waste any cookies if we don't have to. So if things didn't sell, we were unpackaging them crushing them up and mixing them into gelato. So we went with a, like a deep dark chocolate gelato and then a classic vanilla, and then crushed up cookies, put them in there and hand, hand packed, half pints and pints.

It was really fun to do and amazing to see how much more people enjoy having like the gelato or ice cream alongside the cookie. So I could definitely see the vision in the future of being able to have the two side-by-side,

but it's not something that we, we don't currently do it on a regular basis.

David Crabill: [00:44:00] is this gelato something that you are sourcing from a commercial distributor?

Barry Sherman: [00:44:06] No. Nope. We were making it ourselves in the commissary kitchen. Small batch. 10 to 12 pints at a time.

David Crabill: [00:44:13] was this something that you've made a lot in the past or was it just a total learning process to add that in.

Barry Sherman: [00:44:19] Totally a fun experimental learning process, gelato, little bit different than ice cream. Yeah. It's, I don't know. It's unique from my perspective. Like, I don't really see going into a lot of gelato shops and having. Pieces of stuff in the gelato, whether it's chocolate or candy cookies, so on and so forth. So it's, it's really been fun.

David Crabill: [00:44:46] Now I did want to ask about your labels. I noticed that you put QR codes on your labels, and I was wondering I don't actually even know where the QR codes lead to, but why do you put the QR codes on the labels and have you found that to be effective?

Barry Sherman: [00:45:05] Yeah, it leads directly to our website. And that has been there since we were cottage food manufacturers as well. I just think it's kind of strange that it took a pandemic to make QR codes a thing again, but I've always liked them for the simple fact that if you know any smartphone camera picks up that QR code.

When someone's taking a photo, it's going to automatically pop up with where it's supposed to take you. So even if you try to take a fun, fun photo with my cookie in it, and the camera catches the QR code, you're heading to my website.

David Crabill: [00:45:44] I was going to say, you know, they were really falling out of favor for a while there, and then the pandemic hit and boom, you're seeing QR codes all over the place.

Barry Sherman: [00:45:53] Yeah I've always been a fan. I think it's a great way to like hide information, so to speak. It's like unpacking a hidden box.

David Crabill: [00:46:04] do you have any stories as you think back on the last few years in doing this, that jump out at you as being kind of very memorable or special that will always stick with you?

Barry Sherman: [00:46:16] Well, I honestly feel like the experience that I'm having right now of being able to reflect on all of it from the beginning is what's most memorable. You're allowing me to just kind of timeline what we have been challenged with and what we've made it through so far. I mean, literally, from home kitchen, to in-store experiences, to pop-ups, to farmer's markets, to news pieces, to Super Bowl approved vendor.

Like it's amazing. I don't know how to put it into words to know how good it feels to be supported by a community. The most exciting part about running the business in general is to know that I make a product that should, and I think most definitely does, make people happy. Nobody is coming to complain to me about, you know, my chocolate or eww, this

cookie tastes bad. Like I just don't get that kind of response. I'm overwhelmed with joy and watching people enjoy the product that I make. Those, those are my stories.

David Crabill: [00:47:26] Yeah, no. And, and a lot of people don't see that. All that went into, you know, getting your business to this point. People just show up and see a cookie and, and, and take it. But there's so much that goes into it and you really encapsulated it nicely right there. Um, So we've talked about where you've been and you've, you've done so much. What about in the future? Where do you see this going in a year or five?

Barry Sherman: [00:47:52] Wow. I wish I had a crystal ball. I could just pull out of my back pocket right now. And give you a solid, clear answer, but quite honestly, I am walking that tight, tight rope waiting to see what's around the corner with the pandemic. Right now I feel like urban bakers is in a good spot to be comfortable with being able to sustain you know itself and just pay the bills and look for better things on the horizon. So I'm hoping in a perfect world, five years from now, we will see a brick and mortar store where you will be coming in for that dessert cookies and ice cream. And Oh, by the way, pick up half a dozen for the office or, Oh, ship a dozen home to mom.

That's the dream, but as far as, you know, telling you what is there for sure. That is a great question that I don't have an answer to.

David Crabill: [00:48:54] Well, you know, actually it wasn't so much of what you think is going to happen, but more like what you would like to have happen. So it sounds like, you know, the goal, the vision, is to move into a brick and mortar shop and, and make this a, a full-time thing.

Barry Sherman: [00:49:10] Yeah, my goal, actually, it's funny that you say that would be to have. A tiny, tiny retail walk up and grab and go type window, similar to the bakery box, but of my own in a high volume, high foot traffic area. That would just be amazing. That's where I would like to be.

David Crabill: [00:49:32] And it sounds like when you say tiny, that you maybe don't want this to be a multi location, large business. Is that, am I reading into that correctly?

Barry Sherman: [00:49:44] For my vision at this point in time, you are correct. I wouldn't want multiple locations if I'm not able to oversee them. And I know that's something that I'm working on to give up a little bit and delegate some responsibilities to other people or give up some self-control. But right now I feel so protective of what I make that I don't foresee having multiple locations. Cause I would want to know what's going on all the time.

David Crabill: [00:50:15] Well um, I appreciated hearing about your business today and hearing all that you've been through. And it looks like you have some exciting opportunities on the horizon. I hope they pan out for you, but I really wish you all the best in your future endeavors. Now if somebody is looking to reach out to you or find you, how can they get in touch?

Barry Sherman: [00:50:37] You can head over to our website findtheyeti.com or you can hit us up on Instagram at [urban_bakers](https://www.instagram.com/urban_bakers), or simply send us an email urbanbakers@icloud.com.

David Crabill: [00:50:52] Perfect. Well, thank you so much for hopping on today, Barry, I learned a ton and I really enjoyed it.

Barry Sherman: [00:50:59] Awesome. Thank you so much, David.

David Crabill: [00:51:02] That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. It's cool to see how Urban Bakers has grown over just a few short years. And for someone interested in starting a drop cookie business, this seems like a really good business model to follow.

If you are thinking about starting a cookie 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/25. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.