

Dads Can Cake Too with Jeremy Davis

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 Jeremy Davis. Jeremy lives in Charlotte, Michigan, and sells custom decorated cakes with his cottage food business, Designed by Daddy.

Jeremy's impressive cakes and fun personality have landed him on the food network and good morning America. And although his business is very popular, he's still managing to do everything out of his home kitchen and maintain a completely separate full time job. In addition to that.

Now I would say that a custom cake business is definitely the most common type of cottage food business there is, and I know a lot of cake decorators.

But I do not know a lot of men who are cake decorators. So I am very excited to have Jeremy on the show today to share his perspective on what it's like to be vastly outnumbered in his industry. So with that, welcome to the show, Jeremy, nice to have you here.

Jeremy Davis: [00:01:04] Thanks David.

David Crabill: [00:01:06] Jeremy, can you take us back to, uh, the beginning of this adventure? How did it all get started?

Jeremy Davis: [00:01:12] So it really started by accident. It was not something I planned on doing I, my background is I work in higher education, so I've worked in colleges for the last 15 or so years. But I've always been a fan of the food network and cooking shows and really primarily the competition cooking shows. So, you know, always watched them all.

and it's really easy to sort of armchair quarterback when you're watching those types of shows like, Oh, I would've done this or I would've done that. And the funny thing is I really have no formal culinary training, so I don't know why I thought I could do it.

So one day I was sitting on the couch watching YouTube videos um, on. Cookie decorating and cake decorating and just sort of passing the time as we all tend to do. And my daughter climbed up into my lap and I was watching a video by a particular cookie artist named Haniela And she was making a frozen, sugar cookies that were going to go on a frozen themed birthday cake. And my daughter sat there and watched it with me for the 10 or 12 minutes of the video was on there. And at the end she said, dad make that for my birthday. And. Her birthday was this, this was December and her birthday was in January.

And I thought, why do you think I could do that? Like, I don't even cook in our house. My wife does all the cooking. I mean, there's like two things I know how to make. And it usually, and it's cereal and sloppy Joes that's the extent of my culinary background. And it was just one of those things where, you know, she was three turning four and she's my little girl.

And you know, dad can do no wrong and dads can do everything. So I thought. You know what let's, let's give it a whirl. I bought some real basic I bought like a \$5 turntable and a

couple of spatulas. And I started out with a, a boxed cake mix and uh, found a recipe online for some frosting and really just followed the tutorial that Haniela had put up.

And lo and behold, I put together a really amazing looking cake that people thought we had purchased from, from one of the other local bakeries in town. from there, people just started asking me, well can you do this? Could you do that? Have you done this? Have you done that? And I've always been relatively adventurous.

So I never said no. And really four years later, we're, where we are now with a relatively successful custom cake business. And yeah, it keeps me busy, but it is definitely something I love doing.

David Crabill: [00:03:29] So what was it like in your first year of doing business? Did you just get more and more requests for cakes or did you try to market your new business or how did it grow?

Jeremy Davis: [00:03:41] So the first year was. Crazy. I took any and every job that would come you wanted a pastry. Great. You wanted a cake. Awesome. You wanted cookies. Perfect. I can do that. And it really was just me trying to really do whatever I could. I obviously I'll say I was not priced adequately, so I was killing myself for no profit.

And I was just running myself ragged, but I was really developing those, I'll say those skills in business to really move forward and to really advance my brand. The nice thing about what I did as a. I might have, I'll say my grown-up job is I work at a college and a business department. I've been a faculty teaching business classes.

I have a degree in marketing. So marketing and branding, the business was super easy. I mean, I, I threw together a website, a social media presence, built a logo and a brand all within a couple of weeks. And people thought I'd been in business for a lot longer than I actually had because I knew the business side of it.

I didn't necessarily know the, the baking side of it and how all of that worked. So.

The first year was a lot of trial and error of how much should this cost, how much should this not cost? You know, all the fun stuff of cottage law, making sure I fell into those parameters, like I needed to and talking to the people on that side. So year one was crazy. Um, But really by year two and three, I started to I'll say niche down to the things that I really liked doing so now I really do just focus on, on the high end custom cakes. And I'm very happy.

I do, I do less stuff every week, but arguably I make more money than I did when I was doing everything

David Crabill: [00:05:17] So that's interesting to hear that you had the business background, but you didn't have, obviously didn't have the cake experience. And I think it's often the opposite for most people. Like most people come into it, they love to bake or they love to cook and they have no idea what to do on the business side of things.

So what do you feel like you knew when you got started? Through your business background that you implemented that really helped you, that maybe somebody who doesn't know as much about business should think about if they're starting a business.

Jeremy Davis: [00:05:48] The thing that I would encourage anyone who's wanting to start a business is remember that it is a business that it's not a charity, it's not a hobby. It's not any of those things. Because really you're in business to make money. I mean, if we boil it down to the, really the easiest part, you want to make a profit.

And I think what happens with a lot of people who get into, you know, baking businesses or cottage or things like that, is that, you know, when their church has a fundraiser sure, they'll give something. Or if a charity calls them and says, Hey, will you make a cake for this or whatever. And they feel like they need to, because they're a small business and.

I, it was one of the things I had to explain to my wife is that everybody who comes and asks me to do something, I don't need to do it for them. Yes. There are some, there are some charities that I've partnered with and done things for, because I wanted to, but just because you're having a fundraiser or whatever, I'm not going to donate something because it's my time.

And. Time is money. And if I'm only taking a couple orders every week, I can't afford to give away that time slot unless I want to. So just remembering that it's okay to say no. When people ask for things that are outside of your business model. So that's probably the best advice I can give.

David Crabill: [00:07:05] Yeah. Especially if you're doing way too much, like you were in the first year, so well and that, and that first year though, I mean, you talked about having no experience in the food industry and not cooking, but I looked at back at the first stuff that you did and it was pretty good. I mean, it's. It seemed like you must've had some kind of artistic background or interest or something. And I mean, were you interested in art already or had experience in design?

Jeremy Davis: [00:07:38] No. So I'm a horrible artist. Like I can't draw to save my life. now in school I'll say in college, part of my degree in marketing had some graphic design so I can visualize and conceptualize something.

But I have, I always, I've always had to use a computer to do it. Like I couldn't just sit down and draw. What I want it to look like, I will say I'm getting better at it now. I do a lot more like cake sketching and things like that. But when I first started it was, I'll say I had the ability to see it in my head.

And apparently the medium I can create it in happened to be cake. But if you asked me to draw it, I, I wouldn't be able to do it. Or why don't you papier-mâché that? Or why don't you sculpt that or whatever it is I can't, but if it's in an edible format, apparently that's my medium.

David Crabill: [00:08:25] Well, uh, let's jump into, you know, obviously the business took off to some extent and what are we talking about in terms of like year two or, you know, just before you got onto the food network?

I mean, like you're you have a full-time job, right? Like how much are you working outside of that job to do this business?

Jeremy Davis: [00:08:45] I probably average about. Twenty-five to 30 hours a week in the business as well. So it was a lot of late nights.

So once everybody was home and everybody was done with their homework and eating dinner and taking their bags and in bed, then I was going to the kitchen at like 11 o'clock at night, getting stuff ready for the week.

David Crabill: [00:09:04] Did you sleep at all?

Jeremy Davis: [00:09:06] Uh, No, I found I only need about five hours of sleep at night. I function really well on that. If I get any more than that, it's a luxury. And then usually eight hours is my max. Like if I sleep more than eight hours, I don't feel good. So it's a five hours is, is my sweet spot.

David Crabill: [00:09:23] Okay. So you took all those hours that you spent watching the food network and YouTube, and you just started making cakes instead, right?

Jeremy Davis: [00:09:31] Pretty much.

David Crabill: [00:09:33] Um, Now you got on the food network. Is that something that you intentionally did? Did you apply or did they call you, like, how did that happen?

Jeremy Davis: [00:09:42] They contacted me. It wasn't, it was something that. Well, you know, when you, again, as a business person, you know, okay, I need to sit down and I need to write out my one-year three-year five-year goals. I need to put together my business plan and yada yada, yada, that was on my, I think it was in my five-year goal was to be, to be on a food network show so yeah, they basically found me through Instagram. The importance of having a strong social media presence is great because that's typically where all of those people are looking for things like that.

So my Instagram page was relatively strong. They liked what they saw and. Started the whole process of several interviews, several phone interviews and Skype interviews, then cooking demonstrations, and then finally casting.

David Crabill: [00:10:27] Now there's a ton of cake businesses out there, were they just specifically looking for men who are cake decorators and that's why they found you.

Jeremy Davis: [00:10:36] Yes, and no. I think that's, I think I'm a unicorn in the, in the baking world, obviously as a, as a man, who's a Baker. I think I'm even more of a unicorn because I'm a dad who does it too. So there's a, there's a lot of male bakers out there, but not necessarily male bakers who are working a full-time job and have a family and things like that.

So I, I guess I'm an interesting story and the fact that I can actually do it as nice for them too. But I have been contacted from different enough different casting agencies that were specifically looking for a male Baker. Like our show. We have too many female bakers. We need some more men. Do you think you could do something like this?

Which again, I have no problem representing my gender and saying that men can be in the kitchen and men can bake. And it's not just a, a woman thing. It's yes. It's weird to be sort of outnumbered all the time, but All right. Like I said, I like a challenge and I think it's fun to sort of show that a six foot two, not culinary trained guy who can get it in the kitchen and throw it down.

David Crabill: [00:11:38] Yeah. Why do you think there aren't as many men who decorate cakes?

Jeremy Davis: [00:11:45] I have a couple of theories. I mean, one, It was never really an option, I think, as even so now sort of growing up, I mean, things like home economics and things like that in school just aren't being taught anymore. So a lot of guys aren't being exposed to that. Like they may have been years ago.

It's also sort of viewed as not a manly thing to do. I mean, there's a lot of industries out there that are female dominated because people don't assume that men do jobs like that. You think of nursing or frankly, even education and teaching and things like that.

But I would argue there are plenty of male bakers right now who are successful. Sort of taking over, I'll say, taking over the industry, but sort of top of mind, people like, you know, Duff Goldman, Ron Ben Israel Buddy Valastro are obviously men who are doing exactly that I think, as we have evolved time-wise and really with the advent of things like the food network and cooking channel and things like that, more young men are seeing that. This is a viable career option. You can be very successful in the culinary world and do very well.

So I think you're going to start to see a shift in that with this next generation of people, but I did the gen X-ers and before it just wasn't something that we did.

David Crabill: [00:13:08] I liked how you put it directly into your branding right. Designed by daddy, you know? It's front and center, so no one can miss it. And you make the most of that, differentiation. Uh, All right. So the, the food network you got called by the food network, kind of dream come true, I'd imagine, and went through some sort of casting process. What, what was that whole experience like?

Jeremy Davis: [00:13:33] So it was a really long process. So you start out with. You get a message on Instagram, like, Hey, I'm, so-and-so from such and casting agency and we're looking for bakers for a cooking competition show. Like they don't ever tell you they're from the food network, they don't ever tell you what the show is going to be or what it is.

It's just one of those, like, Hey, we'd just like to get to know you. But so it starts out with one of those and you do a couple, all of those types of calls with a the casting associate.

And then if they like you and sort of like your story, they will then pass you on to another, like a casting producer who then will set up a Skype call with you and you'll do a, you know, like a 20 to 30 minutes Skype conversation with them. And I think they're trying to see how well do you portray yourself on camera now?

So now they're seeing you for the first time and seeing how you interact and things like that. And then typically after that, there's a huge time span in between like it's, you're like, Oh, I think, I guess I didn't get anything. And then for me, for the show that I was on, and then it was probably two or three months later, I get a call again from the casting producer saying, Hey, we've presented you to the network.

They really like you. We want to move it to the next to the next round. Now we're going to talk to a culinary producer and we need you to bake something and show us what it is that you did. And some shows I know, will actually bring someone out and you'll do like a live baking demonstration for mine.

It was pre COVID, but they were like, yeah, can you, can you bake a cake in five hours? And then can you bake a sort of a pastry or something in an hour and a half, and then present the two of those to the culinary producer. So basically I made this cake and then they're like, okay, can you cut into it?

And I'm guessing because they wanted to verify that it was actually a cake and not just a bunch of Styrofoam stacked together. But yeah, so cut, cut the cake. Show them that I also made some cream puffs with a cracklin on top, in a pastry filling. So I showed them those. And then again, it was probably another month after that, that I didn't hear anything.

And finally got a call from the producer again, saying, okay, you're in the final stages. So now you can expect to get a contract. This is the show that it's going to be. This is the network that it's going to be on. And can you be ready to go for filming in like a week and a half? And it was. I'm like, what, how long am I going to be gone for?

Like, it's at the end, it is super fast. It's like, okay, fill out the contract, do this last thing, we're going to do your flight information. And you're going to, you're going to be here for four days. And it was sort of a whirlwind at that point. And then in September I was filming the show and then the show actually aired in February.

David Crabill: [00:16:20] Did you feel prepared when you got there? Like, did you feel like you had enough experience to jump into the competition?

Jeremy Davis: [00:16:28] Not at all. I was the only one that was not a quote unquote trained culinary. Person, I didn't go to pastry school. I didn't go to culinary school. The other four contestants all did.

So right from the get-go I was the underdog and I was the one who was the, the quote unquote home Baker. So if you, if you watch the show, it looks like I'm just a home Baker. And that was just sort of the persona they decided to give me in the show. Where in fact I do own a business doing this. So it was, it was weird to watch myself on camera and go I said some things that make it seem like I'm just this like, Oh, I just bake when I'm at home and do

you know, bake for my kids and my church. No. I do have a legitimate business where I do this. So I initially right before we started, I had that sort of apprehension. But frankly, as soon as they call, you know, tell you to start, you just fall right into your element. It was a lot of fun. I think some of the reason why I wasn't super nervous during the show was because I didn't know to be nervous. You know what I mean? It's one of those things where it's the first time I've ever done a show there's cameras everywhere and just do what you're just do what I would do in my own kitchen, you know, make the cake, bake the cake, decorate the cake, like just, just sort of do what you're doing.

I'm just now doing it. And a cake that would normally take me probably two to two and a half days to do I'm doing it in four hours. So that's the only sort of pressure you feel is like, how am I going to get all this done in this short timeframe? And it doesn't look like it would, if I had the two and a half days that I would normally do.

But think everyone knows that I'm a better cake artist than what you see on TV. Because they show pictures of your work, but they also go, Oh, in four hours, you did really great in four hours.

David Crabill: [00:18:14] Yeah. So how did you end up doing?

Jeremy Davis: [00:18:17] Well, so I won, which is, so that was really surprising and exciting all at the same time. It was one of those things where I, again, first TV show going against four. Amazing. Other bakers. And then to be the one who pulled out the win was amazing.

David Crabill: [00:18:32] Yeah congratulations on that. That is so cool to see. And Did you feel, I mean, you said that you didn't feel like you were up to snuff with these other bakers, but you know, after you got into your element and, baked whatever cake you made, you made like a bridge cake. And I can't remember what the other one was.

did you look at your work and go, Oh, you know, like this is actually, you know, this stands up to them.

Jeremy Davis: [00:18:57] Yes, and I don't, I don't mean it to sound like that, but it was one of those things where in the first round I was pretty confident that I did really well. But then in watching the show, I realized I was on the bubble. I could have easily gone home. So that was, I'm glad, I didn't know that going into the second round, but going into this into the second round, I was pretty confident because I was a cake artist.

So the, The one person I was going up against. He was, he went to culinary school and he went and he was a we'll call it. He calls himself a pastry chef, but isn't really a cake artist. And then the other person, she was a cake artist, but she was, she didn't do cakes as often. So I knew at that point going in, I had an advantage because that's all I did.

At that point, I was only doing cakes. So, you know, building, constructing something bigger than normal, it was my comfort zone. So really going into that round, I was extremely confident going, I got this. And then really when I was able to look at what the other two had done, comparatively size wise, mine dwarfed both of theirs.

again, nothing, nothing bad to say against the two of them, because we're actually friends and their things were they were amazing.

But I think I played the game better than they did.

David Crabill: [00:20:15] Well, I had noticed a lot of your customer testimonials say that it's not just the design of your cakes, but also the cake itself is really good, like extremely good or, or like the best they've ever had. So do you think that played a factor into it too? When the judges tasted your cake?

Jeremy Davis: [00:20:36] I think so. I think for me, one of the things I wanted to do in my business was make sure that. The cake looked as good as it tasted. It tasted as good on the inside as it looked on the outside, cause I've gone to a lot of weddings and a lot of parties. And it may have been a really pretty cake on the outside, but it tastes, it did not taste very good. And you didn't want to have another piece of it or another bite you were like, let me put my napkin over this and throw the plate upside down.

So you can't see the throwing this away. when I started doing this more professionally. And knowing that I was going to charge more than let's say the grocery store was going to charge or another bakery in town. I knew that there had to be some sort of differentiator, and it's really sad to say that taste is the differentiator, but I think it really is.

I mean, you can, you can have a really talented artist who can make a really beautiful cake, but if they don't know how to make it taste good on the inside, then it's just a really pretty piece of artwork that you don't necessarily need to eat. I want to make sure that you actually eat. The cake that you buy from me, because I want you to come back and buy the next birthday cake for me.

Or if I made your wedding cake, I want to make your baby shower cake and then the birthday cakes and all of that sort of stuff. So I'm really trying to, to build lifelong customers. And I think that only happens if they realize that yes, this cake may have cost more than it would have if I bought it from XYZ place, which no, it tastes so good that I'm okay with that.

David Crabill: [00:22:03] uh, what did you end up winning on the show?

Jeremy Davis: [00:22:05] Well, what I won and what I got, were two different things. So the prize initially on the show was a sort of dream family outdoor vacation, which was going to be, which was perfect What happened due to COVID is they gave us a cash prize instead because it was too hard to figure out like, when can we travel? When can we do, you know, all of that sort of stuff. So it ended up being a \$10,000 cash prize, which arguably is kind of better than a trip, but cash is always really good.

David Crabill: [00:22:34] Well, so that was just the first experience you had on TV, right? It wasn't too long later that you got probably another call, right? I assume you didn't try to get on. Good morning America, but take us through that whole experience as well.

Jeremy Davis: [00:22:49] Okay. So that one was a very, a very weird experience. So um, one day I got this random email and it was like, hi, I'm so-and-so from good morning America.

I'm, one of the casting producers, and we'd like to talk to you about the thing. And I was like, what, it seemed sketchy.

Like it wasn't, it wasn't, it didn't feel like a legitimate email. And so I sort of left it for a couple of days and I was like, whatever. And then finally I was like, I should probably, it seems legitimate enough. Um, And so I responded back and she explained what they were doing and I was like, Oh, okay. That sounds really fun. And so it was literally a couple emails. There was no audition.

There was no Hey, can you bake something? It was like, okay, perfect. We'd like you, we want you to be on the show. And these are the dates of the shows are going to be. And I was like, Oh, well, that was super easy. And did not require any work on my part.

All in, all they basically told us was that they were going to be highlighting black owned, small businesses. That was the thing. And then we were going to get a chance to talk with a business mentor to give us advice about our business, to help us grow in the next year.

um, and there, and there may or may not be a sort of cash seed money for whoever the winner was. So, I mean, we thought we knew it was a competition. That's what they told us. But after talking to them after the fact, it was one of those things where. We were all going to get it because the company that was um, which was curls beauty supply.

they were planning on giving the money to each one of us. And then we all got a sort of mentoring session with the CEO of curls, which was really great. And an additional prize that no one knew about was the fact that we all were also going to get a sit down meeting with Walmart.

Basically see if you could take my brand to sort of a national level, which was kind of cool. Kind of scary. not really sure what I, as a custom cake artist is going to do for Walmart, but there, there were some things that we had talked about that I could really see and would be really exciting to be able to do if they sort of come to fruition. So.

David Crabill: [00:24:50] That is cool. Uh, But yeah, but I, I saw you won \$5,000. Congratulations on that. And of course they didn't tell you that you're all gonna get it. Cause they wanted your like super shocked reactions right. For TV.

Jeremy Davis: [00:25:02] Exactly.

David Crabill: [00:25:04] Now you had this huge stage, right? Like what was the response like after you were on the food network after he appeared on good morning, America? Like what happened. After that, what was the aftermath and what happened to your business?

Jeremy Davis: [00:25:20] So strangely enough, after the food network, it wasn't that big of a deal. Only because COVID happened literally right after. So like my show aired on the 24th of February and really by mid-March everything was like closing down and shutting down. So it was, I'll say I didn't get the wave. Like I thought I would've gotten from, from that.

I did get some you know, I got initially gotten a lot of people asking me about cakes. So I would say a lot of inquiries came in. But. To be able to say, Oh, I did this many more cakes

because of being on the food network. Probably not. Cause I actually had the entire month of April, I did nothing.

Like I had not a single order because everything was shut down. So um, it was not the, the super exciting like, yay. I was on TV moment that I thought I was going to have. Good morning, America was a little bit different. Because again, I think I, we were sort of in a different spot with COVID than we were, right when it first started. I'll say I did get, again, a lot of local newspapers and TV affiliates and things like that reached out and we did some things. but I got way more inquiries from outside of Michigan.

So people from New York and people from like California and things like that, that had seen me, that were like, Hey, can you ship me a cake? And I'm like, no, because of, A, because of cottage, I can't and B there's no way I'm going to ship a three tier cake to you. Like it's just not going to come looking right. So it was, it was strange that I'd gotten a lot of those people like, Hey, we just saw you on good morning America. We really want you to make this. Great, but you have to come pick it up. But 2020 was a really good year for me. It was something that um, with being on TV twice, that was great. But I really was able to do some pivoting in the business that I'm not sure I would have done if we hadn't been in a global pandemic. So yeah. I love making, you know, four and five tier wedding cakes that are big and outlandish and all that sort of fun stuff.

I love doing that, but obviously weddings were either canceled or shrunk significantly. And so I wasn't doing those big cakes anymore, but what happened because of it is a lot of. Birthdays became a big thing. so I got to do a lot more of sort of the craftiness of cake artistry.

So it wasn't necessarily, here's a three tier cake, put some flowers on it and, and go out the door. It was, I want a Nintendo switch cake, or I want a Minecraft cake, or I want a name the character. I probably made all of them during, during 2020. Um, it was, it was fun, a little scary and like, You know, when I drop a wedding cake off, let's say, I don't have this like, Oh, I hope they're going to like it. No, because again, they have nothing to sort of frame it with. It's not like it needs to look like Pikachu and the cake doesn't look like Pikachu. With a birthday cake. like every single time they'd come to pick it up. It was like, are they making? Are they making those like positive? Like Yes, I like the way it looks or. Are they giving me the side eye, are they like questioning it?

And it was sort of every time the door rang and I knew I was delivering the cake. It was that feeling of anxiety, but it was, I will say, I don't think anyone told me to my face that they didn't like it. So that's a good thing.

David Crabill: [00:28:38] Hey, I've seen your work. It's pretty good. So I don't think anybody's complaining.

Jeremy Davis: [00:28:43] I only had a couple of only in a couple early on nothing recently, which is good.

David Crabill: [00:28:48] Oh you did have some, some complaints in the beginning?

Jeremy Davis: [00:28:51] I did. And it was, I will say it was never about flavor, which is always good. I did have a complaint once about the way a cake looked and sort of the design of it. And I remember very specifically saying, I don't think we should do it this way. Like, if you want it that way, I'll do it. But I think it would look better if I did this I was still so early and still so new in, in this that if it was now, I would say I don't do that kind of style. And that would just be it, frankly. I had to tell someone that just the other day, like the picture you sent me is great, but I can't make it look like that. That's not one of the things I do, but I could do it like this.

And they were like, Oh, okay, well that sounds good too. Back then it was not that. And I laughed because I think that cake only costs like \$30. And right now it would cost \$150. Like if they like the difference in price, the difference in, and they like threw a fit about this \$30 cake. And I was like, it felt, I felt devastated and like, maybe I shouldn't be doing this and all that sort of stuff, which was kind of funny. You develop a thick skin in this industry because it is very, very subjective, but The good, always outweighs the bad.

David Crabill: [00:30:04] do you, do you have any advice for dealing with customer complaints?

Jeremy Davis: [00:30:09] The only thing I would say is make sure that you, that you listen to the complaint. Like, I mean, I'm, I'm not going to say I'm the best at anything right now. So if I did miss something and I, you know, if I did, like, if it. Tasted wrong or something like that. I will definitely fix it. So that's the that's the biggest thing.

Try to fix the problem if you can. If you can't, you just have to be okay with it. And I will say that a lot of even early on when the, when that complaint happened, I still, I still had a lot of people defending me. So whether they were previous customers or just people in general who knew me sort of jumped on those posts and were like, you know, that that's not right or whatever.

And I had to sort of go in and go, no, I totally understand. You know, I I'm, you know, I apologized for, for why they were upset. Again, I didn't, I didn't refund their money because there was nothing wrong with it. You know what I mean? Like, if there's something wrong, I will do everything I can to rectify it.

But if it is your, your opinion that you don't think it's up to what you think it should be. I sort of have artistic license in that, in that respect. You know what I mean? I, I am the, I'm the artists that you hired to do this, and if you don't like my work, I'm sorry, but there's nothing technically wrong with it.

Um, So that, so there's that I mean, I did have one where I just completely. I completely screwed up. Like I thought their wedding was a Saturday and their wedding was Friday and I got a call saying, Hey, when are you planning on bringing the cake by? And I'm like, what are you talking about? It'll be there tomorrow at this time.

And they're like no, the weddings today. Um, That's a horrible feeling to have when you Lucky enough that I prepped stuff in advance. So it's not like, I mean, I don't have like cakes

in the freezer for months on end, but I had already baked the cakes and they were already like prepped and what I was going to do.

Cause I was like, Oh, it's Friday night. I'll do all of the finishing touch things that I would do. You know, stack the cake, get the ribbon on put the fondant on all that sort of good stuff. So I literally had to leave work and go do that. And for that, I frankly, I completely refunded their entire order because I was about four hours late than when I was originally going to deliver the cake.

Now, no one knew that I was late. Like I delivered the cake right as they were eating dinner. So like, it looked natural that I was coming in at that point with the cake. But it was just one of those things where I, I just felt like I needed to. To make it right.

And to me, the only thing I could think of to make it right was to, to give them a refund and, you know, here's, here's the cake, here's the cupcakes, there's all this stuff. But, you know, I don't, I don't need anything from that. And frankly, they have, you know, I made their anniversary cake a couple of years ago.

I think it was last year actually. And you know, I think they're a customer for life. Again because I did what I thought was right in that respect. So anytime you get a customer complaint or anything like that, I think you have to do what you think is right. And what you think is right by them.

Because again, if you're not strong enough to, Sort of take that criticism and take that under advisement. You're just going to get walked all over as a, as a business owner. And I think, I think a lot of people in a, I'll say in a creative business, like cakes or paper crafts, or whatever, tend to be empathetic to most situations because we're in sort of an industry that we're in a service business. So we want to make everything right. That I think the mindset sometimes can be that we're not a business. For me, I had to remember. I'm still an artist, so I have to be okay with the way that my art looks and be comfortable with that and understand that it's a subjective medium.

And if you don't like it, I'm sorry, but you paid for it. And again, if there was nothing wrong with it, Then our transaction is complete.

David Crabill: [00:34:06] Well, have you ever had any cake disasters or delivery mishaps?

Jeremy Davis: [00:34:11] No, thank goodness. The closest one was missing the date and having to like redo it, like do everything really fast, but I have not, I've never dropped a cake. Um, Well actually, Nope, that's a lie. I have dropped a cake. But it was so not to be like a product dropper or anything, but I have two. Cake safes and it's really a delivery system for cake artists. And basically it's a box that you put the cake in and you set the cake in there and then there's a giant Metal rod that you sort of jam all the way through your cake. That goes from the top of the cake all the way into the board and into a locking position within the, the box itself.

So it really makes delivery super easy and super stress-free because before I would never stack a cake and deliver it, I always would stack on-site, but I had the cake. It was an outdoor

wedding. They had the cake in the box. It was on a Dolly and I was walking into the reception hall and I hit a bump and it fell off the Dolly and was laying sideways. So making a cake vertical now it's laying sideways and I gasped not too audibly, but there was like a room full of people. And they gasped because it fell and it was laying on its side. And I was like, Oh, I'm totally fine. Cause it's in the safe. So I literally picked it up, set it down and put it, you know, took it out of the box and people were like, it's okay.

And I'm like, well, yeah, cause that's what this thing is designed for. Like That's why. We have them. So that was the only time I ever dropped a cake.

But nothing happened to it because it was in my cake safe.

David Crabill: [00:35:42] Well, let's talk a little bit about pricing. You talked about how you used to charge \$30 for something that would now cost \$150. Now, how has your pricing gone up over time? And when did you know that it was time to increase your prices?

Jeremy Davis: [00:35:58] So pricing was probably the thing that I struggled with the most, and I think probably most cottage bakers do because we're not really sure. One, we don't necessarily know if we're good enough. So we, we typically tend to undercharge for a very long time. And I realized probably within that first year, that. I I'm not making any money, so I need to figure out a way to charge more. So really the first thing I did and it was, I took a couple of pricing classes that were specifically geared toward cake decorators.

One was called like screw cake pricing, which was kind of fun. And it really, really talked about first and foremost, understanding the psychology behind pricing, because again, We tend to price things lower end because we think, well, we're not a bakery. We don't have overhead. We don't have all these sorts of things.

And whatever that is. It talked about that, the mindset of it, and also talked about learning how to figure out the base price of all of you or whatever it is that you're baking. So to the, like literally to the penny I don't know it off the top of my head now, but at the time I could tell you an eight inch chocolate cake.

Costs this amount of money, the frosting on it costs this amount of money. And if I was just going to simply frost it, it will take me two hours to do that. So from start to finish, it might take me four hours to make an eight inch round frosted cake. And I would know that that cake costs, let's say \$60 just to do that.

Now, if you want to decoration how much goes into that? And I know I need to make sure I pay myself a nice wage. So 10, 12, \$15 an hour. That goes into the cost of the cake. And it really helped me figure out the cake that I charged \$30 for really should cost this not necessarily \$150, but it should cost X amount of dollars now because I need to make sure I'm making a profit.

It was hard. I will say I changed my, I changed my prices. I want to say three times over the last four years. And it was really, I was like \$2 a slice for a cake. When I first started and then I went up to \$5 a slice then I went up to, I think, \$7, a slice. And now \$7 is sort of the base.

Like if you want just a basic cake, it's probably going to cost about \$7 a slice. Most everything. My average right now is about \$10 a serving. Now I don't typically price by the serving anymore. It really is by the, by the project. But it, it definitely did go up. And some people were like, well did your pricing go up after you were on TV?

And I'm like, actually, no, it didn't. It people told me I should, my prices should go up because I was on TV. And I'm like, well, no, I'm, I'm happy in the price point that I'm in right now. Because I think it's fair for the area that I live in. It's enough that I feel confident that I am being paid, what I'm worth as an artist to do these cakes.

And I'm happy doing them. Like if I, if I was making less, I wouldn't be happy if I was making more, I'd probably feel guilty because I would think I wouldn't be taking like I'm price gouging at, at that point. So I'm in a very happy I'm in a really good spot price wise that I am, I'm happy, I'm comfortable. And I think my customers are too.

David Crabill: [00:39:07] you had mentioned um, that you took a, course or a couple of courses about pricing, and obviously you started. Totally brand new, no experience. Where have you turned to, to learn about cake decorating and stuff? What are some, cake artists or resources that you could point people to who are trying to get started themselves?

Jeremy Davis: [00:39:29] So the first frankly, the first place I looked when it started, when I started, well, you know what, Yolanda Gampp from How To Cake It is the one I probably watched the most. Joshua John Russell, and he has a channel now called You've Been Desserted but he was doing Man About Cake before that. And I'd seen him on a million cake shows before probably five, 10 years ago.

And really once I realized that the two of the two of them actually did a lot of tutorial based things, not necessarily The step-by-step tutorials, but more like I'm watching you bake a cake and I can go, Oh, that's what you're doing there.

But then I also Part of owning a business is investing in the business. So for me, investing in the business included by, you know, paying for memberships into cake tutorial, places like Craftsy, cakeflix.com the Sugar Geek Show. I was in that one for a while, too. Some of them are monthly subscriptions.

Some of them are yearly subscriptions, but it was really one of those things that it was my safety net. So if a customer came to me and said, You know, I, I would like a, a roller-skate cake or I would like a golf bag cake, or I would like, whatever it is, I could go, okay. I feel like I could do that. And I was pretty confident that in one of those places, I could find something that was close enough that would sort of show me I say I got my culinary degree from YouTube. Even though I didn't, but that's typically what I tell people.

David Crabill: [00:40:52] well um, I did want to talk a little bit about how you've marketed this business. I looked at your Facebook page and you're, you're posting all the time. You're very active on social. And I also noticed that you got. Like a ton of Facebook likes before you went on TV. in fact, I went all the way back to the beginning.

I saw, I think you got 200 likes and a couple days or something. And then you got 2000 likes within a year and a half. What kind of strategy did you use to get that kind of attention to your Facebook page early on?

Jeremy Davis: [00:41:30] So early on I particularly went to the Facebook groups that were prevalent in my area. So where we were, we live in Charlotte, there's a what's happening in Charlotte page so all of the sort of communities that are around where I am, I joined those communities and you know, they would have things like On Mondays vendors can post things.

So I would just post a picture of a cake I was working on and just sort of talk about the business. So, Hey, I'm Jeremy from designed by daddy custom Cakery. I'm here to help you out with whatever you need. Here's what I was working on last weekend and just be a picture of the cake and like my contact information.

And if people wanted to contact me, they could. And so you, you tend to get a lot of likes on posts like that, and people would click through and. Like your page, because again, I was local I'm, you know, if you, if you were to look at my analytics from, from Facebook and things like that from Facebook specifically, you'll see, most of the people are probably within a 20 mile radius of where I live.

Like that's just sort of the 2,500 people I think that are following me right now. Probably 2200 of them are within 20 miles of me. So that was the big thing with Facebook, because again, I knew that. I didn't have a huge marketing budget. I wasn't going to be able to put ads in newspapers, put up billboards, direct mail.

Any of those things that typically a business would do, but because we have social media, because it's such a powerful tool, use it to its advantage. Like I, I only ever did a couple true Facebook ads or sponsored posts or things like that because I found out again, early on, if I do. If I post consistently, and if I give content that people want to see, and if it's shareable content, I don't need to promote a post.

I don't need to sponsor a post. it'll just be there because again, I'm not trying to get to a national audience with what I'm doing. You'll see in these little groups, that'll be like, Hey, I'm looking for someone who can make a, a birthday, cake for my son's first birthday. And then everyone sort of tags who they think. So you get a bunch of tags that way too, and now I'm in several wedding groups in, again, in our area like mid-Michigan brides and brides to be Michigan and Michigan wedding vendors and all of those types of things. So on a weekly basis, I'm in those groups. Posting to potential couples and things like that. And it's really doing what it's supposed to do.

David Crabill: [00:43:47] Now what kind of content or what types of content do you feel have been uh, really effective?

Jeremy Davis: [00:43:54] Um, So if it's Facebook pictures tend to be the best. So a photo of What I'm doing. Um, People love behind the scenes pictures too. So not necessarily just a, here's a picture of a finished cake, a picture of me doing something with the cake Um,

Instagram is a completely different animal and arguably I don't like Instagram, but it's still a very, it's still a really good tool to use.

And frankly, I don't like Instagram because there's so many things that I have to do with it. So between photos, photo carousels, reels, Instagram TV Boomerangs and all of the different things. I'm constantly having to put together new content for Instagram that I don't necessarily have to do on Facebook.

So one of the things I, I typically think about, so if I'm making a cake, what are the different angles that I can shoot the cake from, what are the behind the scenes pictures I can take? Is there a video I can take while I'm doing this so I can show what I'm doing? What does the kitchen look like when I'm taking the picture?

There's a lot that goes into, into doing the social media piece and I always joke with my friends who are cookie decorators, that they have it so easy because like, you can like make one batch of cookies and use 10 different cookie cutters and have 10 different cookies. And you have two weeks worth of content. I typically have one or two cakes a week, and there's only so much I can post about that cake because people are going to be annoyed by the fact that isn't this the same cake he showed me three days ago. So so if you were to go to my Instagram page right now, you would see that I have about 48 posts right now.

I have about 640ish followers and I have about 48. People that I'm following. So I have this lovely pyramid. And the idea is, is I've learned enough about the Instagram algorithm to know that if you're following more people than are following you. That's not a good thing. So, you know, there'll be people who have like 6,000 people they're following, but they're only, they only are being followed by a thousand people.

Instagram doesn't like that. Instagram doesn't like it. If you only use pictures, they like to see you're using all of their mediums. So like I said, I G T V reels, photo carousels, boomerangs, all of those, your feed needs to be mixed up with all of those things. So I. I had a coach once tell me that you should do like out of any 12 posts, six of them should be reels.

Two of them should be Instagram TVs. Two of them should be photos, two should be either a photo carousel or a boomerang. So to kind of get your mindset working in that Space of knowing Instagram It's a fickle mistress that Instagram, and you just need to feed the machine like it, like it wants to be fed and they change the algorithm all the time.

So I'm constantly trying to keep up with what's going on. And frankly, my goal on Instagram is to have 10,000 followers cause I really want that swipe up feature. so I really spent the last year working at understanding Instagram. And I think I'm doing a pretty good job. Um, My, my Instagram account got hacked probably when I had about 1500 followers, which was really upsetting. Um, Cause I had to start all over again. So the account I have right now, I've only had since I think October of last year, so 600 plus followers in a few months is I'm pretty happy with, but It's again, because I knew how to play the game.

David Crabill: [00:47:10] Now is this just something that you enjoy doing you like enjoy looking up? How does the game work? most people don't take that kind of time or effort to

learn about all the algorithms and stuff like is it, is it fun for you or is it just because you want to grow your business?

Jeremy Davis: [00:47:26] It's not fun at all. Like, I don't like it at all. I loved Instagram when it was just post a picture and like, it was just that. but if I truly want to grow and I think if Someone like the food network or someone like that comes across my page.

They should see someone who is being intentional with their social media. Like I said, if you, if, even if you were to look at my old, my former account got hacked, I still only showed maybe a hundred posts at a time. I was constantly archiving things. Cause again, Instagram likes it when your number on your left and the right are lower.

you know, if you have less than a thousand followers, you should have no more than a hundred to 125 posts, just because it likes the post to follower ratio. Like right now I have a, like a 20 to one post to follow ratio.

Actually I don't think it's that high. So it was like 11 to one, it sounds really nerdy and it sounds really kind of boring and it kind of is. But again, I understand that. I'm trying to run my business as a business. So the frankly, eventually, maybe I won't be a cottage Baker anymore. Like if I was, if I was happy, just, you know, making one or two cakes a week. I probably wouldn't feel like I needed to do social media as strong as I'm doing right now. But I do want to grow, I do want to take my business to the next level and see where it see where it goes, because I really enjoy it.

David Crabill: [00:48:45] Well, what about Facebook? How does their algorithm work?

Jeremy Davis: [00:48:48] Facebook is pretty, pretty normal when it comes to algorithms. It's not a there's not really a game that you have to learn with Facebook, Facebook really is just happy if you post something on them.

David Crabill: [00:49:00] How often do you think you need to post on Facebook for it to be happy.

Jeremy Davis: [00:49:05] I post probably every other day and it seems to be happy there are sometimes. I, my Instagram and my Facebook page are linked. So when I post something on Instagram, it posts directly to Facebook. Same thing with like my Instagram stories, they go to my Facebook stories. I post typically a story on Instagram. Every day. but I think consistency in any social media is key. So I would say with Facebook once every three days is probably okay with Facebook, but Instagram, you need to post every day.

David Crabill: [00:49:39] Now I have noticed that you do a lot of video, like a lot of tutorials, especially time-lapse tutorials. what have you learned about. Doing that kind of recording in your kitchen.

Jeremy Davis: [00:49:52] Um, Have really good equipment to do that with I have a really good Mount that I use. My Arkon mountain is great. Because it's sturdy and strong and it goes where I want it to go. Part of it is figuring out like I have a small kitchen, like it's a

galley, it's a galley type kitchen. Frankly I have an extra table because my kitchen is too small to do what I need to do it in.

So it is finding creative angles. To do what you need to do. If you've noticed some of my videos have a, like a you see the, see the brick wall that's actually a backdrop that blocks a lot of the stuff in my kitchen. So you can't see it because it was a nice, smooth clean background. it didn't cost me very much to get the background.

I can shoot directly on it and it looks great. And I found that people like. Watching those types of videos, whether they're on Instagram or Facebook or whatever, they like seeing, you know, if it's, if it's more than a minute, a lot of people tune out or they'll scroll to the end. So 15 to 30 second videos are great.

They're hard to shoot only because you're like, okay, how do I take this cake that took me eight hours to do and, and boil it down to 30 seconds and make it look like something you want to see that doesn't, isn't going by so fast.

David Crabill: [00:50:58] And what are you using to shoot these videos with.

Jeremy Davis: [00:51:02] So I have my iPhone, 10 max. and then I use my iPad. So I mirror my screen on my camera to my iPad so I can see what I'm doing. Um, My Arkon mount actually holds my camera and my tablet in place. So it gets it off the, off the table surface, so I can actually have room to move around.

And I have a light that I bought, like a ring, like a giant ring light that I bought from Amazon. if you want the links to things that I have, just let me know and I can get them to you. Cause they're relatively inexpensive, but they make a world of difference.

So the time-lapse option on my iPhone is what I shoot all the video in. There's a program I use called PicPlayPost which is what I use to stitch everything together. And it actually has a setting to export it out to Instagram and export it out to Facebook. So it's the right size and dimension like it's supposed to there's a free version of it, but it has their branding on the bottom of it. Or I think it's a hundred dollars and you can use it forever and there's no ads and you can put your own logo in.

But they have a bunch of royalty free music that you can use within Instagram without getting flagged by Instagram. So.

David Crabill: [00:52:04] I noticed on the Facebook front that you've been doing Facebook lives. And it looked like you're using a lot of anticipation and curiosity, like not telling people what was going to be on the live. What, what has been your strategy for leveraging lives and what have you learned?

Jeremy Davis: [00:52:22] Um, What I've learned is that people like lives. I mean, they love a good, you know, time-lapse video or something like that, but they do like to be able to see you and interact with you live. So Really for me in the height of what was going on with COVID when I wasn't doing a whole lot of stuff, I had to figure out something to make a little bit of money.

And I realized that I could. I could do a live of me doing something that I know people would want to see me do. And then have something that the end that they would want to do. So whether it was okay, I am going to frost these cupcakes. And at the end, I'm going to give a set of them away.

And then after that, I'm going to sell them the next day. And, you know, I have. Five dozen cupcakes that I'm going to sell for \$10 for a four pack. But again, like I said, I think people really liked to being able to sort of talk to me and ask me questions and really, really interact with the audience that you have.

And it wasn't like I had like a thousand people on any of my lives. I think the most I ever had was like 20 people, but they were 20 people who were in my community that wanted to get that behind the scenes. Like, what do you know, what are you doing in your kitchen? What are you, what are you making right now?

How do you make that? So, you know, I'd give little tips and tricks during the lives. And again, if you stayed to the end, I would tell you, Hey, this is my address. If you go to my porch, there's going to be, uh, you know, four cupcakes in there. First one there gets them, and you would not believe at like nine or 10 o'clock at night, there would, people would be like running to my house to get these cupcakes. Like some people were like, Oh man, I don't live in your neighborhood. It's too far. I'm probably not going to get them in time. Or, you know, and then I would say, you know, what you weren't able to get them, but you know what tomorrow I'm going to have a pop-up sale and they're going to be like 10 bucks for, you know, four, if you want to order some, just let me know.

I have X amount of them and when they're gone, they're gone. And then I would do another live a week or two later and make a different kind of cupcake or whatever it was. So again, it was. I, I won't say I got rich off selling cupcakes, but it was definitely something fun. And productive that I could do that benefited my community in a way that we were all, like I said, we were all sort of stuck in quarantined and didn't know what to do.

And this was a fun thing to do.

David Crabill: [00:54:35] I did notice that uh, you've done some classes. And is that something that you're looking to do more and what have you learned from teaching.

Jeremy Davis: [00:54:47] So I love teaching. Actually my master's degree is in education. So teaching has always been one of those things that is near and dear to my heart. And. Frankly I'm even the faculty at the college that I work at. So I teach on occasion, but really teaching cake decorating or cookie decorating was, was one of those really, really fun things to do.

And you realize that, you realize that through teaching, I really learn what I don't know. So, or, or why I do things a certain way, and it's just really fun to see the look in someone's eyes that. Maybe they didn't think they could do it, or they didn't think they were good enough or they didn't think whatever it was.

And it's a, it's an easy thing I think for cottage people to do, because it's not a, it's not a big investment. I mean, all you're doing is like, for me, for the cookie decorating classes, I baked

the cookies ahead of time. I made the Royal icing ahead of time. Then during the class, we did decorating techniques, learning how to thin out the Royal icing and coloring it and things like that.

And then I basically did three or four different, simple designs, and I provided the, frostings, the. The sprinkles, the box to take them home and things like that. And they were able to come in for a couple of hours and learn something fun and new and go out and be happy. And, you know, it was fun to see the people post the pictures on there of their creations or sort of whatnot.

David Crabill: [00:56:11] Very cool. Well, Jeremy, it's been great talking to you today and. Where would you like to see this business go in the future?

Jeremy Davis: [00:56:21] I don't know. Well, yeah, I sort of don't know. In my head, I have this really cool idea of having a. Like a cake studio. I don't necessarily want a bakery where I have to get up every morning at like three in the morning and bake cookies and muffins and things like that. That's not what I want to do, but I would love a space where I could actually bake the cakes for the clients, have um, decorating classes in the space or whatever I need to do.

just a small space where it could just be mine. That's what I've sort of always envisioned. I like, and like I said, I call it my little, my, I call it my cake studio, but I love being at home too. So yeah, my, my ideal thing is to have a really nice studio and whether that's in. Our house that we have right now, or if it's a new house that we have that has a like a garage space that I can convert into a studio. I don't, I don't know what that looks like.

But like I said, I'm, I'm really happy where I am right now. I'm just afraid that very near future I'm going to exceed the cottage law. Amount like this year, I actually did hit it. And luckily, because of COVID, I didn't go over it, but I feel if I had, if we this year, so in 2021, I will probably hit that threshold sooner than I want to.

And then I'll have to start telling people I can't make stuff for them. So,

David Crabill: [00:57:40] Yeah, well, Michigan has a relatively low limit. They have like 20, 25,000. Is that right?

Jeremy Davis: [00:57:46] yeah. Well it's low, but I will tell you when I first started, I never thought I would hit that number. Again, that seems like such a far off number that I was like, Oh, \$25,000. Oh yeah, that's fine. Like, I, I will be totally fine, but then you get a couple of 4-figure wedding cakes in there and you're like, Oh, I'm getting close to that \$25k way too quickly.

David Crabill: [00:58:06] Well, it is a good problem to have

Jeremy Davis: [00:58:09] Yeah. I can't complain.

David Crabill: [00:58:11] Yeah. Anyway, Jeremy, thanks so much for jumping on today. Where can people find you or reach out?

Jeremy Davis: [00:58:17] Uh, You can go to my website, which is www.designedbydaddy.net or Facebook and Instagram at [_designedbydaddy](https://www.instagram.com/_designedbydaddy).

David Crabill: [00:58:28] Wonderful. Well, thanks so much for jumping on today. I learned a ton from you and especially on the. Uh, Marketing side and the TV side. So thanks for sharing all of those good tips and hopefully you'll inspire more male decorators to join you.

Jeremy Davis: [00:58:47] Sounds good. Well, thank you for having me, David.

David Crabill: [00:58:49] That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. Wow. Jeremy has had quite an eventful first few years in his business, and I'm sure his story will be inspiring to any cake maker who's just starting out.

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/28.

And if you enjoyed this episode, please head over to Apple podcasts and leave me a review. A review is the best way to support the show and it will help others find it as well.

I'd also really appreciate if you could share this show with any bakers or home cooks that you know who might be interested in it.

And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own homemade food, check out my free mini course, where I walk you through the steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground. To get the course, go to cottagefoodcourse.com.

Thanks for listening. And I'll see you in the next episode.