

From Part-time Hobby to Full-time Bakery with Jennifer Jacobs

David Crabill: Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage food businesses about their strategies for running food business from home I'm David Crabill. And today I'm talking with Jennifer Jacobs.

Jennifer lives near St. Petersburg, Florida, and runs her successful bakery, the Wandering Whisk Bakeshop, where she sells custom cakes, cookie sandwiches, and many other baked desserts.

She used Florida's cottage food law to operate her bakery from home for five years before buying a brick and mortar storefront in 2019. Jennifer's background is in the TV industry and she is especially good at marketing her business organically So today I'm looking forward to hearing how she built such a large following without spending an arm and a leg.

And with that, welcome to the show, Jennifer. Nice to have you here.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:00:52] Thanks. David looking forward to uh, revealing all the secrets.

David Crabill: [00:00:56] Yeah, we're definitely looking for secrets today So can you take us back to how this all got started?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:01:03] Yeah. So my story's kind of interesting. I was never that girl that grew up thinking I would own a bakery. I actually went to the university of central Florida in hopes of graduating and working in the music industry So I had moved up to New York city for a few years and I had always baked with my mom around the holidays.

That was really our thing. And so I grew up baking just for fun when I moved back from New York city, I found myself baking a ton because I got a job working in TV production, and I was working these long, overnight shifts So I was awake all day while my friends were at work I baked really just to kind of pass the time.

And this was back in 2013 So it was kind of at the height of Pinterest when it was first starting and. You know, I was really trying to experiment with recipes I like to credit everything back to these red velvet cookie sandwiches. I brought these cookie sandwiches into the TV studio I was working at and people started asking if they could buy them from me, which was pretty crazy considering I never thought anyone would ever want to actually pay me for something I was making And these two guys I was working with at the time said, Hey, can we pay you to make us another box of these cookies and bring them in tomorrow?

We'd love to take them home to our families So I did, I ran home. I made them, I brought them in the next day. And then I asked the guys, I said, Hey, did your families love the cookies? And they said, well, we actually ate all of them at night at work. And we need you to now make us each another box of cookies.

So that was really the start of the business. And from there, it was just kind of word of mouth around the TV studio I was working at. And before I knew it, people were saying, Hey, I need a birthday cake or I need cupcakes for a, a friend. And I really just kind of started the business from there. But. Yeah, the business side of it. I never dreamt, I would open a business or be a business owner myself. I mean, I worked in corporate America and that's kind of where I saw myself. I just never really looked at this as an option until it just kind of, I like to think it just kind of fell into my lap and really I ran with it.

David Crabill: [00:03:19] Yeah. I mean, I noticed you were an associate producer for the home shopping network, so that's pretty serious job. And I was wondering, I mean, with that kind of job, what sort of skills did you take from there to, into the business? I imagine quite a few marketing skills.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:03:38] Yeah. So I don't think I realized how much that job had an effect on me until I was no longer there. I see myself using so many of the skills in my daily life that I picked up when I was at HSN So really the selling part of the business, Trying to convince, not convince someone, but you know, when someone comes to you and says, why should we book you for our wedding versus booking one of these other three bakeries?

I've learned the tactics of not, how to you want to sell to someone, but you don't want to be a salesperson. You want to talk about all of the wonderful things you're going to offer the wonderful features of your business. Like for me, everything is baked in small batches. We use the highest end, most premium ingredients in our desserts.

And so working as a TV producer with this team that was essentially on TV selling products to people, I think I just picked up on so much of that without even realizing it until all of a sudden I had to learn how to sell a product.

Most of us don't have sales experience. You know, we don't, we didn't go to school to learn how to sell a product So I think that is something that a lot of people really need to kind of refine their skills on that. It's really about connecting with your clients. For me, I have built relationships with people over the last, you know, five years, seven years that I've been doing this and I've built these relationships with people.

So they come back to me year after year for every birthday, every anniversary, every time they have something to celebrate, they want to come and get a wandering, whisk dessert for that I think for me, it's not about just. Selling your product and, doing whatever you can to make that sale. But it's about connecting with the people that are coming to you and building this personal relationship with them so that they really get to know you as a business owner and that they choose to support you.

And I think opening up who you are and showing people really a glimpse into who you are as a business owner, as a person, you know, a peek into the kitchen you're working in, are you working in your house? And you have two young kids, or you have a house and you, your window looks out to the beach. You know, people want to see where are you working?

What are you doing? They want to connect to your story and to who you are as a business owner.

David Crabill: [00:06:01] Great advice. Uh, so how long did you work? In the TV industry.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:06:06] I was there for six years.

David Crabill: [00:06:08] Okay So let's say, you know, go back six years, instead of going into the TV industry, you decided to start a bakery from the get go. What do you think you would have done differently and like how do you think that would've changed your business? And do you think you would've been successful if you had started out from scratch?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:06:26] Well, for me, I would say starting as a cottage food Baker. So working out of my home when I first started this business while also working a full-time job. Yes, it's incredibly challenging. I mean, there were weeks where I was so busy taking on orders, but I was also working a nine to five job. It was challenging.

But for me, I think that allowed me to gradually start this business and kind of get my feet wet. And at the very beginning, I didn't jump all in. I didn't start baking these red velvet cookies at the beginning and two weeks into it, say, I'm going to open a bakery. I'm going to quit my job and do this full time.

I don't think that was really a thought in my mind for maybe the first year or two having a full-time job while also working, you know, whether it's a full-time or a part-time job, but having another job that's going to provide you this income really allows you to kind of take this time to build this, this business from scratch.

But I think if I would have just jumped in six years ago and said, I'm going to open a bakery, I'm going to start this business. That would have been so much more challenging because a lot of my original clients came from my job. It came from the people I was working with and their family and friends.

And so. Having this, this full-time job, and then doing the baking on the side, I think really allowed me to grow at a slow pace, but it was this perfect pace for me because I just didn't have this pressure of having to run this bakery and support myself and pay all my bills and everything right up front, strictly from this baking business, it, the income from my producing job allowed me that flexibility.

David Crabill: [00:08:07] Yeah, I mean, you now have a very successful bakery. I'd imagine you're extremely busy. Uh, But what were the first couple of years? What did those look like? What was that ramp up, period? Can you take us into that world?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:08:21] in those first two years, I think that's when I really focused on learning new skills I actually went to my local library and got out some Le cordon Bleu textbooks that they had. And at that point I just started reading as much as I could to get as much knowledge about what I was making.

I think it was in about 2015. I discovered this program out in San Francisco at the San Francisco baking Institute.

And it was a week long intensive that they offered. And some professionals were out there. Some bakers like me that were kind of just getting my feet wet in the baking world. And I

went out and took this class and it, I like to think it really changed everything for me. When I came back from this class, I knew a whole heartedly.

I think that I wanted to do this full-time and that's when I fully jumped in So at that point, it's when I came up with the business name, it's when I started the social media pages for wandering whisk. And it's really when I focused on having this be more than just Jen is baking desserts in her kitchen, but now I am operating under this business um, but yeah, that's, that's kind of how it started, But the orders will they came. I mean, building up the clientele, it doesn't happen overnight. It just takes time.

David Crabill: [00:09:40] Yeah, I saw that you, you went to the public library and got a ton of books. And I thought that was so funny. Cause I don't know if I've heard of any uh, Baker, who's gotten their resources through the public library these days, but,

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:09:54] Oh, I love, I love the library. I still go to the library all the time and I've probably checked out every cake, cookie, whatever kind of book at my local library. And I love it. And here's my word of advice. Check out your local library because in my County you can go on the website and they have almost any cookbook you could ever imagine in their system, and you can request it and go pick it up.

It's phenomenal. Even all these brand new cookbooks that are coming out, you may say, Hey, I want to go and get some ideas, but I don't necessarily need to purchase every cookbook that comes out. It's a fantastic resource highly recommend the library.

David Crabill: [00:10:35] So, what would you say is indicative of your style? What kind of baked goods do you sell? And what's your, what's your bread and butter?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:10:43] So all the cakes we do are all buttercream based. We don't use fondant in any way, shape or form. And I'm very proud of that because I feel that with buttercream, there is so much, you can do so many different styles and designs. And I think for so long buttercream was put into this category where you just, Oh, it just looks pretty, but you can't do much with it.

So I think it's been really cool learning all the different techniques and the, I do a lot of piping and palette knife flowers and all this really elaborate work So that's really fun for me to do cakes of course, but I really love doing other desserts we do cookie sandwiches, which I would say are probably one of our best-selling items.

So everything from a chocolate sea salt cookie sandwich that the original red velvet I still do. And in the fall we do this sweet corn and black pepper cookie sandwich, which is awesome. And then I do French macarons. I do cream puffs, all different kinds of desserts. We actually just made the decision to kind of stop doing cupcakes.

So I feel like cupcakes are kind of just over done in my area. You can find them everywhere So I'm really trying to focus on desserts that are really unique to the area and really unique to my business.

David Crabill: [00:12:02] Those are some interesting flavors in there. Corn and pepper, I think. Um, Where, where is the inspiration for these flavors coming from?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:12:12] I like to say that a lot of the inspiration I have is from traveling that hence the name wandering, whisk So a lot of the original flavors that were on my menu, I adapted from different trips I have taken the lemon lavender cake is one of our best-selling wedding flavors. And I went to Provence a few years ago with my family and got to go around the market and pick up fresh lavender.

Fresh lavender oils. And it was amazing, but I bring a lot of that inspiration back to me or I'm sorry. Back to the bakery and use that in my desserts. I, I just feel like these unique flavors are something that my area was really lacking, but I want to bring people something more than just a marble cake or a red velvet cake or whatever the grocery store has been making for them all these years.

I want them to come and get a banana nutella cake or a lemon lavender cake, or we do a salted pretzel cake, just something really unique. That's going to blow the guests away when they serve that, that cake.

David Crabill: [00:13:15] Yeah, I do remember reading that the banana nutella cake was like a big thing when you started out, right? Like you won a competition or something.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:13:22] I did. Yes as much as I don't do cupcakes now, cupcakes were important to me at the beginning I think it was in 2015. I had a friend that said, Hey, there's this local cupcake competition. You should really enter it. And I said, okay, what the heck? I'll do it So I had to bake a couple hundred mini cupcakes and I went to this competition and people paid to get in and then they'd walk around and they would pay to they'd pay a dollar to get a vote.

And I had in my little bag at my station over 500 votes for my cupcakes and I won the people's choice award the first and second year that I had entered. And I also won the judges pick for the best buttercream. And it was amazing. It really kick-started my business. And showed me that what I was making was good enough, not just for my family and friends to tell me it was good, but when the public is coming and telling me it's the best cupcake that they had ever eaten that to me was kind of this sign of, okay, well, what I'm doing is good enough because of course you second guess yourself all the time, because you think, Oh, my friends and family love it, but are other people going to come and really enjoy what I'm making?

So that was, that was very cool. And then I actually went on to judge that competition the two years after that. And that was kind of neat being on the other side and seeing these uh, novice bakers come in and bring their cupcakes in for the first time.

David Crabill: [00:14:52] Yeah. And I remember you, you said that you got best buttercream award, and so maybe that's part of the reason why you focus on buttercream, because it's the best.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:15:03] well, and I should say that buttercream award wasn't even an actual award at the competition. They made it up on the spot and the judges, I remember at the end of the award ceremony, they said, okay, well, we have another award that we just created because this was the best buttercream we've ever had.

And so that was kind of like the cherry on top for me. And I'm very proud of our buttercream. It is. I mean, it's, it's delicious. I have people that come in for wedding consultations and. It's usually the groom, that'll say, Oh, I don't really like frosting. And I'll say, just taste it. And they taste it and they say, Oh my gosh, this is so different than what, what they've had at other bakeries.

We don't use shortening or powdered sugar or anything like that in our buttercream. It's just, it's. It's so great.

David Crabill: [00:15:53] Is it, is it a meringue buttercream?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:15:55] It is. Yes. It's a meringue buttercream.

David Crabill: [00:15:58] So it sounds like you, you know, had this really great career, with an associate producer position at HSN. Why did you leave that? And, and go into baking full time.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:16:13] So the story takes a little bit of a turn So I had been telling my family, I think I'm ready to leave this job and open a bakery, a storefront. I took my parents and funny enough, we went out one night to look at a bakery that was for lease and just went and saw it.

And the next morning I walked into work and I was laid off with about 2000 other employees as our company merged and was bought out by another company I look at that timing and it kind of blows my mind. The thought that the night before I was looking at a bakery space, it wasn't the one I ended up getting, but it had me, I had to jump in, totally just jump in right away and figure out what I was doing.

So I took those first few months after I was laid off to formulate a business plan, to write out everything I was doing to get in contact with some realtors and some local business people that could really help me find that perfect space. And I just started doing the research on equipment and. You know, all of the costs associated with starting a business and a storefront.

So I knew I was going to leave that job. I had thought I would walk in one day and put in my notice, but, you know, things went a little different than I had planned, but I look back and I truly think it was a blessing for me that that happened the way it did.

David Crabill: [00:17:40] And at that moment, what was your following or your, your baking business looking like? Cause you're already at least two, three years in right.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:17:50] Oh, I was more than that. I got laid off in October, 2018. And so I had been the business, went under the name, wandering, whisk the summer of 2016. And I

had been doing it a few years prior to that as well So I would say it had been about four years at that point that I had already been operating the business, but.

I was at the point where I really was doing a lot of weddings and a lot of work I knew I had financially, I was going to be able to sustain myself with the business, but I also knew I was going to have to grow even more if I really wanted to not only sustain myself financially, but also be able to have more than just breaking even each month, but being able to pay my bills and to put money away.

And all of a sudden I had to build my own retirement accounts and all that because I no longer had an employer that was, you know, doing the retirement and the health insurance and all that So there's a lot more that goes into it than just, okay, I'm going to find this storefront and I'm going to sign a lease.

That to me was honestly the smallest part of it. It was all of the other things that come with that.

David Crabill: [00:18:59] I'm going to circle back on the commercial bakery in a little bit, but I just wanted to first talk more about how you marketed yourself in the early days. Cause I feel like that's really your specialty what were some of the strategies that you used to market your business or was it really just selling to your coworkers?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:19:21] In the beginning. And really until this day, word of mouth has always been my biggest form of advertisement. I have never spent any money doing any paid marketing. I've never paid for a spot in a magazine. I've never paid for Facebook ads. I have truly done this a hundred percent organically for me at the beginning press was really important for my business.

So one of the first big. Pieces I had written about my business was by the Tampa Bay times. It was in 2016 and it was this huge front page article about wandering whisk bake shop is born and it was an article with the food editor, all about how I started the business, what I specialized in. And that just grew the business overnight.

I was getting phone calls and emails from people saying, Oh, we saw you in the paper. We, you know, we want to support you. We want to buy products from you. That was incredible I always tell people, find ways to market your business through press in your area, whether it's a newspaper, a magazine, you know, so much is done online these days, it could be a local blogger that has a really great following that maybe, they come in to your home and they talk to you and do an interview with you.

Or you give them some desserts or, you know, there's so many ways to get press other than just posting something on your Instagram. But I think people really. Really connect with seeing your name and your business in something that is part of their life So someone that reads the Tampa Bay times every day is going to see this and say, Oh wow.

The food editor always has great recommendations. Why don't I try this bakery? So in the early days, that was really, really important for me because I didn't have a business

Instagram or Facebook page until 2016 So at the beginning, I was just doing all of the marketing through my personal pages.

So it was only friends and family really that were seeing it. But jump on the train, jump on Instagram. If you don't have an Instagram for your business. I think that is a huge, thing at the beginning that you just need to focus on getting this following on Instagram and putting out good content, consistent content.

I don't mean. Putting out a picture of a cake you made and then not posting again for three weeks, you have to really just be consistent with what you're putting out into the world.

David Crabill: [00:21:44] what would you recommend as the strategy for Instagram, for someone who's starting out? Like is once a day enough, do they have to post multiple times a day? What would you say about that?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:21:55] Oh yeah. I don't even post multiple times a day. I'm really big on Instagram stories. I think stories for me almost brings in more views occasionally than an actual static post does people really like to see behind the scenes? You know, me prepping ingredients in the kitchen or filling cookie sandwiches or frosting a cake.

I have a tripod and I'll sometimes just throw my phone up on it and record myself, decorating a cake. And people love that So I think. At the beginning, just be consistent with your posting if you say every two or three days, I'm going to put up a static post on my feed, but then almost every day you should be putting something into your story.

And I save a lot of content I have a, you know, say I have a really busy week leading up to a holiday in the kitchen. I'm going to film a ton of content. I'm not going to post all of that content that week, because I don't want to overload people, but I might save some of that and say, okay, I have a week coming up.

That's not super busy in the kitchen I'm going to post all of that content during that week. Nobody knows if you weren't filling cookie sandwiches on the day you posted it. And it was from three weeks prior, but really saving up that content is really important to making sure you have something to post every day.

David Crabill: [00:23:11] So you started with some local connections. Like a newspaper article. And did you already have a connection with that editor or was that something you initiated or did they ask you to do that?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:23:24] No, that was very. Organic. She just found me reached out to me, but that's another tip I have So when you're on Instagram tag, these local businesses, so tag your local newspaper or a local entertainment magazine, or a food magazine, anyone that you want to feature your business, tag them in your photos or in your posts, because if they don't know you exist, they can never call you up to do a feature on you.

So just make yourself visible in that community. And you'll be surprised at how many people want to reach out and learn about your story.

David Crabill: [00:23:58] And it looked like you were also connecting with a wedding planners in the beginning.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:24:04] wedding planners are. Vital to the success of your business, but not only wedding planners, but other vendors in the industry So I've connected with photographers, with florists, with all different people in the wedding and event industry.

And now that they know me as a person, as a business owner, they're familiar and hopefully love my desserts, they are going to recommend me to more of their clients So I think that's a win-win because I'm recommending a florist and then they're recommending me to their clients and that's a great way to get business and you're not paying anyone to recommend you. So I highly recommend just getting out there and getting to know your local vendors.

David Crabill: [00:24:47] Do you think that your photos were what was capturing people's attention? I mean, I could see your photos today and they look incredible, but um, yeah. And I don't know if, if you hire that out or if you do them yourself, but was that something like a skill that came from your producing days? And, and is that what caused your Instagram feed to get so noticed?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:25:11] I do all my own photos unless I tag a photographer. And, you know, if it's maybe a wedding cake that a photographer took a photo of, other than that, everything is taken by me, mostly taken in the bakery. And My dad had given me this really old DSLR camera.

I eventually got another camera. I got a little bit nicer camera Nikon, but it was a refurbished camera. So I didn't even spend a ton of money on it, but I just learned how to take photos using daylight as the primary focus you never want to use the flash, just go by a really nice bright window. And the photos are so important to a business, especially a new business, because if somebody has never tasted your desserts or has never read a good review about you, but they want to purchase something from you.

The first thing they're going to do is they're going to see a photo of your product if someone sees a photo that's taken in a messy kitchen, all they see are dirty dishes behind it. You know, that cake or that cookie may taste amazing, but it's not appealing to that potential client having really bright cheery photos in my opinion, just really helps your business at the beginning.

David Crabill: [00:26:28] You were doing this back in 2013 when the smartphone cameras weren't as good. And now we're in 2021. Do you still think that if you were starting today, you would invest in a refurbished DSLR camera as opposed to using a smartphone?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:26:46] Absolutely. I stand by that because I still shoot. Almost every photo that's on my Instagram feed itself is taken on my DSLR camera. I still see an incredible quality difference between an iPhone and what I call a real camera anything you see in my story, that's quickly shot in the kitchen or just behind the scenes.

That's almost always shot on my iPhone, but I think having, you know, you're creating this really beautiful cake and the quality of the photo and, you know, you just want it to be

perfect because people are coming to you and spending all of this money on some beautiful cake or wedding cake or desserts.

And to me, investing a little bit of money into a real camera is just going to pay off a thousand times

David Crabill: [00:27:36] The other side of that though, is the uh, complexity of a DSLR camera obviously can do anything, but it takes a bit of learning to know how to use it So were you taking courses or experimenting? Like how did you develop your skills of using a DSLR?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:27:56] I took a few really basic classes, but to be honest, I don't do anything real fancy on the camera. I let the light from, you know, where I'm shooting the daylight come in. I let that do a lot of the work I do a little editing on the photos. Like I will edit out like a shadow or maybe enhance it a little bit if it just looks a little dark, but I think it's important to obviously know how to operate the camera, but a lot of photographers that I've become friends with over the years. Other wedding and event photographers have been really helpful in just teaching me little tips and tricks of you know, easy ways to kind of capture my desserts.

David Crabill: [00:28:36] Uh, so moving forward in your business, I know you left your job and were looking into starting a uh, full on storefront So how long did it take between the time you were laid off and the time you're actually able to get your storefront opened.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:28:55] I opened the storefront almost one year to the date of when I was laid off, I didn't start looking at spaces immediately.

I didn't get laid off and the next day I was looking at spaces, took a little bit of time to kind of process what was happening, what I needed to do in that time, I immediately started writing a business plan. I think a business plan is incredibly important for me. I was not using investors and all that, so I didn't.

Really needed business plan to provide to anyone else, but it was for me so that I could sit down with all of my ideas and really get them into one place to make sure that what I was planning to do is gonna make me enough money and was gonna be feasible with my life. And um, I found the storefronts after, I would say it took about three months.

I started in January looking at places and it was a challenge. I was being shown places by realtors that the rent was \$5,000, \$7,000 a month for a tiny little space that wasn't even a kitchen. It needed to completely be gutted and redone. And so I got very discouraged at the beginning and I said, there's no way I'm ever going to be able to do this.

Uh, You know, a kitchen remodel could be \$50,000, \$100,000. I said, I don't know how I'm ever going to be able to afford this. So. I kept looking and I kept sticking with it. And the storefront I'm in now it's about 10 to 15 minutes from our downtown area. And I learned that going off the beaten path just a little bit, really helped in the cost of what I'm paying for my rent.

And there are so many factors in getting a storefront that you have to consider. And one of them is the location, of course. But if you're in right in that downtown area or right on that main street, you're going to pay probably five times what you'd pay. If you just went off the beaten path a little bit.

So for me, it was just kind of going out just trying to figure out the area, figure out what was going to be best for my business. And I'm not a full on storefront where I have people walking in every day. I'm more of a destination So we are by appointment only that essentially means we're a custom order bakery.

So people will. Go on our website they'll order ahead of time. And then they come to pick up at the bakery. And so I wasn't real concerned about the walking traffic or people going to find us by walking by that didn't really mean much to me So that was helpful in being able to find something that was a little out of the way.

David Crabill: [00:31:31] So when you opened, like opening day, wasn't even a big deal for you because you didn't have customers coming in. Right.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:31:39] Well, it was a big deal So I say that we're a custom order bakery and we do all everything's made to order, but we do these pop-up events they're at our shop and it's just a day that we open up and we fill we have a big dessert case in the front and we fill the case with items and.

It started out as this idea of, Oh, I'll do this maybe a couple of times a month. I'll open on a Saturday. People can come in and get desserts. Well, the first one we did for our grand opening, we sold out in, I think it was a little over an hour and I had baked for probably a solid week to prepare for that day.

The line was around the block. I figured, okay, this is, you know, this is great for our grand opening, but it won't continue to be like that a year and a half later, our line is longer. Every single time we open for a pop-up to the point where people are now camping out in the morning, bringing lawn chairs and blankets and coming several hours before we open, just to get in line so that they could be first in line to get in and get the items that they want.

David Crabill: [00:32:44] That sounds like an Apple store to me.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:32:47] Yeah. Like when the new iPhone releases, I like to think that we kind of have this cult following of people that wait for us to do these pop-ups and they pick out what they want. Cause I post the menu a couple days in advance and people come in with lists of items that they want. And it's really cool because we don't just open and say, okay, we're going to just bake a bunch of random things for the case.

It's always themed or it's around a holiday So of course we do, you know, a couple at Christmas, Thanksgiving Valentine's day, but then we did this really awesome one last year, it was a retro pop-up everything was like 90s themed desserts and we did. Like Dunkaroos and cosmic brownies and hostess cupcakes, and all the kind of nostalgic treats.

So we're getting ready to do a really big summer one So every dessert in the case is really tailored for whatever that theme or that holiday is.

David Crabill: [00:33:43] It sounds like the uh, themed popups has worked so well for your bakery. If you were a cottage food Baker, do you feel like you could have translated that idea into the cottage food space in some way?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:34:00] Yeah, for sure. I think just finding a place that you can host it is the key in doing something like that. I see a lot of cottage bakers. That host uh, kind of similar to my pop-ups, you know, maybe in a coffee shop, they uh, sell products and they have it displayed on the countertop at a coffee shop or they do pre-orders.

But the pop-up shops are definitely a great way to get your name out. You know, whether you're doing a farmer's market or you're setting up somewhere else. it's a great way for people to kind of get to know you and your product.

David Crabill: [00:34:34] do you feel like you wish you had expanded sooner or maybe left your job sooner or um, do you feel like it all kind of came together at the right time?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:34:44] I think it came together perfectly for me. I had just said that I was going to wait probably another six to 10 months before I left my job. I was trying to just save up enough money to open up the business with the money I had put aside. And so I said, Oh, I'm going to wait a couple more, you know, a few more months until I open up the brick and mortar.

But you know, it all happened. It was a little different than my plan, but it truly worked out. Better than I probably could have hoped for. I look back in those first few months when I was trying to find a space. And even when I had signed the lease and was doing the renovations on the, on the bakery and I was so overwhelmed, I said, is it going to be this hard all the time?

Is it always going to feel like there's something completely new happening all the time between getting all my licenses and insurance and equipment. And it just felt very overwhelming at the beginning, but once you get into it and once you have your space and you get into a rhythm, it is such a wonderful thing to have your own business and to be your own boss.

David Crabill: [00:35:52] Do you market yourself in a different way now? Like, do you feel like the marketing just takes care of itself now? Or are you still really proactive about marketing your business with the commercial bakery?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:36:04] Oh, I'm still in very proactive of marketing the business constantly. I think the social media side of it is a whole another facet of the business that a lot of people just don't consider when starting a business. People probably assume that I'm just in the bakery baking things five days a week. And that is so far from the truth I am in there baking and prepping orders.

But so much of my time is spent doing the marketing side of it and doing the administrative side of it like I said earlier, the Instagram part of it is so incredibly important because for me. I would say about 75% of my business comes from Instagram I'm very consistent with what I'm posting, but then I also do like these email newsletters, which I think are really important.

So every time we post a new menu for a holiday or we're having a pop-up, I send out a menu to my email subscribers, and that's a really great way to just drop into someone's inbox I think you can do that very early on in your business, you know, get those email subscribers, capture them either through your website have a little pop-up come up to capture them, or if you're out in the market, something as simple as having a clipboard out there and having people put in their email addresses and then putting them on a newsletter, it's, that's a fantastic way to really get people's attention.

But I just think as often as you can be in someone's face as weird as that sounds, you want to make yourself known like I posted a mother's day menu a few days ago. Okay. So that first day I post that menu, we never get a ton of orders the very first day. But as I consistently post about that menu and remind people, okay.

The deadline's approaching. And as I focus on, you know, showing them more behind the scenes of how this cookie sandwich was created or how this tart was created, it intrigues people So then after they see me post that menu five times, they may eventually click on that menu and say, okay, well now I'm convinced and I want to buy something.

So it's really important to just stay consistent on what you're posting and to just really, you want to be at the top of someone's mind. And so I think by being there consistently, that's the best way to gain new customers and to remind your current customers that, you know, you had something new for them.

David Crabill: [00:38:30] How many employees do you currently have?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:38:34] Well, the employees are me. I run pretty much everything on a day to day. My mom is an asset to my business. She's amazing. She comes in and she helps around all of my pop-ups and holidays and helps me with a lot of the weddings I do. And then. Um, My brother and my sister-in-law and her mom are my pop-up team.

They come and they help me at a lot of pop-ups and I have friends that come in and help. I have a friend that's a private chef, and when she's home, she'll come in and help me. We did the super bowl back in February, we were contracted by the NFL to do a huge tailgate event at the stadium, which was awesome.

But I had to bake several thousand cookies in a couple day period So I had a couple of my friends come in and I hire them to come in and help with the prep, but it's been great. I could probably hire some people, but I've gotten to the point where I'm just very comfortable with the way I do things and the team that I've built with friends and family coming in that I don't feel like I may be at the point where I need to bring anyone else in from the outside quite yet.

David Crabill: [00:39:42] So, how has your pricing changed over time? Uh, What did you use to price at when you started and I can see that your prices are pretty high these days, so how's that evolved?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:39:56] I don't like to say our prices are high. I like to say they're comparable with the work that we're doing and the quality of the product that people are receiving you may look at our cakes and think, wow, \$150. That's expensive for a birthday cake. Well, yes it is. If you're used to going to Publix and buying, you know, a cake there or going maybe to a bakery that doesn't value the quality of the product or the design quite as much, but pricing has evolved so much over the last few years.

So when you start out, you undervalue a lot of your product because you think. Well, why would anybody want to buy from me when they could go to a bakery and buy from them? So when you're working out of your home and I'm speaking from my experience, so not everyone may have these same thoughts, but the way I felt was, well, I'm baking out of my apartment.

Why would someone want to buy a wedding cake from me out of my apartment when they could go to this fancy bakery down the street? So I was definitely charging a lot less than I probably should have at the beginning. And sometimes I like to go back and see how much I was charging and maybe offering free delivery and just not valuing the time I was putting into it.

So also I should speak about just insurance really quick as a home Baker at the beginning, I thought, well, why would I need insurance? And I think that's a really big thing. It's very important to have liability insurance when you're first starting out, because that covers you.

If anything ever goes wrong and someone tries to come back and wants to Sue you for any reason So that was another thing that I had to incorporate into my pricing so pricing is, it's a game it's kind of figuring out what your market will entail.

So thinking about where you live and who those clients are for you, what are they going to pay? Because if you live in a real small, rural town charging a hundred dollars for a cake. That may be impossible for you because no, one's going to pay that. Versus I live in a pretty big area. I do a lot of weddings in Tampa and St. Pete and I have the people, you know, the clients that want to spend that kind of money on things So for me, pricing has just kind of evolved over the years

David Crabill: [00:42:18] Yeah. And when I said um, high prices actually, wasn't really referring to your cakes the prices that were surprising to me were your dessert prices, where you're charging, you know, over \$50, a dozen for a cookie sandwiches or uh, brownies, I think we're over \$60 a dozen

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:42:38] Yup. That justifies the time and well, cause if you think about, so if you walk into a storefront bakery, So I think about some of our bakeries in like our downtown area, I walk in and they're selling a cookie sandwich for \$7 So although you see on the website, wow. \$60 for a dozen cookie sandwiches, that seems like a lot, that's \$5 a piece.

So people see it as a larger number because everything has to be bought by the dozen yeah. I mean, like I said, my prices have changed over the years and I find that the clients that I have have no problem spending the money on the quality and the designs and all that, that we provide.

And I, I market ourselves as we're a high end boutique bakery I'm not trying to compare wandering whisk with a lower end bakery or a grocery store that's like comparing Neiman Marcus and Walmart. It's just, you can't compare them. They're just very different types of businesses.

David Crabill: [00:43:37] Did you feel apprehensive about raising your prices? Like were you nervous to raise your prices the first time you did so.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:43:45] Oh, I mean, at the beginning, for sure, because you're charging whatever this price was, you know, I probably started selling cookie sandwiches for \$20, a dozen or \$25 a dozen, whatever it was at the very beginning. And I remember I took a pricing course very early on. And that to me was very pivotal because it taught me all of those things. I just talked about to consider all of the different factors in your pricing. But of course at the beginning, when you raise your prices, you think, Oh my gosh, if I add \$10 to a dozen cookies, and now all of a sudden it's \$25 to \$35, are people going to buy it?

And you know, what's crazy. Every time you have a price increase. Yes. There may be a few people that don't come back because they say, Oh, that's too expensive, but those are not the clients you want to serve anyways So I always say you want to work harder or I'm sorry, you want to work smarter, not harder.

So it's very important to make sure the product you're putting out is at an appropriate price point that you're not only breaking even on it, but you're earning a profit on it. And that's something I very wholeheartedly believe I am earning a profit in my business and I've been in my shop for a year and a half and people told me, Oh, give it five years.

You'll finally earn a profit. And you know, I never believed that because I said, if you're running a smart business and you've really worked out your financials and you've really sat down and looked at what you're spending and what you're putting out, you can run a profitable business very early on.

So I think that is a myth that you're going to spend the first five years, never earning a dime for yourself.

David Crabill: [00:45:28] Do you feel like, as you've grown, you have increased your prices to, to maintain your sanity, like to actually reduce the amount of um, orders that come in.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:45:39] Yeah, as time goes on, you just have to evaluate what you're putting out and making sure that you're bringing enough money in.

But with that, when you're selling. All of these different kinds of products, cakes, and cookies, and all of this. For me, I would rather focus on working a few large events and weddings per month than doing a hundred birthday cakes. That's not to say I don't enjoy

doing that because I enjoy doing the smaller orders and the smaller birthday cakes and getting to connect with those types of clients.

But for me, I would really rather focus on doing a really big corporate event and putting out thousands of items or a big wedding that has a cake and a dessert table

and favors and all of that. Rather than working myself to death, creating hundreds of birthday cakes, just to earn the same amount of money that I could have earned from doing maybe five weddings and a corporate event each month.

David Crabill: [00:46:36] just, before we, uh, close up this interview, I did want to ask you know, sort of the fun question about uh, it looked like as you were getting, going with your commercial bakery, you ended up getting on the food network. And obviously you've had a lot of TV experience before that. Um, But was that something that you were trying to do or you applying and how, what was that experience like?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:47:00] So, no, that was a very random experience the year prior I had interviewed for the great American baking show, which was on ABC, it's the British bake-off spinoff in America I was approached for that and I actually got to the finals and flew from New York to LA the next weekend and did all of the auditions and made it to the top 20.

And then didn't make it. And I was super bummed. I had gotten this far and, you know, thought, okay, I'm going to take a break. I'm not going to apply for anything. I'm just going to, you know, focus on, what's to come with the bakery So I got a call from a food network, casting director, kind of out of the blue.

And he told me they were casting for Halloween baking championship. And although I love the show and I love Halloween. I said, I don't think my cakes are scary or gory enough to be on Halloween baking. And he said, well, we have this other new concept. It's holiday baking championship, which a lot of you have probably watched, but they were doing a spin-off episode and it was called Christmas in July.

So The competition was based on making Christmas themed desserts, but with a summer twist So I said, Hey, that's no problem. I got this. I live in Florida. My whole life is all about doing things around the holidays, but it's a hundred degrees outside So I spent several months doing the audition process.

It's it was a mix of Skype interviews. I had to bake on camera and present a cake on camera to some producers out in LA. It was very crazy So I went through several months of auditioning and I got the call about two weeks before I was to fly out to LA to do the filming and doing the show itself was such an incredible experience.

It's taxing on your body because you are filming for about 16 hours a day, you're in the studio it's exhausting. You're not only running around and baking under a time limit, but you're also trying to remember what it is that you're making while the producers are asking you questions and there's a million cameras following you.

And I might've set a potholder on fire, which they didn't show, but yeah, it was such a cool experience. I don't know that I would do it again, but you never know what the future holds.

David Crabill: [00:49:21] How was it on the other side, you know, obviously were interacting with producers. But now you're actually on the camera, right?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:49:30] Yeah, so that was weird because each contestant on the show, each Baker had their own producer. That was with them the whole time So that producer was just like keeping an eye on everything you were doing, because then when you watch these baking shows, you see that there's these little off camera interviews where you see someone baking in the kitchen and then you see the Baker afterwards talking about what they were doing.

So I worked very closely with my producer to uh, you know, explain the processes of everything, but it was interesting because so much of the process felt so familiar to me and being on camera did not make me nearly as nervous as I thought it was going to be.

Just because being in a TV studio with my job for six years it kind of felt like second nature.

David Crabill: [00:50:16] And I noticed that you also have done morning shows like local morning shows on TV. Is that something that your connections from your producer days has gotten you or have you sought that out or have they reached out to you to do those spots?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:50:32] Yeah. So a lot of it was, I, I knew people that knew people So I had some friends, one of them was a friend from high school that was a producer on one of the morning shows. And she said, Hey, come be a guest. But that's a really good point, David, because when I first started and was very new in the cottage world and was first baking out of my home, doing those morning shows was one of the first things I did to really get real face time with people out there.

So that's a great way. To introduce your business to people in your community So my advice is reach out to the producers on those shows. A lot of them have pitch forms on their website that you can go on and let them know about your business. But yeah, I did several of those and I really feel like it got me this great experience of being on camera and kind of learning that side of it.

But, you know, it never really hurts to, you know, one more person out there sees you and learns about your business and then they tell someone about you. And I wouldn't say the morning shows had a significant amount of traffic to my business compared to being in like the Tampa Bay times. But Hey, it, it got me comfortable being on camera.

And I always say any experience you can get like that is, is not bad. I mean, just take advantage of what you're given, especially at the beginning.

David Crabill: [00:51:55] Well, you've definitely come very far in your business. And I can tell that you have a very uh, successful commercial bakery. What are your next steps? Where are you looking to go from here?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:52:08] Well, we just started teaching classes at the bakery that got pushed from 2020 to 2021 So we just started teaching French macaroon classes, cake decorating classes. I'm really focusing on getting more people into the bakery to, you know, hone in on their skills and learn something new.

And I have a lot of people that don't even have real experience with baking that enjoy coming in and just doing something fun with friends or family So for me, that is. I would say the next big step of just getting classes going and you know, just always growing. It's like we just did the super bowl.

And so always looking for new opportunities of big events that are coming to town and working with them. But right now I feel like I'm at this point where we've grown very quickly and I think it's okay to say I'm not looking to grow significantly in the next six months.

I'm looking to maintain what I'm doing, but to refine what I'm doing. So at this point I've been going through a lot of my recipes. I've been tweaking things. I've been coming up with new creative things to put on my menu and that's something else I've spent a lot of time working on my website recently.

So as a cottage Baker, I got a website very early on and it just so happened that my brother knew how to do that he created a website for me, but there's so many of these website templates that are so easy to manage yourself. You don't have to go pay some designer to do this very fancy website when you're first starting out.

But that's something I definitely recommend at the beginning, get a website, put some of your pricing on there. Put a little bit about your story and who you are so people can connect with you. But yeah, I've, I've spent a lot of time just um, making sure everything I'm putting out there looks as awesome as I want it to.

David Crabill: [00:54:00] So that's the, like the next year, but you said you had a business plan. Do you have a plan for what you want to do in say five years or what you'd like to achieve in your business?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:54:12] I mean five years from now. I'd like to think I'll be in a bigger space and I will have a staff that um, we can just take on more work and uh, take on more weddings and just do more of these large events and maybe host pop-ups more regularly. I don't see ourselves being a retail bakery at any point where we're open every day.

For me, that is just. It's so much commitment to have to fill a case every single day, because we do so much custom work. And for me just doing the custom work is so profitable for my business I really just see our business growing, maybe doing classes on a more regular basis, and I just want to travel a ton more.

And I think that's, what's very cool about the way I've set up the business is that I'm able to take time to go around and travel, take classes. I've taken classes from San Francisco to Paris at Le cordon Bleu to Vancouver, Canada. I love to travel and educate myself wherever I can. And I think bringing back those skills is what really makes my business unique and makes wandering, which is so different than just your standard run of the mill kind of bakery.

I just uh, want to continue to grow and really wow. People just really unique items.

David Crabill: [00:55:30] Yeah, you gotta go out and find some uh, some more flavors out there to, to bring back, right?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:55:35] Yeah. Yes. Got the list and ready to ready to travel as soon as I can get out there.

David Crabill: [00:55:42] Is there any kind of memorable story from the last few years that comes to mind that that really stands out to you as you've run this business?

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:55:52] I mean, I can tell you a funny story of one of the probably one of the first years I was doing the cottage work just in my first apartment. So the little apartment I was working out of had the oven was not only crooked. It was probably about 50 degrees off, which I didn't know until I learned what an oven thermometer was. And I used my oven to store all of my Tupperware and things like that when I got into a pinch and didn't have room to put it anywhere else.

So I had done this set of custom decorated sugar cookies, and I put them in a Tupperware and then put them in the oven overnight thinking, Oh, they'll be safe in there. Well, the next day I go to preheat the oven and I smelled burning plastic and realized that that Tupperware full of cookies in the oven had completely melted and there was hot plastic all over my oven.

So I just look back at that and, you know, I like to look back at a lot of the mistakes I made at the beginning and just kind of laugh at them now. But you know, a lot of those things that you think, Oh my gosh, how embarrassing? I can't believe I did that. Or. just take that with a grain of salt and remember that you're just starting and as the journey progresses, crazy things are going to happen.

And so just don't take yourself too seriously and just remember, you know, we're in a creative business, it's meant to be fun and exciting So yeah, laugh at the little things.

David Crabill: [00:57:19] Thank you so much for coming on the show. Um, If people want to reach out to you how can they contact you or find you.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:57:28] Yeah. So I've been talking about Instagram a lot, so you can follow us on Instagram. It's at wandering, whisk, and same on Facebook, just search wandering whisk bakeshop and you can find our page. And then our website is wanderingwhiskbakeshop.com. And I like to think for a lot of the newer bakers out there that don't have a website quite yet, or still tailoring their website.

go onto different bakeries websites, go to ours, find some other bakeries. And that's how I really learned what was best to kind of put out there and social media too just visit other people's pages. Look at their stories, look at the reels they're making and just get ideas. And that's the best way you can learn.

David Crabill: [00:58:10] Well, thank you so much for sharing uh, tons of great tips uh, that you shared with us today. And yeah. Thank you very much for coming on the show.

Jennifer Jacobs: [00:58:19] Thank you so much, David, this has been awesome. I hope you guys took something away from this conversation.

David Crabill: [00:58:26] That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. Jennifer's story is proof that if you consistently commit a few hours per day to a side business, you can create something amazing in just a few short years.

For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/34.

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

And finally, if you are thinking about starting your own home bakery, 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.