

# The One-Woman Show with Amanda Luecke

**David Crabill:** Welcome to the Forrager podcast, where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs, about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill, and today I'm talking with Amanda Luecke.

Amanda lives in Maple Grove, Minnesota, and sells custom decorated cookies with her cottage food business Minnie's Cookies.

now, you might recall that I recently had Janna Paterno on the show and like Janna, Amanda creates some of the best custom decorated cookies you've ever seen. You should check out her Instagram account right now.

but unlike Janna, Amanda has no plans to shut down her business anytime soon, quite the opposite.

In fact, her cookie business is absolutely thriving. She has 26,000 followers on Instagram is always fully booked months in advance despite her high pricing. And now runs an increasing number of cookie decorating classes that bring in about \$2,000 each,

but as glamorous as all that may seem, Amanda is very open and honest about the fact that trying to juggle everything as a one woman show has definitely not been easy, especially as a stay at home, mom of two young kids.

In this episode, you get to hear how Amanda went from knowing absolutely nothing about cookie decorating, to building these super successful business that she has today. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Amanda.

Nice to have you here.

[00:01:21] **Amanda Luecke:** you so much for having me.

[00:01:23] **David Crabill:** So Amanda, can you take me back to the beginning of this cookie decorating journey? How did it all get started?

[00:01:30] **Amanda Luecke:** So. my mom ended up passing away back in February of 2016. And after she passed away, I ended up quitting my job so I

could stay home with my daughter. And at the time she was only nine months old. So I really wanted to find a way so I could be home with her. while I was looking for ways to make money from staying at home, I just started baking, because baking has always been my therapy.

And when I was looking at new recipes or new things to try, I came across these Royal ice butterfly cookies online, and I thought that they were the most beautiful cookies I'd ever seen. So of course I had to research them and I ended up looking and listening and watching tons of YouTube videos And I would make as many cookies as I can in a day. And after a few months of making cookies for friends and family, my husband suggested that I start selling them. So that's kind of where my business began.

[00:02:31] **David Crabill:** So I'm seeing that you just have the most amazing cookies and you definitely have a very creative side. So where does that come from? do you have a background in art anyway? So

[00:02:43] **Amanda Luecke:** I do. I have been doing art since I can remember. I went to a lot of different art camps and stuff as a kid. I've been drawing, especially drawing since I was little.

And I ended up studying art in college as well, mostly painting. So I definitely have an art creative background,

[00:03:03] **David Crabill:** do you feel like your artistic abilities transferred over to the cookie medium very easily. How are those first cookies when you try them?

[00:03:12] **Amanda Luecke:** Well, decorating with bags of royal icing is very different than, you know, using pencils or markers or paint brushes and things like that. But I think just being able to see things in a creative way, I guess you could say, when I would look at something, I was able to kind of break it down into the different parts of it.

Like I would with any drawing that I would be starting. And I was so. Ambitious and so motivated to learn I think it was just a new creative medium for me. And that's what really excited me about it.

[00:03:49] **David Crabill:** about how long were you experimenting with different cookies and decorating before you felt like, you know what? These are ready to. So, do you remember what your first

[00:04:01] **Amanda Luecke:** So honestly, like I did it for a few months before I started selling, but when my husband suggested that I start selling these cookies, I thought it was the most ridiculous idea ever, because I just thought why in the world would people buy these decorated cookies from me? And at the time I remember doing all this research and trying to figure out, okay, are there other people that do decorated cookies around me?

And I didn't find anyone. later on it turns out that there are tons of people, but at that time I didn't find anyone. And so I didn't really have any information to really go off of But I was very nervous to start doing it. And the feedback I got from, you know, customers in the community was amazing.

[00:04:44] **David Crabill:** So do you remember what your first order or your first sale was like? What

[00:04:49] **Amanda Luecke:** the first kind of paid order, I guess you could say is I made cookies for my grandma and of course I told her she didn't have to pay me, but I made um, Mason jar and then I made flower cookies. So it kind of looked like a bouquet of flowers inside of a Mason jar. And she gave me \$15 for them so it was very sweet, but my first actual paid order was a friend of mine who ordered cookies for her son's birthday and they were t terrain cookies.

[00:05:18] **David Crabill:** did you charge for your first order?

[00:05:22] **Amanda Luecke:** I think my first cookies I ever started with, I had a flat rate of \$34 a dozen, which is ridiculous now.

[00:05:33] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I mean, it's crazy to see what you're selling cookies for. Now. We will get into that. so did you have any expectations for this business? I mean, what did you think would come of trying to sell your cookies? All

[00:05:45] **Amanda Luecke:** Oh, my gosh. I remember this conversation so well, my dad has always been very supportive of my business and anything I've wanted to do in my life. So when I told him about this, he really helped me with the business side of it. And we were trying to come up with a plan of what my goal would be for my first year And I was just hoping to maybe sell a dozen cookies a month, you know, one order a month. That's what my goal was. It just seemed like, okay, if I can do one order a month and that's pretty good. So it's crazy. . Right,

[00:06:21] **David Crabill:** Alright \$34 a month.

[00:06:23] **Amanda Luecke:** right. Well, because when I first started, you know, I wasn't thinking, oh my gosh, I'm gonna make so much money from this business. I was just thinking, this is really fun. I love doing this. I can stay home and I can see where it goes, but I just didn't know if people would be interested in decorated cookies.

[00:06:43] **David Crabill:** take me through that trajectory of your first few months or year. What was the actual trajectory of your business? Like.

[00:06:51] **Amanda Luecke:** basically I had posted. In a local, I think garage sale, Facebook group or something that I did cookies. And because I was new and had never done cookies before, I didn't have a portfolio full of my work.

And so whenever any order came in, no matter what it was, no matter if I thought I could do it or not, I would take it. And then I would just force myself to learn whatever I needed to learn, to get that order done. And because I had so much ambition I learned a lot of new skills very quickly because I needed to because I told people I would do their orders. and since the beginning I've started this business, I've been booked as much as I've wanted to be, which is amazing.

[00:07:38] **David Crabill:** Where, where does this ambition come from? Because you said at the time your mom passed away, you had a nine month old. So I guess uh, she was just over a year old when you started the business where did you find the time to focus on it?

[00:07:53] **Amanda Luecke:** which is still the case today. A lot of my decorating has to be done after my kids go to sleep. So a lot of the times I don't even start decorating cookies until 9, 10, 11 o'clock at night. I've always been a night owl, so that really helps because if I wasn't, I don't know if I would've survived my first two years of cookie decorating, I just love learning new things. And when I learn something new, I put everything I have into learning it and to becoming good at it. I really that's my goal for anything new that I try is that I really strive to become as good as I can and to learn as much as I can, and to constantly be trying new things, to keep pushing myself.

[00:08:38] **David Crabill:** You think of an order when you really had a big learning curve? Like it was very challenging order to figure out or complete.

[00:08:50] **Amanda Luecke:** Yes. So within my first few months I had a customer who's still one of my Most loyal customers today. She's seen me through everything, all my changes in my business, but she ordered cookies for

the state fair so this was what for August. So just a couple months into my business, she wanted cookies of all of the different vintage food signs that you see at the state fair.

I just had no idea how I was gonna get these done. I didn't know, painting was a thing like now I paint all the time on my cookies. I loved to paint, but I didn't know that was a thing. and I didn't know that airbrushing was a thing.

So I was trying to create shading it was just such a learning curve. And the fact that, they turned out as well as they did she's ordered them multiple times since the exact same order. And it's so fun for her and I to see how they change and how I change them and how I do them differently. So that was one of my most challenging things, just because I had no idea,

[00:09:53] **David Crabill:** that's obviously an example of learning through. Is that how you've mostly learned or have you learned from online resources as well?

[00:10:02] **Amanda Luecke:** Both. I learned everything I've learned about this cookie business through YouTube videos, and now they have so many cookie groups and resources on Facebook.

Amazing. And I just, I didn't have any of these things when I first started. And so I was kind of going in blind, but as I took on more orders and learned about new techniques and started meeting other local bakers, you know, my whole world opened up more. And when I learned about Facebook groups, then it opened up even more. But for the first, I don't know, year, year and a half, I kind of felt like I was just alone in this little bubble because I just didn't know that there were other people like me out there.

[00:10:45] **David Crabill:** what are some of your favorite, Facebook groups for cookie decorating? What, which uh, ones would you recommend to someone who's trying to get started?

[00:10:54] **Amanda Luecke:** Well, I know that there's one that I'm not in. I used to be in it, but it's, I think cookie decorating for beginners. They really try to have only beginners in there. So then nobody feels, pressure up to have certain cookies look a certain way. I think groups like that are great. There is a sugar cookie marketing group that has a lot of really useful information.

It's run by these two twins that have a marketing background. So they help with a lot of the marketing side of your business, which is different from a lot of

cookie groups that are just strictly asking questions. About anything to do with cookies. And then if you just search cookie decorating groups, there's so many. There's just a lot more resources out there. And I have people that message me all the time on Instagram asking me questions. So you can always reach out to other cookies decorators, bakers that you see online and ask them questions as.

[00:11:53] **David Crabill:** So you said that you've always been as busy as you wanted to be and I'm sure you do a lot more now than you did when you started. So how has your busyness changed over the years?

[00:12:07] **Amanda Luecke:** I first started my business, everything was very focused on, cookie decorating. And I took a lot of orders when I first started and I kind of had to start scaling back from that actually, you know, as my daughter got older and she wanted to do more things and she needed more of my attention, I couldn't do basically anything during the day, even prep work and things like that.

Everything had to wait. But a lot of times, especially around the holidays when I have holiday presales, those are really big because if you can't get cookies, custom cookies from me during the year, then times when you can get them are during presales,

and so during holidays, I tend to take on a lot more, with custom orders, you know, everything's very specific to that person's order. Whereas holiday orders, I get to choose whatever I wanna do and then I'm doing just those designs. So I can generally take on a lot more.

I think my, busiest week I don't know, last Christmas was pretty crazy. but I've had weeks where I've done. Upwards of 60 to 70 dozen cookies. And it's been really crazy,

[00:13:18] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So that's, that's a lot of custom decorated cookies, especially with the, level of detail that you put into your cookies. So what's kind of your style? Like what's your cookie decorating style uh, that you prefer?

[00:13:33] **Amanda Luecke:** you're doing. It took me a really long time to get. What my style was. So that's a really funny question because even just last year I remember there were times when I was like, I really wanna find my style and I didn't think I had one. And then when I would talk to my cookie decorating friends, they'd be like, you definitely have a style, which I just didn't realize.



Because a lot when you first start is you're looking at other people's work and, taking inspiration from those. Whereas now that I've been in this for six years, I can kind of look everywhere around me and kind of figure out what I want. So I like kind of like a minimalist style, not simple, but minimalist.

So I, I. very clean and classy looking orders. I like more muted colors. I'll do bright colors. I'll do any, you know, type of colors that there are, but I do like more muted colors and sophisticated looking. I don't know if that's the right word for it. But I do love to do a lot of texture. So whenever I can, I like to add different types of texture, whether it be using parchment paper to create texture or brushes, to create texture with thicker icing or palette knife to scrape icing across cookies, to give it texture and just painting. So

a lot of my cookies that you'll see. Over the last six months to a year is very close to my style because now the orders that come in are people who just tell me here is my theme.

Here is my color palette, and you can do whatever you want. So that has been amazing. Just being able to take somebody's theme and having them trust me enough to create cookies for them in whatever style that I prefer, because now a majority of my customers are customers that I've had for years. So if I have new ones come in, sometimes people will have more detailed requests from me just because they don't know me. They don't know what they're gonna get from me. but I always tell people if you give me free reign, your cookies will be better.

And not because I'm going to purposely make them better. It's because when I have creative freedom, I tend to do more designs and I tend to try out more techniques versus when you want me to stick within parameters. Then that's where my mind goes because I wanna give my customers whatever they want.

So if they want, if they're very specific with me and what they want, I won't veer off of that. That's what they'll get, because I wanna make my customers happy. But if they trust me enough to let me do whatever I wanna do, they're going to get a set that has a lot more variety, a lot more designs and that I would hope that they would be happy.

[00:16:24] **David Crabill:** So, can you walk me through the pricing? I know you said that you were selling his cookies for less than \$3 a piece when you started. How has your pricing changed over the years?

[00:16:36] **Amanda Luecke:** So I started out with one price, which was \$34 a dozen. And then probably by the next year or two, then I moved to a tiered

system where I had, I think it was 34, 30, 6 and 38. And I stuck with that for a while. but as I got better, I would have other cookie decorators telling me, you should really increase your pricing. And pricing is something that is very scary to do, the thought of having to increase your pricing and then losing customers and not knowing if you're charging your worth or if you're charging more than you should.

it's very confusing. It's very scary. It causes a lot of anxiety. And so having other local bakers to talk to, has been extremely helpful and having that support system as well. But this past year, starting in January, I increased my cookies.

So now they're \$8 per cookie. So they're a dozen. And I was terrified, absolutely terrified to do that.

And I was terrified that I would lose all my customers and the business has been great. So what I'm super thankful for is that my customers seem to really appreciate and respect the amount of time and effort that I put into my cookies. Another thing that I found very helpful, that I know that there are other bakers who that are hesitant to have their pricing transparent.

I am not like that on my website. My pricing is very transparent. I have an entire page dedicated to my pricing it explains what's involved what they will get. And then when they even fill out an order form just for an inquiry for a custom order, they have to physically choose that pricing. So what that does for me is it eliminates anybody who they're just not within their budget, which is absolutely fine.

I understand that my cookies are not within everyone's budget, but then. Neither of us has to waste the other person's time.

So anybody who comes through my website with an order, they know their price, they know what I charge, and that has helped tremendously for my stress and my anxiety, as far as the pricing part of my business.

[00:18:54] **David Crabill:** Yeah. And I noticed not only are they \$8 a cookie, but you have an 18 cookie minimum. So people are really having to be willing to drop about \$150 at least to get your cookies. And you said that's a starting price. Do your cookies typically go higher than that?

[00:19:13] **Amanda Luecke:** They can, if they want very, very detailed cookies or something that's very intricate hand painting or something, that's just so much more time consuming. They can go up. Now a majority of orders that come



through are going to be in the \$8 pricing, just because it is such a high price point. But it just gives me that room for if an order comes in.

That is just so beyond what I would normally do. I want those people to know that yes, you can absolutely order something like that for me, but it may be more expensive

[00:19:50] **David Crabill:** So what is the largest cookie order that you have received? and

[00:19:55] **Amanda Luecke:** probably around the 300 mark, somewhere around there for weddings. Weddings are a big one. And, you know, a majority of orders that come in, they're usually two, three dozen or more.

it just depends on what people are wanting them

[00:20:16] **David Crabill:** And a big order like that. About how many designs are you typically doing?

[00:20:20] **Amanda Luecke:** One of the, like I had one where they all wanted, they wanted all the exact same cookie. The more cookies I do. I like to do more the designs, which people also like as well, a lot of people think, oh, I'm I just have to stick to two or three designs. No, absolutely not. Especially when it comes to weddings and things like that, where they have a specific color palette.

So if it's, you know, Navy and blush and white, well, that's only three colors. So if you want 10 designs, that's fine because it's, you know, mixing icing is something that takes a lot of time. So the more colors that you want, then the price could go up that way. But the more designs you want, you know, I'm not too picky about that because for me, if it's a really large order, the more designs, the more variety I get. And I enjoy doing that.

[00:21:15] **David Crabill:** So about how long does it take you to make maybe one cookie or a dozen? Like, do you know how long it's taking. And

[00:21:23] **Amanda Luecke:** It also depends on the design. I am doing an order right now. That's like a camping set that one for two dozen, it would take me two nights. So two nights worth of work to get that done, but I just did an almost all hand painted set for my dad. And that one took longer, because I have to wait for things to dry, then I'm doing a lot of hand painting.

So there's certain things like that that take longer hand painted sets take probably the most time. I'll spend 15, 20 minutes on one cookie. If not more. And so cookies like that are the ones that become a lot more expensive and time consuming to do.

[00:22:07] **David Crabill:** with that amount of time and effort that you're putting into this. Just making the cookies. Right. You've also got to manage the customer, manage the orders, do all the other things in your business. Do you feel like your business is lucrative enough to be income that can support your family.

[00:22:26] **Amanda Luecke:** Yes. I, well, I should say. Cookie decorating alone. I don't know. I think if I didn't have kids, which I obviously do not regret, but if I didn't have kids and had all day to be decorating, I think I could take on an amount of cookies every single day. Like a bakery almost would where I could make enough money to support, my family type of thing, my husband and I, but because I can only decorate at night strictly doing cookies.

I don't know about that, but I also teach classes on top of that. So classes bring in a lot of money as well. So if I can teach a class a. Or a couple classes a month. Then that is probably where a lot more money can come from and holiday presales. So big holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, those big, big holidays are huge as far as income goes, but with custom cookies alone, no, probably not.

[00:23:32] **David Crabill:** How much are you charging for your classes?

[00:23:35] **Amanda Luecke:** It varies. So one thing I've been actually struggling with is finding a location to teach classes trying to find a location where it's, semi close to where I live, but doesn't have too high of a rental fee because the higher the rental fee the more that I end up having to charge for the class.

So. That's gonna vary, but then I just started actually adding in airbrushing, because I really wanted to do that. So I just had a class for doing a seven piece cookie bouquet where they did florals and then we airbrushed them and that class was and a half hours long and I charged a hundred dollars for it.

So I had to go out and get all of the air brushes and you know, you're using learning different techniques that are still beginner, but a little bit more advanced beginner versus a lot of my other classes where it's straight, Royal

icing, you know, we don't do any airbrushing. We don't do any fancy florals and those classes are gonna be closer to \$75.

[00:24:37] **David Crabill:** And how many people do you have in each class?

[00:24:40] **Amanda Luecke:** My preference is 24 to 28. Any more than that, it can get tough, you know, to try to get around to everyone. but I always have a helper. So I have a really good friend who also does cookies and she lives near me. And so she will come and help me with all of my classes, which is amazing because she knows exactly, you know, she also does cookies.

She knows what I need. She can help people out. So that's a huge help. And I also project everything. And so when I'm doing cookies, I have my phone projecting down on my cookies, which is projecting on either uh, projection screen or a large screen TV. So everyone can see up close what I'm doing. So that also helps as far as being able to do bigger classes.

So I really enjoy places that I can find that I can project the images of what I'm doing and am able to walk around and help people.

[00:25:37] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I mean, there's quite a bit of technology that I feel like you're using, I, I noticed that you seem to record almost everything that you do, to post on social media. So what, what have you learned about that?

[00:25:50] **Amanda Luecke:** Oh my gosh. I did not expect the amount of. Non cookie decorating work that goes into running a business. it has been absolutely insane. And the social media aspect, especially is probably one of the most exhausting parts of my business, to be honest with you because to do reels, to do all of the reels, all of the videos for my cookie, I have to stop after every single step that I'm doing.

Make sure I have my camera set up, make sure it's pointed at my cookie correctly, make sure that my cookie is placed correctly. Like what you see that 32nd clip is so much work just to get that one video out there. And oftentimes I actually forget, so a lot of sets that I do, I don't record because I will have forgotten to record the first half of the cookie.

And then by that time, it just doesn't make sense to record anymore. Um, So the pressure of having to do and post on social media definitely does play a big part in my business.

I find that a lot of my orders, I guess you could say, and local customer base comes from Facebook. A lot of those customers are on Facebook and interact with my Facebook page. Whereas my Instagram page is a lot different, there's a lot of other cookiers, other bakers, other people like that.

And then of course I still do have customers, but much more widespread. But with social media always changing and always changing the rules and always changing algorithms it's exhausting, to be honest and trying to play the game of it all is very stressful.

So, especially with summer right now, I just kind of post when I can, if I have videos to post, I will post them. If not, I might not post for a few days because sometimes I just need a mental break from social media. But that being said, I do really enjoy making reels when I remember to make them, I think they're fun.

I like, adding music, choosing music for my reels. I actually take a lot of time and effort into choosing music for my reels, which is so funny to think. and I used to be very picky about. Having everything be perfect. But when you're in the middle of decorating a cookie order, you cannot always take the time to stop and make sure everything is perfect.

And there's no piping bags in the frame and there's no icing in the frame. It's just, sometimes you just gotta work with what you have in front of

[00:28:23] **David Crabill:** So, what is the game of social media? I see you have over 26,000 Instagram followers. Is there a posting schedule that you like to adhere to? Is there a certain type of posts that you try to focus on?

[00:28:37] **Amanda Luecke:** you. Oh, I have been trying to figure out social media forever. I. Have no idea if there's best times to post. A lot of times I will post in the mornings whenever I get a chance after I make my kids breakfast and I have a second, I'll remember to post, you know, if I forget, then I might post around lunchtime.

Sometimes I'll post at night as well. You know, there's a lot of people up at night looking at videos and things like that.

I find that people love reels. They love them. Instagram recently changed everything. You know, they used to be this, platform for posting beautiful photos. But I know what the rise of TikTok and the popularity of TikTok That's what people wanted to see And so they're really pushing reels, which I don't

mind posting reels, but it's frustrating as a creator who loves photography and spends a lot of time setting up my props, my background for photos and puts a lot of time in editing my photos that the engagement for photos on Instagram has gone down dramatically.

And, it's kind of a bummer to see, that this platform just changes their mind. And they make you crazy. Social media makes you crazy.

[00:29:55] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I think it seems like all the social media networks are trying to move over to be more like TikTok. And you do have a TikTok account. And I noticed that you've gotten a number of videos that have hundreds of thousands of views and at least a couple that have millions of views. So what, what have you learned?

Like, is there any strategies you've learned to help a video go viral?

[00:30:20] **Amanda Luecke:** Oh, my gosh, no, I have found zero rhyme or reason to TikTok. I have tried posting at different times.

I've tried researching the best times to post, what they want from you. I've tried out different things and I don't understand what they want from me. I know TikTok is a lot more about, they wanna see your face. They wanna see you be vulnerable, whether it's real or not, they want you to talk about your life.

They want you to, tell stories and when I'm doing cookies, those things. Aren't things I'm focused on. And so That's a lot of work that would need to go into that. And having, my Instagram page, my Facebook page, my email, my website, All of that, plus all of the other things with my business and my family and my personal side.

finding time for a whole nother social media platform is very difficult to do.

[00:31:17] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like the social media's paying off? Like, do you get inquiries from Instagram or has that opened up publicity opportunities, things like that.

[00:31:28] **Amanda Luecke:** Yeah, Instagram definitely has. I get a lot of messages on Instagram. I have in my bio that I don't take orders through Instagram because I get so many messages, whether they be just somebody reacting to a story. And so you can have tons of messages throughout the day and um, messages can very easily be lost.

So I usually won't take any orders through Instagram But I have, met different other influencers and people that I've done collaborations with, which I really enjoy doing. I know that a big question for a lot of cookie decorators and other people starting out is, should I do collaborations with these big influencers?

Should I do giveaways? Should I do this? Should I do that? You know, will that help me gain my following? And honestly, I would say, no, I work with other people. And I do giveaways with other businesses and stuff because I love doing that. I love giving away cookies. I donate a lot of cookies throughout the year, every single year for different organizations and different events.

But I do it because I love doing it. Not because I ever expect to gain anything from it, I think that people who. Go into doing collaborations and giveaways with the expectation that they're going to gain a huge mass of followers is not realistic. It's not gonna happen and you're gonna be left disappointed.

And even the followers that you might get from those things, if they're not interested in your content, like if they're only following you, because they were told to follow you in order to enter this giveaway. Once the giveaway's over, they could easily just unfollow you So my biggest thing for people is donate for sure. Do giveaways work with other businesses, collaborate, do all that things, but do it for reasons that you're passionate about do it for organizations that you love, what they're doing, do it because it makes you happy. Not because you want something out of it.

[00:33:25] **David Crabill:** So do you have like a favorite collaboration or giveaway that you've done?

[00:33:31] **Amanda Luecke:** one of the newer small businesses that I met just December of last year is this local business called Miko events. And they do, you know, those tiny tent types of parties. She does awesome little sleepover setups for boys and girls. She does luxury picnics She is amazing to work with. And a very reciprocal relationship. And that's what I find with any of the people that I work with. Even other cookie decorators, you know, sometimes I'll collaborate with other cookie decorators as well.

Because. it's a very lonely business, you know, doing what we do staying up late you're by yourself. So finding that group of local, people who do the same thing you do is amazing. And I've found that, and I'm so grateful because, you know, they're not only other cookie decorators.



They've become my friends, they're local. And a big thing that I've found is people are so concerned about competition, you know, competition with other bakers in their area. And I personally don't have that. I have these people who are supposed to be my competition, but they're my friends. and there's friendly competition.

Like it's the kind of competition where they make, you want to be a better version of yourself they are always pushing you. And they're your biggest cheerleader and they're there for you. And I refer orders to them. They refer orders to me. We work with each other. We have no problems. I am collaborating with one of my friends, Amy from Cakesmith Baking on an event coming up. In July and we're both doing cookies for the same event.

So her and I are actually working together on it, which is amazing, you know? And finding your, your people. I think that's really important. And being supportive and giving back to your community is very important.

[00:35:21] **David Crabill:** how do you feel like you established or developed or found those. Relationships with people.

[00:35:27] **Amanda Luecke:** A lot of times people message me and then they tell me, I actually am a local cookie decorator. I just started, you know, would you be able to answer some questions, you know, and they always say, I'm not trying to be your competition. I'm not trying to steal business.

And I find that so sad because, I want to definitely encourage this environment where you can ask other people and it's not about competition, but that's where everyone's first thoughts go. And there are so many people who want to order cookies that no single person could ever take on all of those orders by themselves. It doesn't even make sense. And so having a really deep pool of referrals I've tried a lot of my friends cookies, you know, and I will share them on social media saying how amazing and delicious they are because they are.

And if you can't get cookies from me, then get them from this person. And so it's just people reaching out to me and you find the people that you click with, and then you start hanging out with them outside of cookies, and then your kids end up hanging out and you have play dates and it turns into real friendships.

[00:36:39] **David Crabill:** you've made so many cookies at this point. I'm sure it's hard to choose, but are there any orders that you can think of that were your favorites or particularly memorable?

[00:36:52] **Amanda Luecke:** Oh, it was for a baby shower and it was Peter rabbit. And I had never gotten to do Peter rabbit before, and they were very special for so many reasons. It was a customer that, you know, she started becoming my customer because she entered one of my giveaways and she won. And then from there, she had me do cookies for her bridal shower and then her wedding, and then all of her important anniversaries and girls weekends and birthdays.

And then I got to do them for her baby shower. And it was just like, I'm about to cry. , it's ridiculous, but she's become a friend of mine. She started off as a stranger and has become a friend of mine and somebody who now I've gotten to be a part of all of these amazing, super special, incredible events in her life.

And hopefully I'll continue to be able to do cookies for birthdays and you know, for her kids. And it's just. That was a very special set to me.

[00:37:58] **David Crabill:** I'm sure you have a ridiculous number of cookie cutters. Now, are there any that stand out to you with ones you go to a lot.

[00:38:08] **Amanda Luecke:** gosh, I have a lot. Ones that you go to a lot are plaques, which, you know, are different generalized shapes that you can put anything on. And then your regular, you know, rectangles and circles and stuff. But my friend Amy from cake Smith, she and I just recently went in on a 3d printer together. And so that has been really cool. Cause now she can now send ideas to me, or we can talk about ideas or ideas will just happen in conversation. And then I'll sketch them up on my iPad and she can turn them into cutters.

So it's opened up, you know, a whole new world of cookie cutters for us, if I'm working on a set and all of a sudden I come up with this idea, or she comes up with this idea that she wants this design, or I want it in our set.

We don't have to worry about trying to order it. So that has been something that's been really cool.

[00:39:05] **David Crabill:** sure you never imagined how much different equipment you would use when you started this business. What's some of the other equipment that you've invested in over time.

[00:39:15] **Amanda Luecke:** An airbrush machine. Those are definitely helpful. A lot of people use airbrushes for different things. I use airbrushes a lot for adding shading to different things. And then people obviously use them to

stencil backgrounds and different things on the backgrounds of cookies. And then projectors are very useful.

I actually refused to use a projector for the first two years that I was in business because I just felt like with my art background I was decent at writing and doing script on cookies. It was just something I didn't need. And. Once I had this wedding order and it was for over 200 cookies and they all were the exact same.

And it had a monogram in the middle. They were very simplistic cookies, but because they're simplistic, you cannot hide mistakes on cookies like that. And so I thought that maybe it was time to buy a projector and it was one of the best investments I've ever made because like I had an order one time she wanted it was for her daughter's third birthday and she wanted cookies of her daughter's favorite stuffed animal. It was this bunny that was so ratty and just so well loved. And a child stuffed animal is a really, really big deal. So I wanted to make sure that this stuffed animal looked like her stuffed animal and having that projector to be able to project the image of her actual stuffed animal onto my cookies.

So I could get the correct shape was really important to me. And for me personally, I don't know if I would've been able to do. That as well without a projector.

[00:40:48] **David Crabill:** So projectors airbrushes are there specific recommendations that you have?

[00:40:54] **Amanda Luecke:** The projector that I use is a pretty standard one. It's a Pico projector. if you're starting out cookie and you have a projector, it's probably the one you have. It's not as expensive, I think it's just over a hundred dollars, but it doesn't hold its charge for very long.

So for me, it's not a big deal because I have mine permanently set up on my work area. So I don't have to worry. Moving it around and setting it up. So it's always plugged in But it's getting old. So I've been looking into other ones I've been recommended. I think it's called Lumos projector.

And then there's another one where they're both wireless. As far as airbrushes go, the one that I have that's a corded airbrush is artfully designed creations. I have had it since probably. And it's been amazing.

I haven't had any issues with it. I love it. But I do know that there's lots of airbrushes out there and the ones that I just purchased. I purchased 12. So I

could have them for my classes is a cordless airbrush, which I'm not sure exactly what the brand is, but that has actually been really amazing.

I use that one actually quite a bit when I'm doing, having to do a lot of the same type of airbrushing on something, because I don't have to worry about the cord getting in the way. uh, I don't know, backdrops, that's another thing, you know, depending on how much people wanna get into the photography part of it. I love photography. I've always loved photography. So taking pictures is one of my favorite parts of my whole cookie business. And you can get all sorts of different backdrops. And props, they don't have to be anything extraordinary or expensive.

Like I have a really nice digital SLR camera that it's just the poor thing just sits in my closet. Ever since I got a smartphone All of the photos that I take with my cookies are done with my iPhone 11 I just take a lot. Photos with that. And then I edit them in Adobe Lightroom, which is awesome. there's a free version and you can do a lot with the free version of the app. But I have the paid version because you can do a little bit more with that.

But yes, the Adobe Lightroom app has been huge for me in editing photos.

[00:43:11] **David Crabill:** I see that you heat seal all of your cookies. have you always packaged your cookies that way? Or how has your packaging changed?

[00:43:21] **Amanda Luecke:** So when I first started, I didn't have a heat sealer. I didn't know that existed. And I didn't know, cellophane bags were a thing that people use, you know, I was so clueless, so I used to stack them. First of all, I would stack all of my decorated cookies and, you know, little stacks of, four or five.

And then I would Saran wrap them together and then put them in Ziploc bags. it was terrible. It was absolutely terrible. So as my business grew, I learned about cellophane bags and there's a lot of people who don't heat seal their bags, but for me I find that for a lot of events, people are either grabbing cookies at the last minute, you know, and taking them home or they grab them and they don't wanna eat them right away.

So then they're all ready heat sealed and they can just shove them in their bag and save them for later. And it also helps protect them from other people, touching them. So I always will heat seal them,

[00:44:20] **David Crabill:** And where do you get your packaging from?

[00:44:23] **Amanda Luecke:** So for cellophane bags, I mostly buy them from Amazon. I'll also get them from a business called clear bags. you know, you can get them from basically anywhere. And I got my heat sealer from Amazon as well. for your regular size cookies, usually what I use for custom orders, which will range anywhere from three and a half to four inches.

I use the four by six size bags and then for any bigger cookies, especially for holidays and presales where they're individually boxed and have bows and stuff, packaging, things like that. Then I will get five by seven. And then I get use a lot of my packaging from clear bags for my boxes or another company called B R P box shop.

So they're both great. And clear bags is nice because the more you buy the cheaper it gets. So this is another great reason to get to know your other local cookie decorators or bakers because my friends and I can then order a bulk order of boxes because we know we're gonna go through them and then we can share it,

but yeah, I will spend a little bit more on packaging. because I think it's worth it. And if people are gonna pay my prices, I want what they're getting, especially for holidays and presales to be gift ready.

One of the biggest time consuming parts of this business, Is packaging when I'm packaging for my presales and holiday stuff like that. I have to give myself at least a full day, if not more, just to package my cookies, it takes hours and hours and hours.

And it's something that people always forget. And I'm one of those people I get to that time. And if I'm lucky, my brother will come over and help put boxes together for me and put my ingredient labels and stuff on my boxes which is a huge help. Otherwise I have to make sure I have eight hours just to package all of my cookies.

[00:46:22] **David Crabill:** said that a thermal label printer was one of the best purchases you've ever made.

[00:46:28] **Amanda Luecke:** I forgot about that. Yes. I just discovered that from my friend, Maddie of gartygoodies, she used them, And so I ended up buying one and then I would buy labels for it. And because you're not using any ink, because it's thermal printed, I can print out 300 labels in under three minutes. It's insane. And I just create all of my labels in Canva and you can just use the free version of Canva to make your label however big you want it.

And then I just connect it to my laptop and you know, select a custom size. And I think my labels are three by two inches and then you get the preview of it, but it has been the biggest, time saver. My dad used to print all of my labels at his house on his laser jet printer, the sticker ones.

you know, that can get really expensive one. You're using all of that colored ink. And two buying labels is not cheap. And so then I decided, okay, I'm gonna get a stamp. So I ended up getting a stamp of my ingredient lists and then getting like paint. It's basically like a paint ink stamp.

And I absolutely loved it because I used white and on a clear bag, it looked really nice. But the problem with that was you have to wait for the ink to dry. So if I'm needing to bag a hundred or plus cookies, I have to find space for a hundred bags to be able to sit out and dry for five minutes, And that's just not. Conducive for doing fast packaging. And so when my friend told me about these thermal printers the printer itself mine was a little over a hundred dollars. That seems to be the personalized ones. It seems to be around where they are, a hundred to \$200. And then my labels, I thought that thermal printing, you know, specific labels would be expensive, but they're not.

my last one. I got a roll of 750 labels and \$11 or something like that, maybe less than. And so what I do is when I run out of labels, I have the little cardboard roller thing that the last ones came on and I will just go through and I'll print 750 new labels and I'll just roll them back up on the old roller And then they're ready to go. So that way I'm not having to constantly be printing labels. and then I have them ready. And even my seven year old, she can put stickers on boxes. For me, which is super convenient.

[00:48:54] **David Crabill:** And which thermal printer did you.

[00:49:00] **Amanda Luecke:** It's called Polono. That's just the one that I ended up getting. But there's a lot of thermal printers out there and I am sure a lot of them are very comparable to each other. And you just have to look at the description and you just have to make sure it says it can print various sized labels all of these are generally meant for those four by six shipping labels.

But you know, mine are obviously three by two there's little sliding measuring trays. If you open up your printer that you can slide it back and forth to be the width of whatever stickers you're using and I can even use circle ones. And I just, again, created my circle image in Canva and was able to print it off using the custom size option.



[00:49:47] **David Crabill:** now I saw that you do not offer any delivery. Is that correct?

[00:49:52] **Amanda Luecke:** Correct.

with two kids now, one being seven and one being, two and a half and always having orders that are picked up at different times on different days. I can't guarantee that I can deliver cookies. So it just works for me and my business for people to come pick up.

And, during the last two years, obviously I ended up having a table outside and then I would put everybody's orders, outside on a shelf and then they would have their names on them for a really easy pickup.

so there's lots of options like that.

[00:50:27] **David Crabill:** Would you ship your cookies if Minnesota's law allowed it?

[00:50:31] **Amanda Luecke:** Probably not. And the reason is because I have seen a lot of posts from people who live in states that are allowed to ship with horror stories about. Things that happen, cookies, breaking, you know, people breaking cookies, and then blaming them, things going wrong with money exchange, apps, websites, heat.

You never know if they're gonna go to Florida and your cookies are gonna melt on the way there. There's just so many different things that can go wrong when it comes to shipping that even if Minnesota offered it, I don't think it's something that I would offer.

[00:51:11] **David Crabill:** I saw a post that you said when you started your business, you didn't realize you had become a one woman show. What does that mean?

[00:51:21] **Amanda Luecke:** in my little dreamland. I thought, okay, I'm gonna have a cookie decorating business. So that means I just get to decorate cookies all day long. And I'm so happy and I'm doing my creativeness every day, all day. And life is wonderful. No, you have all of the emails that come in.

And right now I'm having so many issues with all my emails on every different platform and it's driving me nuts. So that's one thing that's been a huge headache for me is just the technology side of things. Then you have the social media

side. The one who has to market everything, you know, and sift through all of that information.

And then you have the person who has to do photography. You have the baker, you know, you have the person who has to clean up, you have the person who has to package The person who has to, set up and organize everything. the person who has to do all of your accounting, I just did not ever expect of the things that go into trying to run your own business.

[00:52:20] **David Crabill:** What have you learned over the last number of years? Of time management and organization.

[00:52:28] **Amanda Luecke:** I am a procrastinator at heart. I love to procrastinate. So that's something that I've really had to work on as far as cookies go.

And sometimes it can be hard because. I still want those days, even if it's one day a week where I'm just not doing cookies. And a lot of times that's not the case because even if I'm done for my cookies for last week, I need to start prepping and making dough for my orders for the next week.

But when I am organized and when I really focus on getting everything I need done in the order in which I plan it, which I do all the time for every single one of my orders, I have schedules for all of my presales. I write out a schedule of here's my week, this on Monday, these are the ones I need to finish by Tuesday.

These are the ones I need to finish and so on. If I can stick to those schedules, my life is much better. I tend to have a lot more time and I always try to leave myself time at the end, in case something goes wrong and cookies take longer and I have to push it out another day. But I do also work very well under stress

So if I have to get cookies done, I will find a way to get them done. But if possible, I like to plan out my week starting Tuesday. I'll try to have all my dough made. So then by Tuesday I can start on cookies and get them done by Wednesday to start on another set of cookies and so on.

Some people are really good at doing multiple different orders at the same time. I am not. I like to really focus on each individual order when I'm doing them. So for me if I don't stick to my schedule, it makes things much more difficult for me, because then I end up having to do multiple different orders.

At the same time. I'm using different colors. The themes are different, the styles are different. And it definitely causes me more stress.

[00:54:21] **David Crabill:** So what keeps you going? Why are you so passionate about it?

[00:54:25] **Amanda Luecke:** I, I love doing cookies. It is such. A creative fun outlet for me. And I love my customers. My customers are amazing and they've always been so supportive of me. And if I've had to take time off for, maternity leave or, you know, if I just am too burnt out that I can't even do Christmas cookies, I always have that worry in the back of my mind that I'm gonna lose my customers.

If I can't give them cookies for this holiday, I'm gonna lose them. And my customers always show up and they're like, no, you won't. And they are just so supportive of, my mental health and taking care of my family. And I just, I love them. And so when you have such amazing customers, it makes your job so much easier.

it gives you more, even more reason. to want to do what you do, because you know that you're doing it for people who really appreciate and value you and your time and your skills. And that's amazing, you know, I couldn't imagine if it was any other way. And so I also just really need to have something that's for me, I'm obviously doing this to make money for my family and for us to do other things and things like that and to save, but this is something that's mine. That's my creative outlet that I grew this business from nothing. And for me, that's really important to have something that is my own and that's separate from everything else.

And that's something that I've built and that I'm really proud of. I love doing it. I love having this business I love the people and connections I've made through it. And the organizations that I've been able to donate to. all of that is such a great reminder of why I do what I do. And the whole thing that started at all was being able to stay home with my daughter.

And so now that she's, finished first grade, she's in school, I have this other one who's two and a half, and being able to stay home with her has just been incredible. And this business is the only reason that I'm able to do that.

[00:56:40] **David Crabill:** Obviously your business has come a long way over the last few years and your decorating skills have as well. Where do you see yourself in the future? Where would you like to take this business or expand?

[00:56:54] **Amanda Luecke:** I wanna continue to do custom orders and holiday orders. But I'm slowly starting to take, try to take less on, continue to do them, but just take on less because I want to focus on classes. I wanna focus on education. I wanna focus on helping other people who might want to, you know, start up their business.

And if I didn't have all the people, you know, who've helped me. along the way, I wouldn't know where I would be now. And so I love teaching people. I love seeing at the beginning of a class, somebody look at the cookies that they're about to decorate and think I cannot do that.

there's no way I can do that. And then throughout the class, seeing how you break it down for them and you go step by step explaining things to them and how, by the end of the class, they've created this beautiful set of cookies that they didn't even think that they could do. And they're always so shocked with themselves.

And so you know, a lot of people take the class just for fun, but there's a handful of people, you know, who take the class and. That passion, you can see it ignite in their eyes and they're like, wow, this is something I would really enjoy. And you hope that they run with it and then there'll be more cookie decorators in Minnesota.

[00:58:07] **David Crabill:** Amanda, it's cool to see how your business has grown over the years. And I look forward to seeing where it'll go in the future. Now, if somebody would like to reach out to you or learn more about your business, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:58:24] **Amanda Luecke:** definitely feel free to contact me, Um, You can reach me on Instagram. You can try to send me a message through there, and it's just @MinniesCookies and the same with Facebook, you can try to send me a message through there as well. And then my email is info@minniescookies.com.

[00:58:42] **David Crabill:** Great. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:58:47] **Amanda Luecke:** Thank you so much for having me. It was so much fun.

[00:58:51] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast.

For more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast/67](https://forrager.com/podcast/67)

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And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own custom decorated cookies, 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](https://cottagefoodcourse.com).

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