

# Men Bake Cookies with Mike Skyring

**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 Mike Skyring. But real quick, I wanted to check, have you created a website for your business yet? And if you have, do you pay for it?

[00:00:18] A lot of entrepreneurs still think they need to spend money to get a good website, and that is simply not true anymore. I am a really big fan of Square Online. That's what I use for my fudge business website, and I created a free tutorial that will walk you through how to set up a totally free website in less than an hour.

[00:00:36] In case you think free also means cheap. It's actually quite the opposite. I think Square Online is hands down the very best website tool for most cottage food businesses, and it's even better than any of the other paid services out there. So if you want to learn more, you can watch my free tutorial by going to [forrager.com/website](https://forrager.com/website).

[00:00:58] All right, so I have Mike Skyring on the show today. Mike lives in South Lyon, Michigan, and sells gourmet cookies and custom-decorated sugar cookies with his cottage food business, Men Bake Cookies. It's definitely a fun and creative business name, and it all started totally by accident in 2021. Mike was never a baker, but just for fun made some decorated cookies for his daughter's birthday, and as they say, the rest is history. Mike's business escalated very quickly and not just because cookies are delicious, but also because Mike is a very passionate person and dove all in. In this episode, you'll hear about many of the marketing strategies Mike used to turn his business into the success that it is today.

[00:01:45] And with that, let's jump right into this episode.

[00:01:49] Welcome to the show, Mike. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:52] **Mike Skyring:** Awesome. Thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

[00:01:54] **David Crabill:** So Mike, can you take me back to how this whole thing got started?

[00:01:58] **Mike Skyring:** Uh, It's kind of funny actually. So me and my wife got married about 10 years ago now, and we were going through our cabinets and I was trying to clean up some stuff like two years ago, and I was like, we have not used this mixer in the last eight years. Like, we're never going to use it. Neither one of us bake, so we're just going to sell it.

[00:02:13] And I was like, you know what? Maybe like, I should try using it. So, my daughter, had her second birthday coming up and I was like, all right, let's try making some cookies. So, looked up, you know, a bunch of stuff online, and tried to figure it out. I had like a month to learn this, and I was like, all right, we got these cookies.

[00:02:28] So, made some cupcake cookies, did a little royal icing on them. Took them to her party and everyone was like, oh my gosh, they're so good. These are amazing. How'd you start this? I was like, it was on a whim. And then it just kind of really spun off from there like after that, you know, people

loved them and then other people wanted them, you know, from their events and just kind of grew from that.

[00:02:44] Simply like just a trial of just doing it for my daughter's, you know, little party. I never had any idea to become a business of my own.

[00:02:50] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I mean that's pretty common for people to start with their kids' birthday and then, you know, have a business sort of grow from there. But uh, it is a little surprising that you just wanted to use this mixer and you went with decorated sugar cookies, right?

[00:03:06] **Mike Skyring:** And exactly, I was like, I mean, it looks easy, it looks, you know, I was like, I'm sure I could do this. I mean, it was not as easy as I thought, but she didn't care. I mean, you know, she was young. It was perfect for her.

[00:03:17] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So what year was that?

[00:03:20] **Mike Skyring:** Two years ago now.

[00:03:21] **David Crabill:** Okay, so you started the business what, in 2021?

[00:03:25] **Mike Skyring:** Yeah, correct.

[00:03:26] **David Crabill:** So, you made these cookies for her birthday and you know, people started talking about them, and then what was the trajectory from there to when you started actually like creating a legit business?

[00:03:40] **Mike Skyring:** I would say it wasn't far, much later actually. It seemed like it kind of all happened. Cause we have a, actually have a friend who bakes, like, you know, just from home. She's like a home baker and she doesn't like, you know, do a business or anything. And my wife's like, you know, maybe she can make the cookies.

[00:03:50] I was like, no, no, I got this. I got this. You know, so she came to the party, she's like, wow, he's really good. You know, how'd you do it? Blah, blah. you know, coming down that road and talking about, And I had like another friend who was having a party coming up, so I made her some. And I was like, yeah, I can't really do this for free.

[00:04:03] Cause I had, you know, I have a full-time job as well besides my business. So I just started, you know, I was like, okay, I can do this, you know, but you got to, he's got to pay. I can't just, you know, give away free cookies. I can't work at a loss here. And then pretty soon just, word of mouth and all that kind of stuff.

[00:04:16] Next thing, you know, orders and orders and orders. And it was great. I mean, I love it.

[00:04:21] **David Crabill:** Did you have any business experience before this?

[00:04:26] **Mike Skyring:** I have not, no, I, I mean I've always worked like in the private sector type stuff, so I've never had any, business or selling or marketing or any of that. It's definitely, a learning process along the way.

[00:04:37] **David Crabill:** And then what is your full-time job?

[00:04:41] **Mike Skyring:** I work for the Veterans Affairs Hospital.

[00:04:44] **David Crabill:** So very different.

[00:04:46] **Mike Skyring:** Very, very different. Yeah.

[00:04:48] **David Crabill:** Okay. So you never had business experience and it also sounds like you didn't even have aspirations to start a business.

[00:04:56] **Mike Skyring:** that's actually, actually about right. I did not, it was not in my plan. I never said, you know, one day I'm going to own my own business, but never aspirations, no.

[00:05:03] **David Crabill:** It's just funny because as I was looking back at your Facebook feed and the trajectory of your business, it just looked like you just took off and you dove all in and just started to really move forward with it in a big way. And it's not something that I would expect from someone who never had any ambitions to be an entrepreneur.

[00:05:26] It's sort of something I expect from someone who's been like dreaming of doing this for years. Like, what caused you to just jump all in?

[00:05:34] **Mike Skyring:** I think that's just actually my personality. Like either all or nothing, you know? That's just kind of how I am with everything. Like if I was like in the military and work and my real job, like that's just how I am. So for me to like, you know, only try this, a couple of times and, you know, turn people away, no, no, I'm not going to do anymore.

[00:05:49] That's just not in my nature. And I, I don't know. I like. I guess progression and like the reward of like seeing my business grow and that kind of stuff as well too.

[00:05:57] **David Crabill:** So you're a dad, you have a full-time job, and it sounds like you were probably pretty busy before starting the business.

[00:06:06] **Mike Skyring:** I was busy before. I am busy now. yeah, I mean, it's, it's great. I mean, I couldn't complain and my daughter loves it. My wife's like, oh, we get cookies. It's like, right, exactly.

[00:06:17] **David Crabill:** So you had the ones you made for your daughter. I don't know if you gave away any after that. When did you actually take your first order?

[00:06:26] **Mike Skyring:** definitely remember doing like 4th of July theme. Um, It probably was, I'm sure June sometime. I just posted like to a local Facebook group, I believe. Offering, you know, like something like a certain set or a certain design or something like that, you know.

[00:06:37] Then I had just, you know, some one person bite. Oh yeah. We were interested. And then it kind, you know, went on from there.

[00:06:43] **David Crabill:** Okay, so you didn't actually have an individual ask for a custom order. You actually put it out there like, Hey, there's these cookies that you can buy for the 4th of July.

[00:06:52] **Mike Skyring:** I believe so, yeah, I think I had like a custom order before that. It was just like a friend who's at our party. She wanted some, but it wasn't anything like intricate or detailed. She just like wanted some more sugar cookies, like a little design on them. But you know, that I didn't even charge her for, I was like, you know what?

[00:07:07] It was my first time doing like for somebody else. So I just, you know, did them for her. But then after that, I started posting online more and more to, you know, my name out there and that kind of stuff.

[00:07:16] **David Crabill:** Well, decorated sugar cookie is sort of an interesting thing because it's one of those areas where you sort of have to have a certain threshold of skill, right? To start selling. I mean, you don't, but to start selling at like legit prices, like it is just one of those things that people would generally take years like crafting their skills before they actually start a business.

[00:07:39] But it sounds like for you it was just months.

[00:07:42] **Mike Skyring:** Yeah, for me, I just, I was like, you know, we're just going to go all in. I probably didn't put as much thought into it as much as I should have. But you know, here we are.

[00:07:50] **David Crabill:** Well, I mean, as you look back on it, you know, how were your skills back then when you started selling it? Do you remember what price point you were charging people?

[00:08:01] **Mike Skyring:** I mean, my skills were not great by any means. I think I started my first like dozen maybe I think like \$30 I believe, something like that.

[00:08:10] **David Crabill:** So can you just take me through like how did it grow? You went, you know, I guess you posted these 4th of July cookies, some people bought them, and was it just posting things on social where you got most of your early business? Like how did you promote yourself in the early days?

[00:08:27] **Mike Skyring:** It was just posting things on like the swap type groups, that kind of stuff. I did have a couple of family, you know, members by, in the very beginning, but eventually your family, that falls off to the wayside. Like they're not going to pay, you know, for cookies from you anymore.

[00:08:40] So I did promote, you know, through Facebook groups all that kind of stuff. And then I started doing the farmer's market uh, was it last year? And then that really, really escalated like everything because I did the full season. So I was there every Saturday from May to October. So you really build up like a clientele and then you see people that have bought your stuff before and they're like, oh yeah, I've tried your cookies, you know, my, they were so great. You did our cousin's, you know, birthday and now my friend's going to have a shower. And I gave her your card. And it just kind of really grew from that.

[00:09:05] I mean, I would say the farmer's market really, really helped me a lot.

[00:09:08] **David Crabill:** At what point did you actually come up with a business name?

[00:09:12] **Mike Skyring:** The business name was right away, it was pretty early on before I even like went officially, like before I, you know, like registered LLC, I already had it in my mind. I liked it. Cause like, even now, like being at events or like this, so like Men Bake Cookies. I get so many compliments on my name, they're like, oh my God, that's so great.

[00:09:27] Or you know, it's so unique. Or people be like, well, my husband doesn't bake cookies. And I'm like, you know, I can't speak for all the men. I can just say that I bake cookies. I don't know about them. You know, the other ones

[00:09:37] **David Crabill:** Well, I love the name because you know how I got started with the whole like cottage food thing was I wanted to sell my cookies cause I grew up baking cookies. But it actually sounds like you didn't grow up baking cookies. Right.

[00:09:50] **Mike Skyring:** I did not. I mean, I like, cookies,

[00:09:53] **David Crabill:** That's just funny. I, I mean, I love the name. It is a, funny and a very catchy name and it's also interesting. You didn't like make it more personal like it's definitely like a generic statement.

[00:10:07] Was it just a name that popped into your head or did you spend a long time figuring out what the name would be?

[00:10:12] **Mike Skyring:** There was like a DIY site, like a kind of do it around your house site that, and it said like theirs was something men, I don't remember what it was. Something about men build something or something like that. And I was like, oh, this is, I could work with this. I could tweak this a little bit. And then I kind of made it fit like my niche and you know, like my baking business.

[00:10:29] **David Crabill:** Well, it definitely feels like you've made it into a brand and did you like really focus in on making it a brand from the beginning?

[00:10:39] **Mike Skyring:** I didn't, so I originally started, you know, with just the sugar cookies. And the thing with the sugar cookies is they take time. So, I mean, there's only so much you can do. I mean, in a week there's only so many orders you can do because they, you take a lot of time. So I wanted to find something else to put in there, in that place when I wasn't making sales, so I wasn't doing customs or that kind of stuff. So I did start doing like gourmet cookies. they're about five-and-a-half to six-ounce cookies now. And that I feel like it really brought my brand a lot more around like, you know, started with the sugar cookies and I still do customs and all that kind of stuff, but now it seems like it's, I'm really known for like my gourmet cookies.

[00:11:13] And then I, you know, also do customs on the side I guess, if that makes sense. Kind of like it kind of pivoted a little bit.

[00:11:18] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I definitely noticed that shift towards your gourmet cookies and actually there's been this massive trend, I'd say you timed it pretty much perfectly. Definitely since the start of the pandemic or maybe even just the last two years, this massive growth in these like large cookies. We've got crumble of course, and it's just been this huge trend.

[00:11:42] So were you aware of the trend when you moved in that direction?

[00:11:46] **Mike Skyring:** No, I think I just had to find a recipe online and I kind of tried it there's no crumble actually near me, so I wasn't really. Kind of familiar with them, or, you know, there's no other bakeries. Like, you know, there's a Levain or Levain in New York who sells giant, you know, big cookies. I've never been to any of those places.

[00:12:01] I've never tried them. So I didn't make some that I found like a, you know, some random recipe online. I tried it and I was like, oh, I could, you know, complete this a little bit and make it work. So I kind of tweaked it and made it my own and then it kind of just went off from there. And I think it helps that in my market, in my area, in my city, I guess there's no crumble.

[00:12:18] Like the nearest crumble, you know, was like 35 minutes away. And like the other nearest competitor, actual brick and mortar business is like, 35 minutes another direction. kind of, I found a niche in my own area that hasn't been tapped yet, I guess, which is great for me.

[00:12:30] **David Crabill:** So, You started with the sugar cookies and when did you actually pivot and start making the gourmet cookies?

[00:12:39] **Mike Skyring:** It wasn't a super long time. After I would say probably a couple of months, I think I did um, chocolate chip cookies for somebody. And it wasn't even super big ones. I know it was kind of smaller. I don't remember what the event for was offhand. But it was smaller. And then definitely when I got doing like the farmer's market, at the beginning of 2021 or beginning 20 22, 1 of those that's when I really pivoted to the gourmet.

[00:13:01] It's just because I was doing farmer's market week to week and there's no way I could do the amount of sugar cookies I would sell to have enough, for the following week and the turnaround time on, like the gourmet bigger cookies is way quicker than decorating, you know, 48 sugar cookies.

[00:13:15] **David Crabill:** Now when you started doing the drop cookies, in this case, you know the huge gourmet cookies, did you also experiment with regular like one-ounce drop cookies?

[00:13:25] **Mike Skyring:** I didn't really, I mean, I kind of tweaked my recipes, so I do offer sometimes for events or like birthday parties. Not everybody wants, you know, 12 giant cookies so we can dial them down. I do a two-ounce version, so it's the same cookie, the same recipe. Just dial down, you know, weigh out smaller for events like that.

[00:13:42] **David Crabill:** So when you started doing the gourmet cookies, did people just like start latching onto them real quickly? Did that escalate pretty quickly as well?

[00:13:53] **Mike Skyring:** It did. I mean, it takes a while because you know, I was new. So like, you know, when I showed up at the farmer's market, I'd never been there before. And like, you know, this is something they've never seen. Prices are a little crazy.

[00:14:02] Like you do get pushback from people. But it still took off. Like you know, you're going to have naysayers and people that, you know, you're out of their price range, then you're going to be the people that love it. There are people that will buy cookies week to week to week, you always see the same people every week. Buying my products was just amazing. Like, that's shocking to me.

[00:14:17] **David Crabill:** And when you launched the gourmet cookies, did you like have a number of flavors that were available?

[00:14:25] **Mike Skyring:** I, I know I started for sure with like a gourmet chocolate chip-type flavor. I don't remember the other, you know, one's option. I know I had like a peanut butter um, one that had like peanut butter in the center. not, not a ton. But now it's come more to a rotation. I mean, you know, I'm a home baker.

[00:14:38] I can't make 40 flavors at one time, so it is now, you know, more of, I have like five signature flavors, and then every month or two months I'll trade up like two of the flavors for like a seasonal type. So like for Christmas I had like a peppermint dark chocolate and like a snickerdoodle.

[00:14:52] And like this week I have, um, something based off of Samoa Girl Scout cookie and then a red velvet for Valentine's Day. So just kind of switch them out. So like they're not the same every week. But at least, you know, the favorites are still there. Like chocolate chip is always the signature favorite that everyone's just going to love cause it's chocolate chip. And then it's kind of sprinkling, you know, two or three other flavors for two months or.

[00:15:10] **David Crabill:** What are some of your most popular flavors other than chocolate chip?

[00:15:15] **Mike Skyring:** Lemon meringue is actually super, super popular flavor. Which is actually funny cause like people either love lemon or they hate it, but the people that love it like love it. Lemon chocolate chip is a great one. I do um, choco funfetti which is the kids love, so it's like a chocolate chip but it tastes like birthday cake and it's a little bit of sprinkles and chocolate chips in it. I also do a pistachio toffee, which is actually super popular as well.

[00:15:39] **David Crabill:** I noticed some pretty unique flavors, like were these flavors that were surprising to the people in your area or they had to get accustomed to them?

[00:15:50] **Mike Skyring:** It's hard to say. I mean it really like sometimes like the stuff you think would be like, people are going to love this. Like I do a chocolate chip cashew, which. That's amazing to me. Like, I don't know, cashews are great, to begin with, and it's not taken off as much as I thought it would.

[00:16:03] That one I thought would be great. But it's a little slower mover. But then I feel like, you know, once people try it or like, oh, that taste like? You know, then they're more on board because you're always going to have people that are like, either love coconut or don't love coconut.

[00:16:14] So that's going to rule the people automatically. There's no way. There's no, well, I kind of like it. They're like, oh no, I can't stand coconut, so they're not going to buy that. So it's just, and people always say like, oh, well what's your favorite? Well, well, my favorite is not going to be your favorite. So I'm always like, you know if you like lemon, this is great.

[00:16:26] Like, this is a perfect cookie. If you like coconut, this is great. Or, you know, you can't go wrong with a chocolate chip. It's hard to say.

[00:16:32] **David Crabill:** Do you charge more for the chocolate chip cashew because of the price of cashews?

[00:16:37] **Mike Skyring:** yes, sir.

[00:16:39] **David Crabill:** Maybe that's the reason why people don't buy it as much.

[00:16:42] **Mike Skyring:** No, I don't think that's it because I charge more for other ones too. So I do charge more based on the ingredients. You know, a chocolate chip cookie has chocolate chips in it. Pistachio toffee has pistachios, chocolate chips, toffee. Those are way more ingredients and pistachios are expensive. So pistachios are more than chocolate chip and they'll sell great.

[00:16:59] **David Crabill:** Okay. So, you have variable pricing, so can you walk me through like what your cookies are actually priced out at today?



[00:17:06] **Mike Skyring:** So they're most, so like the chocolate chip is \$5, lemon meringue is \$5. The chocolate funfetti is \$5. But then when you get into like the more and more so like, you know, the cashew one is going to be \$6, pistachio toffee \$6. And kind of the ones that take more work. So like I have a peanut butter one where I have to freeze the peanut butter before I stuff it in the cookie.

[00:17:28] That takes a lot more work. That'll be \$6. So it kind of goes, you know, it goes on the price of ingredients. Otherwise, I'm just going to work at a loss. Like there's no way I can. Pistachios, \$5 a cookie. There's just no way.

[00:17:40] **David Crabill:** Yeah, definitely. And that sounds about right for this type of cookie. Now, how'd you come up with the pricing?

[00:17:46] **Mike Skyring:** I've read a lot of people, like, they're like, oh, we charged by the ounce.

[00:17:50] You know, like a very common theme. You ask in different kinds of cookie groups. People charge by the ounce. So they'll say, you know what, if it's five ounces, I would charge, you know, \$5 which kind of makes sense, to begin with. So that was a great starting point. But then once you start adding different flavors and mix-ins and like different things like that's going to change.

[00:18:06] The Samoa cookie I have right? it's only, it's five ounces. It doesn't have anything expensive in it, but it's a lot of steps. It's, you know, make the cookie, dip the bottom in chocolate, toast the coconut, melt the caramel, put the caramel on top of the cookie, put the coconut on the cookie, you know, drizzle chocolate on top.

[00:18:19] There is many, many steps as opposed to just throw it in the oven, bring it out and let them cool. So, you know, the more work you know, the more it's going to cost.

[00:18:27] **David Crabill:** How much experimentation did it take for you to like come up with these recipes or come up with your base dough?

[00:18:33] **Mike Skyring:** The base dough, not a lot, but like some of the recipes, I can't, you know, they all haven't been hits. I did a Cocoa crispy one, which I think is good. My wife does not like it. She thinks the cocoa crispies taste weird cooked inside. It's not a hit, I tried a maraschino cherry one and it was not great. I used actually like jar berries, you know, cherries and they weren't, I don't know if they were strained not enough, but the cookies just turned out flat like pancakes. So I mean, there's definitely trial before I just, you know, throw them out there and put them on the website.

[00:19:02] **David Crabill:** Do you spend a long time like trying to perfect every recipe before releasing it to the world?

[00:19:08] **Mike Skyring:** I would say, yeah, like I don't want to sell something that I wouldn't, want to eat or I wouldn't want to be behind. Cause at the end of the day, it is my name out there. you know, wow, this was awful. Where'd you guys get it? You know? Oh, Men Bake Cookies. like, I just think like that, like, I don't want, you know, that to happen.

[00:19:21] So I do try a lot and like, make things that taste good and like I have really good friends that live kind of down the street and I'm like, Hey, try this. Is it good? And they're like, no, that one's not that good Mike. You know, maybe, not. Try that one. Or Don't sell that. So I definitely do trial cause like otherwise, you'd never know like somebody would get it and be bad news.



[00:19:36] **David Crabill:** So how much of your business now is the gourmet cookies versus the sugar cookies percentage-wise?

[00:19:44] **Mike Skyring:** I mean, it varies. It really does vary. So now the summer farmer market closed in October, so the first year ever we're doing a winter market, which is indoors and that's every two weeks.

[00:19:55] So now every two weeks I'm, you know, indoors that are indoor farmer market. So that happens to be this Saturday. So I'm doing that this Saturday. But also it's Valentine's Day, it's Super Bowl so this week alone, so I had two customs were picked up today. One was like, I think 18 cookies, one was 12.

[00:20:09] And then I have Farmer's Market on Saturday, which is all gourmet cookies.

[00:20:14] I'm taking about 50 like hearts cause you know, it's Valentine's Day and the kids will love that. And then the following Wednesday, I have a sugar cookie order for three dozen. So, I mean, it really, it really does vary and it varies by the season. I really try to push gourmet a lot more. Mostly just easier, you know, the turnaround time is much quicker.

[00:20:32] I would say maybe 80. 80, Gourmet for sure. I mean, mostly cause you know, I'm doing the farmer's market weekly and that's gourmet. I just did a children's theater production. They did um, a production of Newsies last weekend. the people that work, they'll sell like a couple of concessions.

[00:20:45] They sell candy and all that kind of stuff, and they ask me to come in and sell cookies. It's not no other vendor. So it was just me. I brought maybe a hundred sugar cookies decorated, you know, with the theme of Newsies. And then I brought gourmet cookies and I sold out of gourmet cookies every night. I was there three nights. As much as I try to like, you know, say it could be this, this, it's, it's just hard. It really depends on the event, but like, there's no way I could make enough sugar cookies in that amount of time for three days of work. Whereas gourmet, I can, you know, I sell out on Friday, I can go and make more and have some for Saturday, if that makes sense.

[00:21:16] **David Crabill:** Have you thought about just going all in on the gourmet cookies and dropping the sugar cookies altogether?

[00:21:23] **Mike Skyring:** I have not at this point. But I am more selective um, in the orders I take I have a life as well too. You know, I'm not trying to just, I need, you know, my own time to do my own things besides sit here and do this, you know, seven days a week. So I do try to be more selective. And I do have people, you know, when they request a custom dozen, they have to submit a form and the form is very detailed.

[00:21:42] I mean, you know their name when they want it, how many do they want, what kind of theme do they want, when do they want to pick them up? I mean, if someone's emailing me today to pick up cookies or a custom set, do Monday, it's not going to happen. I don't have the time and I'm not going to work, all night for two nights to get a custom set done.

[00:21:57] I'll either refer them to somebody else if they want or just say, you know what? I, my schedule is booked. I just can't do it.

[00:22:02] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I saw that you request quite a significant lead time for orders and it just seemed like longer than usual. Is that just because your schedule is so hectic? Yeah. It's just, cuz I'm just, I'm booked up. So like, this month, I mean, I'm pretty much booked. I think I have one or two sugar cookie orders due in March, so it just fills up so quick. You know, especially with the farmer's market, like it's just, you know, it's a lot of different things at one time.

[00:22:27] **Mike Skyring:** if I have a custom order during the week, it's hard to make all the stuff I need for the farmer's market on that Saturday. So I definitely am, you know, more selective. I do require, you know, people like you know, how long do you need? You know, I'll say months. If you can give me two or three months ahead of time, that is perfect. Because it's just so hard to work where someone is like, okay, I went on these in two weeks I'm sorry, I can't do that. Like, there's no way.

[00:22:46] **David Crabill:** How do you manage your time and make it all work with the full-time job, with the business, with the family?

[00:22:54] **Mike Skyring:** I have no idea., I don't sleep a lot. it's hard. I do a lot of it automated, so a lot of it, you can't, you can pick up the gourmet cookies anytime at my house and I do have a form and you can fill out the form. And you can't order that day. So you can't order in the morning, pick up that day.

[00:23:08] I think I have it set where it's like a 24-hour notice, so someone can place an order today and pick up, you know, Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday if they wanted. And I do adjust that schedule weekly. So I look at that and I say, okay, am I going to be home this day? Can I have this for them? That helps.

[00:23:21] So I change that schedule on that form every week. They can select from these days if they want to pick up those days. Great. sometimes I do, sometimes it's a lot of hits where people want to come out and pick them up. Sometimes I don't. This week has been actually more unusual with a lot.

[00:23:33] I've had like four people request cookies in last two days to come pick up within next week, which was great. Cause that's actually, in turn, that's what I want. It's so much easier for me to do it that way than for me to bake stuff. And then not know if it's going to sell at an event. Like, if I could just do everything where people just ordered out online, picked up, that'd be the perfect situation from a home baking standpoint and time-wise.

[00:23:52] But a lot of automation, I try to do, like I schedule my Facebook posts that kind of stuff like, and like just keep everything hooked up to my email so I can get emails when all my forms come in. I keep my Google calendar up to date. It's a lot of work, but like the other day, my wife said to me, she's like, you know, you really got this down to a system?

[00:24:08] And I was like, yeah, you know, I think I kind finally kind of do, like, I know when I have to start a set or what, what's the last day. I do have to start a set before I get it done. And how many labels should I print? And even printing labels can kind of like save time. So I sell a ton of chocolate chip cookies.

[00:24:21] So now when I printed my labels, I just took the whole roll. Instead of printing, you know, 10 for this week, I printed the whole roll. Chocolate chip. Instead of splitting it up, just print the whole roll. I know I'm going to need them eventually. Instead of sitting down, setting up the printer, print the

whole roll, file it away when you, you got the whole roll of printed ingredient labels right there. little things like that just help save time. When I was at that children's event theater I had a downtime. So I sell, before the show. They go into the show, I just sit there for about 45 minutes until intermission. Then they come back out um, for intermission they can buy more, you know, whatever they wanted.

[00:24:49] So during that 40 minutes, like I brought bags and I stickered all my bags and my label and my name on there and just kind of find time, you know, to tweak little, certain things I could do when there's nothing else going on.

[00:24:59] **David Crabill:** Do you often feel overwhelmed by it all?

[00:25:03] **Mike Skyring:** I don't think so. I've kind of, I mean, I would say maybe about a couple months ago I did, but now I feel like I really, I have it down. I have a good.

[00:25:10] **David Crabill:** It was so interesting cause you said you didn't really have any ambition to start the business in the first place before it kind of fell into your lap and you also are apparently losing sleep in order to make it all work. So like what drives you, what motivates you to keep moving forward and expanding the business?

[00:25:31] **Mike Skyring:** I mean, I love, people like people's reactions. So I love, you know, oh my God, we love your cookies, and they're so great. I love that part of it. There's many times like, you know, I remember somebody emailed me maybe a year and a half ago after I made them cookies and I think it was for like maybe their grandmother's birthday or something.

[00:25:45] And they sent me the sweetest email saying that like the grandmother had like Alzheimer's. She was losing her memory. But you know, when she saw these cookies, she was just so happy and it reminded her of, I don't remember what the theme was exactly, but such and such when she was a child. And like, it was the sweetest thing.

[00:25:57] It just like, it touched me that like, I did something to contribute to this person's day you know, and make their family's day. So I love that. I love that part of it. I love being a part of like, someone's, family, I guess you could say. I mean, I do like DIY kits and like kids take them home, you know, with their parents and they send photos of the kids decorating them.

[00:26:13] And I like that. I like the success of my business so far and I like that I, you know, it's affecting people, I guess you could say,

[00:26:19] **David Crabill:** Do you have a goal or could you see yourself eventually doing this full-time?

[00:26:25] **Mike Skyring:** Yes. So something has to give I would say right now, this point of my business that I'm at this year, so in the month from January to today, It's almost tripled what it was last year, so I would say, yeah, something's going to have to change.

[00:26:38] I either have to do it full-time or open a brick-and-mortar. Some for sure. Has to give

[00:26:43] **David Crabill:** Well, I notice, I mean, you obviously have the gourmet cookies, but that's not even all that you do. I mean, obviously, you have the sugar cookies too, but you have like the cookie chunks. You've done decorating kits, you've done cookie cakes, you've done candy caramels, said minerals.

[00:26:58] I mean, it seems like. for someone as busy as you are, usually people would like start to hone down their menu, right? And like condense it. It seems like you keep growing it and making it bigger,

[00:27:11] **Mike Skyring:** So, so I have no time in my life, but like, let me make these caramels. I take an hour and a half to stir Yeah, so now I, caramels are on the list as well. So I did take those like to the farmer's market for the first time last week. and I will have those again there this week as well. I don't know what I was thinking. maybe it's just, I'm sure I saw it somewhere and I was like, oh, I should make these and that should kind of how my brain works. it doesn't think like, oh I don't have time to do this. I'm like, sure I have time to stand at the stove for 40 minutes and stir this caramel while it cooks. but I would say mostly, you know, the business is you know, the gourmet and the sugar for sure. Cause I found out that if you don't press things enough, you're not going to get a lot of hits on it. So like, you know, for the cookie chunks, I did take them to an event we had for New Year's in our downtown and it wasn't a big seller because, you know, my audience isn't used to those.

[00:27:55] So I think I sold like one box cause they've never tried them. Like they don't know anything about them. And I probably only sold one or two since then. So you do, I mean, I definitely have to spend more time pushing that. for a great example of showing, you know, yeah, I do offer those. But I need to push them more to get more, in the eyes of people.

[00:28:11] **David Crabill:** Can you describe the cookie chunks? Because I actually thought that was a pretty creative idea.

[00:28:15] **Mike Skyring:** So it's based off of another cookie company that sells items. So I just take the cookies, the gourmet cookies, I have cut them and then I dip them in chocolate and then I put the toppings on. That are included in the cookie. So if it was chocolate chip cookie cut it into oars, hand dip them and then put chocolate chips on top pistachios, hand dip them, put pistachios on top.

[00:28:36] and I kind of advertise this where like, this is not a way to sample our cookies cause you're not, it's not a good judgment, but if you know our flavors and love them like this is something else like that you could enjoy. Like everyone base it off.

[00:28:46] You know, Hey, if you're trying cookies, not try the sampler box 'cause it's not the same thing. You know what I'm saying? It's, something dipped in chocolate, it's not the exact same, you know, things. Just try one of my regular cookies. So I do, you know, try to say that, oh, you don't, do you have your favorite?

[00:28:58] Do you like, you know, which ones do you love? Have you tried these ones? And I will try to bring them back more. It's just been something I've been lagging on. But, you know, again, with time and all that kind of stuff. But I have found that you got to push things a lot before your audience really jumps on board. which is a huge learning curve in a cottage food business. Actually,

[00:29:14] **David Crabill:** As somebody who hadn't had any business experience, what are some of the things you feel like were the biggest learning curves for you?

[00:29:21] **Mike Skyring:** I mean, marketing itself. So like you have to post, I mean, you have got to post and post. I mean, Facebook is just, there's millions of people in the feed. They're not going to see

your stuff. You've got to post and post and post. I came across a post, I don't know, a two days ago, and they're like, you know, I just launched my Valentine's Day orders and I did a post and I haven't got anything. I used to reach out, I commented and I was like, well, you know how many times you posted?

[00:29:41] And she's like, well, two, that is not enough. Like that it just isn't, like, I started posting Valentine's Day back in the middle of January. You just have to be in people's eyes. Just remind them, remind them, and remind them that it's out there. Cause they're not going to order the first time they see it, probably.

[00:29:54] No, they're, you know, January 15th is probably way too soon to order for Valentine's Day. But if they see it enough and it's in their face, they're like, oh, I was meant to order that, or, oh, I meant to do that. Then eventually, you know, they're going to order. But **that's a huge thing I really learned is that you've got to post, you've got to, you know, you can't post on a Friday and expect to sell out all your cookies on Saturday.**

[00:30:13] **It just, it doesn't work like that. People aren't seeing it in your feed. It's, it's not showing up. That's probably my biggest, biggest takeaway. It's definitely the marketing aspect of it. And, you know, putting your name out there and post all the time and reach out and like, do events. Like I do that children's theater but I actually donate 10% of the sales back to the theater.**

[00:30:30] **So it goes back to the kids. Which is great. So I get my name out there. People get to eat cookies and the money goes back to the theater. Email marketing is super important. It's super, super important. Actually, there's a baker in my town. I saw her post today saying, you know, do the Facebook, you know, it's not working correctly lately, you know, we're missing a lot of stuff.**

[00:30:49] **Can you start emailing us? I mean, they've been in business longer than I have, and like, they're just now going to email like marketing. That's crazy to me. Like that's, I don't know, like, I don't know how I couldn't do that. Like, I've been emailing marketing since I started, I believe. And that's one of the reasons if Facebook ever went down, you need to be able to, you know, get to your customers another way. But you can't put all your eggs in one basket. You need Instagram and you need Facebook, and you need email, and You need all of it.**

[00:31:12] **David Crabill:** It's a little overwhelming, right? When you're a new entrepreneur and to say, oh, you need to do everything, and tackling everything can be pretty overwhelming. Like did you add all the things at once or did you pick them up over time?

[00:31:28] **Mike Skyring:** Over time, so like Facebook was my, is my main source. I get a lot of, most of my hits, I guess you could say from Facebook. I use Instagram as well, but it's not as popular. I don't get as many as my sales from Instagram. So I don't spend all my time on Instagram, so I don't spend, tons of posts and reels and all that kind of stuff on Instagram, because that's not where I'm getting my hits from.

[00:31:47] **So I focus on what I think is my biggest sales, which is Facebook. So Facebook posting, you know, my webpage. I don't post very often in swap sites anymore. Just cause I don't feel like I really need to. I get a lot of hits on my own page and like the farmer's market helps with that kind of stuff.**

[00:32:02] I would say email and Facebook, I mean, are almost hand in hand and the emails don't have to be elaborate, like production emails. You're going to see some from like big, retail outlet stores. I might have a couple of photos in them.

[00:32:12] I say like, what's coming up farmer's Market this weekend be there, blah blah. It's at this spot. These are the new cookie flavors. If you want to order, here's a link. So it's nothing, I mean it's not a super fancy email, but it gets to my customers in case they don't see it, you know, posted or that kind of stuff.

[00:32:26] **David Crabill:** How often do you send your emails?

[00:32:29] **Mike Skyring:** Probably once a week like it's not a newsletter-type email. you know, it would just be pretty redundant for me, at least in this point in my game, or to send it more than once. I'm just saying, you know, like I sent one yesterday saying, you know, farmer's Market this weekend.

[00:32:40] You know, here's a flavor. kind of talk about the flavor a little bit, what it entails. Here's another flavor. And then if you have any like tidbits, like right now I'm in a competition for the best of Detroit. Like one of the best cookie companies in Detroit, which is actually crazy to me.

[00:32:52] They even think I could be on that list. So I, you know, here's a link if you want to vote for that. And just pretty much it, it's a quick email, just kind of get in their face again. I mean, 'cause there are many times people are like, oh, I didn't see, you know, oh, I didn't know you were off Valentine's cookies.

[00:33:03] I didn't see them. Or, so just another way to reach out to your, you know, target audience and your clients. There are people that have ordered from you before and get in their face again and say, oh yeah, in case you missed this, here's, you know, your Valentine's Day orders are going to be closing soon.

[00:33:13] That kind of stuff.

[00:33:15] **David Crabill:** How do you get people on your email list,

[00:33:18] **Mike Skyring:** So the first way I do it is when people submit orders, or not their orders, I'm sorry, their custom quote requests. So I get their emails from there. And then a lot of times I'll run like a landing page. Yeah, well they'll just click on it. And a lot of times they're like, Hey, stay up to date with, you know, my cookies, new flavors, promos, or like events we're going to be at. Click here to sign up and I'll just throw that in my Insta stories or I'll throw it on my Facebook stories.

[00:33:39] Super easy and then, either get a couple hits and I'll do it every couple weeks. I don't do it all the time. But every couple of weeks I'll throw that up there. Then it'll give me, you know, four or five hits. And I mean, 'cause email lists fluctuate, you know, you always have people that are unsubscribed or don't no longer interested.

[00:33:51] So, you know, I'll get three and I'll lose one or get five and, you know, lose none. it's constantly a work in progress.

[00:33:56] **David Crabill:** And do you notice when you send out emails that it turns into orders?



[00:34:02] **Mike Skyring:** I do. And I especially noticed that this week actually. So I sent an email yesterday talking about the new flavors, you know, that were out this month, which was the red velvet month, which was red Samoa. And I got two pickups for yesterday, and I had a pickup for today, just based, I believe, pretty sure off the email.

[00:34:19] I mean, it's pretty random, but I just said the email, and like those orders came in right after. So I think oftentimes, you know, they forget or, and another thing so the farmer's markets every two weeks in the winter. I won't be at the next one. I'm unavailable that week. So I did make sure I put my email, Hey, if you want cookies, you know, the next, at least the next two weeks, I, you know, remember cookies won't be there.

[00:34:35] Stock up now. You know, kind of give like the FOMO type into the email. Like, oh, you ain't going to be able to get any unless you. Pick up this week so that you give me a couple of orders. I would say based right off on that.

[00:34:46] **David Crabill:** Well, you definitely have a lot of the marketing pieces working, right? You got the email. And I'm looking through your social media feed. I mean, you do a really good job with social media. Like did you use social media a lot before starting the business or how did you learn all this stuff?

[00:35:01] **Mike Skyring:** I learned it all from, the Miracle Twins,, the Sugar Cookie marketing group has been a huge, huge, huge, huge asset. Like, I've taken so much from it. I, I mean I owe my business I feel like to it. And it's cause it's definitely a learning curve.

[00:35:15] Like even just talking to other people in the same group you know, that are like minded that are maybe have an idea you haven't tried, that just really helps. Because sometimes they're things, you know, I don't think of and I'm like, oh, well I didn't see lots of Grandy. I'll copy what they said. I'll use those words a little bit, change them around.

[00:35:27] It's a lot easier, you know, to kind of bounce it off of other people that are like-minded. So like, I feel like if you can find a group that is a like-minded people, I mean, we have a Michigan cookie or group here as well. And I'm, you know, I'm in that one, I'm in, the Sugar Cookie Marketing group as well.

[00:35:39] And that really helps. It actually helps a ton because being an entrepreneur, I feel like if, you know, if you're by yourself, if it's just you, it can be a lonely type of situation. Like it's because it's all you, you're doing it all. So having somebody else to bounce those ideas off of that really helps.

[00:35:53] So I would definitely create a lot of it too.

[00:35:55] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I had the Miracle Twins on the show pretty recently. And you know, I think it goes without saying that this is an industry as your business name alludes to that is dominated by women. So what has it been like to be in that group or just be a man among women?

[00:36:16] **Mike Skyring:** I mean, it, it's, it's funny and I, I mean, I make light of it. Cause a lot of times not so much in that, like the marketing group, the strict cookie one, but like the local Michigan group, it's very small. I mean, I would say maybe there are 2000 people in it. I'm pretty sure. I haven't seen any other guys in the group or at least talk or anything.

[00:36:30] And a lot of times I'll be like, oh ladies, what do you guys think about this? And I'll always kind of like, I'm not a lady, but I think you should do this. And they're like, oh, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I, I've, I was just harassing you. It's fine. I mean, I. It's not a man-dominated thing. But it's, it's been great.

[00:36:44] Like, so the marketing group, the sugar cooking one is great. You know, the people in there are very like, I mean, there's, you know, there's a few guys in there, so it's not, it's not just me. So it's good. It's good. I don't mind

[00:36:53] **David Crabill:** And so you jumped in and dug into the sugar cookie marketing group, but I also saw that you joined the cookie college. Right.

[00:37:04] **Mike Skyring:** I did it the first day it opened. I did.

[00:37:06] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like joining that membership is what helped you grow so quickly, or was it you could, you have just probably figured it all out with the group itself?

[00:37:17] **Mike Skyring:** I mean I probably, I mean, I guess could have figured it out, but I would say there's no way, I mean, hands down, it helped I mean, there's just so much. I mean, they cover how to set up order forms or, you know, like marketing or posting or how to write copy and like, there's just so many topics that you don't think of.

[00:37:33] I feel like, you know, just going into the business thinking, okay, I'm just going to sell cookies. Like, that's all I'm going to do. I'm just kidding. I'm going to do it. Like, you don't think of how much it entails. On the marketing side, like just trying to sell, it's, it's not easy and especially there's a lot of cookie businesses like out there, there's a lot of sugar cookie makers. So trying to compete with that, you have to definitely put a lot of work in, you know, and stand out and like put more than the other person is in order to make sales. Otherwise, it's just not going to work. I definitely feel like that helped a lot. you know, I try not to compare myself, you otherwise that their own, you know, stage of their business.

[00:38:01] But I do see people, I'm like, oh man, they should, you know, maybe take a different photo or, you know, so I'll kind of reach out like, oh, maybe, you know, edit this a little bit or try, you know, crop in that, or move that a little bit or maybe say something this way to, you know, help change it up. Because the college is like a group of people that I feel like are just really all. All hard in like all head in, so we're kind of all in the same mindset like we were all trying to grow our business. Whereas like maybe the other groups are a little more lax, a little bit, not saying they're not, you know, all head in, you know, anything like that. But maybe not as geared toward, you know, trying to dive in so fast.

[00:38:29] And that's what you get with the, you know, with the college it was just boom, boom, boom, boom.

[00:38:33] **David Crabill:** Well, your photography is really good and not just like the photos and the editing, but also just like you clearly add elements to the picture. You design, you know, sort of a set for your pictures. Like was that all stuff that you had to learn too, or do you think you just have kind of a good eye for design?

[00:38:51] **Mike Skyring:** I definitely had to learn that. a lot of it, I just learned on my own. I would see other photos online, like, oh, that's a good idea.

[00:38:57] Like you could just, just kind of throw anything random in there. Cause a lot of times it doesn't, it didn't have to be anything, you know, specific. You could just put like a mixing bowl next to a, I don't know, a spoon and people like, oh, we love this photo. So just like props, like adding things kind of, I just, I don't know, it just kind of came to me like it just kind of just fell in.

[00:39:11] Like I've never been into photography or anything like that. And even now, like, I mean my photos are with my cell phone. I'm not even using a professional camera. Like so any, I mean anybody can do it, just get a couple apps on your phone, super easy.

[00:39:23] **David Crabill:** In terms of like packaging and branding, it seems like you put a lot of effort into that. like can you share a little bit about. What you've done in terms of making your product stand out?

[00:39:34] **Mike Skyring:** so I like my, the colors on my logo, like that brown on that tan. So I really wanted to keep something within that. it didn't make sense to me to have like a brown logo, but then have like red stickers, like that wasn't aesthetically, I guess to me.

[00:39:45] So I liked the brown idea. So even now, like I use, you know, brown stickers on my packaging you know, for the names of the cookies I use brown bags. I use brown boxes like from people, you know, pick up their custom sets. I use like brown twine to tie it together to close it. Brown stickers, it's kind of all like the dark, more like naturally type looking thing, I guess you could say.

[00:40:05] It just seemed to fit more of my logo, I guess, than, you know, getting like a blue sticker and then, you know, a red bag. I try to all keep it kind of cohesive and maybe it's a little too brown, I don't know, but I like.

[00:40:16] **David Crabill:** Well, you said you brown bags, but typically if you're doing sugar cookies, you would be doing clear bags, right? To showcase the cookie.

[00:40:25] **Mike Skyring:** I mean brown bags as in paper bags. Like for um, when I do like events like farmer's Market, say somebody buys like five cookies, they get a brown bag, like I put them in a brown bag, I'm to carry home.

[00:40:35] The sugar cookies, they're just, you know, getting heat sealed in the clear bag and they go in a brown window box so they can see right through the window.

[00:40:40] They can see their cookies before they pick them up. But I do also send them a photo before so they can see them ahead of time.

[00:40:46] **David Crabill:** Well, in terms of marketing, it also seems like you're trying to position your products as high-end, right? Like you're calling them gourmet cookies. I saw the word luxury on one of your things, like

[00:41:04] **Mike Skyring:** I think that was probably the caramels.

[00:41:05] **David Crabill:** That's what it was. Yeah. So like is that something you're really super intentionally doing to try to up the perception of your product

[00:41:14] **Mike Skyring:** The perception and the price. I feel like that's going to go hand in hand. Like there's no way I could just say random cookie and then try to sell it for \$7. You know what I'm saying? So saying, oh, gourmet chocolate chip cookie. Oh wow, that sounds great. Like, sounds fancy. So I feel like that it kind of goes hand in hand with those two like the wording and the pricing is going to go together I mean, I wouldn't want to sell something on a paper plate and be like, oh, this is gourmet cookie, \$10, it comes on this white paper plate.

[00:41:36] Like, you know what I'm saying? It wouldn't, it wouldn't go, at least in my mind. So that's the perception. Like these are fancy like these are the price. They are because they're worth it.

[00:41:46] **David Crabill:** How did you come up with like gourmet cookies is that's what you're going to call your cookies because you put a lot of effort into some of your names, at least for your flavors.

[00:41:55] **Mike Skyring:** Yeah, I don't remember how I got the gourmet. I'm not sure where I came up with that from. It's, I mean, it's also another, it's also a bigger market. It's growing too, like the, you know, the gourmet, I guess style or New York, or some people call them New York style cookies and that kind of stuff.

[00:42:09] And they'll just call them, you know, like, oh, chocolate chip. And I just feel like it's just a different vibe. It doesn't sound as, you know, as, I don't know about elite or like, just fancy as like gourmet cookie or, I mean, it's kind of like buying like a Ghirardelli chocolate, which is like gourmet chocolate, I guess you could say that's the most gourmet chocolate I know.

[00:42:24] or buying like a Hershey bar, you know, you know that when you're getting one, it's going to be a way different taste than the other.

[00:42:31] **David Crabill:** Well along the lines of trying to position your products as being high-end, I saw that you make your own vanilla extract at home.

[00:42:41] Can you just describe what you do?

[00:42:43] **Mike Skyring:** I mean, it's super easy. It is not hard, it does have to sit for a year. I do let it all sit for a year before I can use it. So trying to like to get a build-up so you have enough is tough. It's actually super easy. It's just like you need any type of 80-proof, alcohol.

[00:42:57] So you could like bourbon, you could use vodka I think you can use rum. And just throw in some vanilla beans and you can leave it there. Kind of shake it, leave it in a dark spot. I mean, they say you can use it after like six to eight months. I do not I will wait a full year before I crack mine. I mean, it's super easy, like literally nothing to it.

[00:43:14] I feel like it's come pretty popular. And I feel like it's something else I can offer. Like, you know, you know what you're getting. You're not getting you know, some kind of box bottle of vanilla from the store, you know, that has like sugar in it or, you know, this is pure vanilla.

[00:43:25] Like vanilla extract, vanilla and alcohol. Exactly what, you know, the extract should be. I mean, there's no reason you have to buy a vanilla with sugar in it.

[00:43:33] **David Crabill:** Is that something that you started doing from the beginning or was it something that you started doing just to increase the marketing of your cookies?

[00:43:42] **Mike Skyring:** I don't even think I did an increase in marketing. I think I just did it because I wanted, like, I just wanted that and it's, I think I just wanted something different. And the price of vanilla is super expensive. But then it kind of, I do feel like, you know, after I, did make a batch and I think I made it, I think maybe last year was my brown Christmas.

[00:43:56] So I did like my first full batch and I was like, oh, like this is, I mean, it smells good. The cookies taste great. So eventually, eventually when I started making it and using it all the time, and then now that is, yeah, of course I'm going to promote that. Like this is, you know, you know what you're getting.

[00:44:07] This is homemade, vanilla, like extract. You're not getting anything from the bottle, not, you don't know what it is. That kind of stuff. And I feel like, you know, that helped and people like, oh my God, that's so great. And I didn't know you did that.

[00:44:16] **David Crabill:** Well, vanilla beans are also extremely expensive. Like is it actually less expensive to do it that?

[00:44:24] **Mike Skyring:** I would say yes. Like I smelled a small bottle of vanilla the other day. So I probably have run out of like the cause my next batch isn't due for like next two months. So I had to buy vanilla and it was \$5 for like a small bottle. Whereas I can, you know, I'll probably get maybe 10 uses out of where I can make a bottle of vanilla and probably get 20, 25 uses out of, you know, for half the cost.

[00:44:43] Like, you, you don't get to buy the highest-end vodka or the highest-end bourbon or the highest end rum. It doesn't, it doesn't matter cause you're not going to, you know, you're not going to taste it. You're just going to taste the vanilla in there. and you can use the same beans multiple times, multiple batches. So whereas, you know, you buy vanilla, you know, use your bottle, that's it, it's gone. You know, this, you can use your bottle. Vanilla, your beans are still good. Throw another, some liquor in there, seal it up, come back in a year and you got another bottle of vanilla. So I feel like once you build up a good amount you can just rotate and, you know, eventually change out your beans and be good to go.

[00:45:14] **David Crabill:** It sounds like great from a marketing perspective, being able to say, oh, I use homemade vanilla, but it also sounds logistically problematic, right? Because you have to essentially be predicting what your orders are going to be looking like in a year or just have way too much on hand all the time.

[00:45:35] **Mike Skyring:** Yeah. I mean, yeah. Cause I mean, it's never going to go bad, like, you know, vanilla is forever. So Yeah. Either have too much or you're going to do, you know, kind of what I did. So I just started and then I was like, oh man, I'm out. Like I use it all. Like, I looked at like six bottles. So eventually I had to, I did have to go out and actually buy like, you know, vanilla.

[00:45:50] But now I make it all like I just made a batch yesterday, so now I just make it every couple weeks I'll get some vanilla beans, some bottles, make it. So logistically, yeah, it's probably a little harder if you're, you know, trying to run like a busy business. but Eventually down the road, if I ever had my own brick-and-mortar store, I could sell vanilla as well there.

[00:46:07] So, I mean, there, there are opportunities.

[00:46:10] **David Crabill:** Yeah, with the name and with, you know, just all the things that you do with your business. It just seems like a theme that you're constantly trying to find ways to set yourself apart from other bakeries. Would you say that's true?

[00:46:26] **Mike Skyring:** A hundred percent.

[00:46:28] **David Crabill:** Are there any other ways that you could think of that you've set yourself apart?

[00:46:32] **Mike Skyring:** I mean, I would say like one, like you mentioned, my photos, like my photos, I try to, you know, take a photo or something you like, it catches your eye and you see it and you're like, oh, I know who that is. Or, I know that's Men Bake Cookies. The photos for sure, you know, my packaging, my labeling I mean my flavors, my flavor, like try to keep them as unique as possible and, you know, something that I don't see all the time.

[00:46:51] Cause I mean, I feel like if I only sold, you know, four of the same flavors, eventually people are going to, you know, move onto something else or someone else is going to, I'd trying to be the first to market with my product before somebody else does. I guess you could say. Like, if I could just get there first, I could get those people in.

[00:47:05] Like, if I could get these caramels first, I have those people, you know, if that got to make sense, I guess.

[00:47:11] **David Crabill:** And with your business name, men Bake Cookies, it looked like you actually got a trademark for that.

[00:47:18] **Mike Skyring:** I am in the process. It takes a long time to get a trademark.

[00:47:22] **David Crabill:** Why did you choose? I know it could take what months, years, whatever it may.

[00:47:28] **Mike Skyring:** So yeah, I'm supposed to hear, I think actually like in March. I'm supposed to get an update I filed last August Um, it's cause because it's so unique because it is so unique and I feel like it adds credibility. I did a thing the other day, somebody asked me about another business locally and I said, I don't think that you know, they have an L L C, like, I think they're just local and I don't remember what their name was offhand.

[00:47:47] And I did a search on Michigan l l c and there was like 30 businesses. That all started with like, started with like, at least the same like type of lingo, like great bakes or something like, you know, along those lines. And I was like, that is crazy. Like there's some people that have the same like idea. Everybody just felt like my name was like, so out there. It's, you know, no one else has it. I feel like it's mine, you know, just want to keep it.

[00:48:08] **David Crabill:** And what have you learned in the process of trying to create this trademark?

[00:48:13] **Mike Skyring:** So it is a lot. I mean, there's a lot to go into a trademark. And there's different things you can trademark. So you can trademark, you know, colors, you can trademark packaging. You, I mean, it's insane and it's expensive. It's not cheap to trademark. And the more you try to trademark,



the more expensive it is. I mean, I do care about my business colors and all that. My logo. At the end of the day, it's just the, I want the name trademarked. So that's what I was going for. I'm not going for the packaging trademark. I mean, I'm not a huge corporate company. You know, maybe eventually someday, but not today.

[00:48:40] So I don't need, you know, to trademark my brown sticker. And, you know, they do, you know, advise even on the website multiple times, you know, if you have any like your best to go with an attorney to help you do this it's not easy. But for, you know, for just your name, it's not super complicated.

[00:48:54] I mean, you just kind of like fill out a form and you have to pay and it is expensive. And if the form is wrong, you do have to repay, and like, you know, it all adds up. it's, it's not, it's not cheap.

[00:49:03] **David Crabill:** Did you go with a trademark attorney?

[00:49:06] **Mike Skyring:** I did not I did it myself only just cause I said it was just my name only. And that's way more simplistic I guess you could say than getting into like other variables of like, Things of like colors and, you know, designs and all that kind of stuff. And it's pretty, you know, you can always, I looked at a lot of stuff on the internet before I did it to you and the form kind of explains a lot of it to you.

[00:49:23] So I did just do it myself. You know, it is in works right now and I will find out, I guess in a couple of months if I should have hired an attorney and it didn't go through. But I don't anticipate any problems. Only cause it's just, you know, you know, Men Bake Cookies. Like, it's nothing. I'm not trying to delve too much into it.

[00:49:39] **David Crabill:** Yeah, so this is like one of the most basic forms of a trademark, and I know they are not cheap. So how much, and you're doing it all by your, you know, like a DIY in it. So how much did it cost to apply for this trademark?

[00:49:54] **Mike Skyring:** I don't remember offhand. I mean it was last August maybe between \$800 and \$1,000. I mean around there.

[00:50:00] **David Crabill:** That sounds about right to me. Yeah.

[00:50:03] **Mike Skyring:** But that's just, you know, you hoping it's right. If it's not right, you're going to have to pay more money.

[00:50:08] **David Crabill:** Yeah. It's not something I would recommend to most people, especially when they're starting out. But

[00:50:13] You have a pretty unique name and I mean, I can kind of see it. it's one of those things that people think they need and they often don't. And it's also one of those things where you don't know you need it until you do.

[00:50:28] **Mike Skyring:** or it's too late. Like, I'm like, oh, I should have a trademark. Like now it's, you know, this brick and mortar have 18 locations. Like that could've been me. Exactly. I mean, the same way, like, I didn't, I didn't, wasn't sure if I wanted to do it, but I put a lot of thought into it. I was

like, you know what I do like my name is very unique to me and my business, and I don't want anybody else to have it.

[00:50:45] Especially with so many cookie companies out there, like they're just growing and like, I feel like even during the pandemic, just so many have popped up, like, you know, someone's bound to try to like, come with a name similar or something like that.

[00:50:55] So I wanted to keep it.

[00:50:57] **David Crabill:** So I know you, you do a lot of events, you've done farmer's markets and you're in the winter's market right now. And what is it like, I mean, I imagine you sample your cookies at markets, right?

[00:51:11] **Mike Skyring:** I do not. I never have. I never have. And I and I won't. I mean people do and I, that, that's on them. My thing is, you cannot go to a grocery store and try a brand-new cereal before you buy it. You cannot, you either buy these brand-new rice crispies or you don't know what it tastes like.

[00:51:26] And that has just been my thinking. And I'll, I mean, besides that, I don't want, I feel like I'm given giveaway, you know, maybe \$30 in samples to get one sale or maybe get no sales. I mean, that isn't worth it to me. So I do not, I do not give samples and I just, I never have.

[00:51:40] **David Crabill:** What's a customer interaction like? Like when someone new walks up to your booth, you know, like, how do you make the sale without having them actually try the product?

[00:51:51] **Mike Skyring:** I feel like you know, the area I live in, I live, I mean, I would say it's a small town. Maybe it's not small. Some, it's, it's small to me, like it's smallish. You know, our farmer's market is small. It's not huge. We have like 30, you know, 50 some booze maybe. And you see the same clientele every week.

[00:52:04] Like there's a same people that come from last Saturday that will come this Saturday and support you. So the clientele, I feel like, if Susan bought a cookie on, you know, on her Saturday and she loved it, she's going to go home and tell her friend, you know, then she's like, oh, I just had this last week.

[00:52:16] My friend gave it to me. I would say about 90% of my sales were just from word of mouth only because I was out there so much. You know, somebody would buy, you know, someone bought it for their friend or someone bought it for someone else, and then they tried it and they came back and they loved it. And like our farmer's market isn't downtown.

[00:52:31] So we have our, you know, our local downtown shops, and even some of them will just, like, they would walk over, you know, it's, it's small. It's a super small downtown. You know, they'd walk from their business every Saturday to pick up cookies. She's like, oh, you know, I'm here to pick up cookies for the shop today.

[00:52:43] And she'd buy her six cookies and go back to work. I feel like, you know, the interaction is definitely positive. And it's a lot of, you get to know your clients. Like I, you know, I, I have a couple and they have twins. I know they're twin boys and, you know, they share the same birthdays. My

daughter, I mean, all because, you know, they bought my cookies, you know, once they tried and they loved them.

[00:52:59] And now I've seen them every other week for the past year and a half buying cookies. You know, all, all without a sample. Just, they tried the product, they loved it. And now I, you know, I see them all the time. Actually, what I feel like has really helped me the most is getting my name out there with, you know, my city and the farmer's markets and being local.

[00:53:15] And then word of mouth. Like we have a New Year's Eve event in our downtown and there's a local business and it was their first year and, you know, they, they do like a ball drop and all that kind of stuff on top of their business. And they said, Hey, you know, we're trying this vendor event, you know, the first year you know, do you want to do it? And they reached, I feel like they reached out to me. I mean, maybe they're reaching out to hundreds of cookie people, but I don't, you know, there's not that many in my area. So they reached out to me and there were, you know, like six vendors and I was the only cookie vendor there. There's like a carnival event in our downtown coming up this year in March.

[00:53:42] And like a month and a half ago they reached out to me and said, hey, do you want to do this event in our downtown? So I think it's definitely word of mouth and getting to know like, you know, your people that, you know, you see all the time. And then hopefully they spread, you know, good news and, you know, some of those tries it and that kind of stuff.

[00:53:54] **David Crabill:** So considering that most of your sales are recurring, when you go into a new event that maybe doesn't have that recurring customer base, and sounds like you're not bringing samples to that, like, it just seems like a big. Obstacle to overcome with a \$5 cookie, right? It's a pretty big spend.

[00:54:14] So like, do you get much resistance from newcomers?

[00:54:18] **Mike Skyring:** I would say no, and like the way, I feel like, you know, everybody has their own niche. Like, you know, I'm not sure where you're from, but here in Michigan we have a company called Biggby Coffee, and we also have Starbucks. So, you know, there's people that buy Starbucks and there's people that buy Biggby.

[00:54:31] So like even at the farmer's market, there's other cookies there, there are people that say cookies, you know, some selling four packs, like they're selling cookies. There are people that only buy from them and there's some people that buy from me. like, you know, once you get your clients and that kind of stuff, you know, they will stick with you.

[00:54:43] I do feel like, you know, they're loyal and that kind of stuff. But I definitely feel like word of mouth and like traveling and Facebook post help since I am, you know, a cottage baker, it's hard for me, you know, to see random people because you have to come pick these products up from my home.

[00:54:55] So when I went out to, you know, the children's theater, it's 30 minutes away. I mean, that's not my area. Like, I don't know those clients because I don't live there. Like I'm not there, you know, I don't do their farmer's markets. You know, so I go, you know, there's children's theater and it's like, oh my God, we heard so much about you.

[00:55:08] We heard about men. We can't wait to try them. We can't wait to try them. And they buy them and try them. Like, they're not saying, you know, Hey, can you cut that cookie in half? So we can have a piece of it. I don't feel like it's hindered my business at all. I mean that's, in my opinion, the loss of giving out samples would outweigh, you know, I kind of think about when I go to Costco, I mean, I'm going to try these, you know, peanuts 18 times. I'm never going to buy them, but Sure. give me the free samples.

[00:55:27] I don't, you're just giving away products that may or may not have a return. And I guess that's just something I'm willing to gamble on

[00:55:33] **David Crabill:** But you've never tried samples before.

[00:55:36] **Mike Skyring:** I have not. No. It never even crossed my mind, like I never wanted to do it. And there's a lot of rules about giving out samples of the cottage baker. I mean, kind of, I don't want to go into that aspect of it. Like you have to cut them and they have to be bagged and you have to wear gloves in front of the people and all just kind of like, and that's the technical way.

[00:55:51]

[00:55:53] **David Crabill:** So do you have any employees yet?

[00:55:56] **Mike Skyring:** I do not, I mean, I have my child and my wife who are my taste testers, but I do not have any employees.

[00:56:01] **David Crabill:** It just seems like you might be getting to that point. Right?

[00:56:05] **Mike Skyring:** I feel like that is coming, it is coming

[00:56:08] **David Crabill:** Well, as you look forward in the future, like where do you see yourself going with this business?

[00:56:15] **Mike Skyring:** I see it only expanding. I don't see myself slowing down. I've proven that now, like, you know, I just did that vendor event for the Children's theater. The lady just reached out to me the other day and she's like, oh, you know, thanks so much and blah blah, and thanks for sending us, you know, the donation.

[00:56:27] And she's like, well, we're doing, you know, this other show in March. Are you willing to do it? I'm like, sure. She's like, now in March I'll be back there three days again. I'm already committing, you know, I'm saying to events and events and events and things and, tomorrow I turn my application for the farmer's market for the summer.

[00:56:39] So tomorrow my application goes in. So I'll be there from every Saturday from May to October and being cottage baker like I, I mean, people that have not done farmer's markets, I feel like they're a huge, huge asset. If you're a cottage baker, you can treat a farmer's market like your own brick and mortar store. I mean, you really, truly, truly can. And that's a huge takeaway. If anybody can use that, you'll get loyal people that will come to you every week, as I said, and by the same, you know, different products and try your new things every week. I've definitely seen like I'm already committed to this so much that there's no way my business is going to slow down this year.

[00:57:08] **David Crabill:** Well, you've invested in this trademark, so where would you like to see your business in, say, three to five years?

[00:57:17] **Mike Skyring:** I need my own business. I need my own brick-and-mortar store. to, I mean, I have to.

[00:57:21] That is my goal.

[00:57:22] **David Crabill:** Thank you so much, Mike, for coming on and sharing all of that with us. Now, if somebody would like to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:57:33] **Mike Skyring:** I have a website, so it's [www.menbakecookies.com](http://www.menbakecookies.com) or they can also email me [@hellomenbakecookies.com](mailto:@hellomenbakecookies.com). Or they can find me on my Facebook page or Instagram page as well. And that's under Men Bake Cookies as well.

[00:57:46] **David Crabill:** Perfect. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:57:50] **Mike Skyring:** Awesome. Thank you so much, David.

[00:57:53] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast.

[00:57:57] For more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast/87](http://forrager.com/podcast/87).

[00:58:05] And if you are enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and leave me a review on Apple Podcasts. It doesn't have to be a long review, but it's truly the best way to support this show and will help others like you find this podcast.

[00:58:17] And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own homemade food, check out my free mini course where I walk you through the steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground to get the course, go to [cottagefoodcourse.com](http://cottagefoodcourse.com).

[00:58:30] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.