

Shupan Abraham with Cakes by Shupan

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 Shupan Abraham. 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 one hour.

[00:00:35] 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. So if you want to learn more, you can watch my free tutorial by going to forrager.com/website. All right. So I have Shupan on the show today.

[00:00:55] She lives in Lawrenceville, Georgia and sells custom cakes, cupcakes, and other treats with her cottage food business, Cakes by Shupan. Shupan has been selling her cakes since 2006, but her business didn't truly take off until a decade later when she finally invested in a coach, which changed everything.

[00:01:15] Now her business is thriving, and in this episode she shares what she's learned about putting herself out there and marketing her business effectively. And with that, let's jump right into this episode. Welcome to the show, Shupan. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:31] **Shupan Abraham:** Thank you so much, David. I am super excited.

[00:01:36] **David Crabill:** Well, Shupan, can you take me back? I think you've been doing this for quite a while. How did this all get started?

[00:01:43] **Shupan Abraham:** Oh, wow. So this was many years ago when I saw this cake, it was a really cute clown cake in this magazine that I had, and I

really wanted it for my son's first birthday. However, I knew nothing about cake decorating. Baking has always come easy to me. since I was a little girl, just always Be able to read a recipe, follow it, and just make anything,

[00:02:11] so when I saw this cake, I knew the baking part would be easy for me, but the cake decorating part of it, I had no idea. But when I read the instructions in the magazine, in my mind, I thought I could make that cake.

[00:02:27] So, with my best foot forward, decided to go to the grocery store. Got everything that I needed and to my surprise and amazement, I made the cake and it was like the best thing that happened to me. I was so happy. I was very satisfied with my work that my son had the birthday cake that I wanted, this cute clown cake.

[00:02:49] And then after the celebration, It was just like a light bulb 1 0 1 day, like, Hmm, why don't you do some cake decorating classes? But then again, I knew nothing about cake decorating. I didn't know anybody who was into cake decorating. I didn't know where I would take a cake decorating class or anything.

[00:03:09] So again, I did some research. And found a store that provided cake decorating classes and started doing this. So everything that I did from that point forward was just fun. And anybody who was having an event, I was volunteering my services to do the cake for free because I wanted to practice all the things that I learned.

[00:03:33] And so I've done my share, David, of free cakes. Like, a lot. Because everything that I learned, I wanted to put into practice. So I was always making something and just donating it or Providing desserts for people's events. And then it was all just a fun thing for me, just a hobby type thing.

[00:03:53] Until one day my husband said, Hmm, don't you think you want to make this more serious? I have no idea that I want it to be. doing this as a business, I was just happy where I was, and then I decided to take the next step. Fast forward to today, here I am.

[00:04:10] **David Crabill:** So, you started with your son's cake, and that was what year?

[00:04:17] **Shupan Abraham:** My son is 28 years old, so this was 1996,

[00:04:24] **David Crabill:** Wow, so quite a while ago, and you were making a lot of cakes for free, and then when was it that you decided to start selling them?

[00:04:33] **Shupan Abraham:** probably just 2006.

[00:04:39] **David Crabill:** Okay, so you did a lot of cakes for about a decade,

[00:04:41] **Shupan Abraham:** Yes, because I was in my happy place. I was just, playing and having fun with it, and I was happy where I was.

[00:04:49] **David Crabill:** and what were you doing up to this point? Did you have a job? Were you At home with your children I was a stay at home mom, we have two children my daughter was first, and then my son.

[00:05:02] So what was that part of it too? Was it you just wanted to stay at home with them when they were younger or was it just that you didn't have any ambition to start selling your cakes?

[00:05:12] **Shupan Abraham:** I just never thought about it. I just knew that I liked the kitchen, since I was little, the kitchen has just always been my favorite place to be so I would just always make something, cook something, Just enjoy it, but never did I ever think about it, doing it as a business until my husband brought that to my attention.

[00:05:34] **David Crabill:** All right. So you obviously already had quite a bit of skills in 2006 by the time you decided to start selling. So what was it like when you actually. Decided to start charging for your cakes.

[00:05:48] **Shupan Abraham:** I had no idea what I was doing. Of course I undercharged, well, looking back now, I know that I undercharged for everything I should say, and I had no guidance, so I was just winging it. But at the same time, I was taking all of these advanced classes, paying plenty of money for these cake decorating classes, because I wanted to, I knew that I wanted to improve.

[00:06:14] I wanted to learn the new trends that were going on at the time learn how to use new techniques and equipments and instruments. But Those things correlating with charging, for my experience, like I said, I was just all over the place. I didn't have any guidance. So I was just winging it as I went along.

[00:06:36] **David Crabill:** So when you say you undercharged, can you gimme an idea of like how much you were charging for cakes way back then.

[00:06:43] **Shupan Abraham:** Say maybe if I did a dozen cupcakes for somebody, I would, I might charge maybe 15. Which is like nothing compared to now. If I did like a character cake for somebody it was easily under \$100. Easy, But then again, I didn't know.

[00:07:04] **David Crabill:** So can you contrast that to what you charged today?

[00:07:07] **Shupan Abraham:** So today, a dozen cupcakes is \$48. And if you want like a picture on it, or maybe a particular theme on it. That would be \$60. A character cake now, depending on the number of servings, because we'll go by number of servings and design, because the number of servings will tell me the size of the cake.

[00:07:33] So, say like an 8 inch cake will serve 20 people, and say it's like a Pokemon theme, I'll charge \$225 for that.

[00:07:44] **David Crabill:** So, \$4 for a cupcake. Are these just regular cupcakes? So they've like large jumbo cupcakes.

[00:07:52] **Shupan Abraham:** They are standard size cupcakes.

[00:07:56] **David Crabill:** That actually is a pretty high price,

[00:07:58] **Shupan Abraham:** People buy.

[00:08:00] **David Crabill:** is that pretty comparable to what other bakers in your area are charging?

[00:08:05] **Shupan Abraham:** Yes. I guess well, my thought is our customers know that everything we do are made to order. So it's not like we have our cupcakes or our products sitting down for days and weeks in the freezer. And then when you want it, we'll take it out and just give it to you. So they know that we use. Quality ingredients to know that it's freshly made for them compared to the grocery store where you don't, I mean, you don't know how long it's been there for. I'm not saying that it's not good. Of course, people buy because they like it. But when you want something custom made, then you pay the price

[00:08:49] **David Crabill:** Well, have clearly come a long way over the years, and you now have, I'm sure, a pretty Established customer base are a lot of your customers, recurring customers at this point.

[00:09:01] **Shupan Abraham:** A lot of them are recurring. Of course some of them are new, and a lot of times get them back for their, you know, kid's birthday, yearly celebrations that they have.

[00:09:13] **David Crabill:** if we go back to 2006 and you start charging, you're underpricing yourself, but you're still, you know, getting yourself off the ground. I mean, were you selling a lot of cakes because you're underpricing yourself? Was it a pretty slow Growth process for you in the beginning.

[00:09:35] **Shupan Abraham:** It was slow because I, think it's because I wasn't doing any marketing, I wasn't looking for customers. It was like, if you found me, you found me, and if you didn't, you didn't. and I'm just comparing that to up to now. I didn't put the effort that I do, that I put into my business now. Again, I just attribute all of that to the lack of guidance. I was just doing this business on my own. It was hard, I guess, hard for people to find me when I didn't I didn't have a website. I didn't have the Google My Business. I didn't. Tell people or engage people to get them to know about my business and what I was doing. I didn't put forth the effort that I'm doing now, even though I did it slowly or hardly.

[00:10:17] **David Crabill:** thinking back, what was something that you did do to market yourself that worked in the earlier days?

[00:10:27] **Shupan Abraham:** I joined the Gwinnett Chamber of Commerce. That's when I started to get some exposure. But I got to meet a lot of other business. People, and then I also was involved in some other kinds of networking. One was the North Georgia Business Connection. So I did those two on a regular basis. The Gwinnett Chamber and the North Georgia Business Connection.

[00:10:53] So within those two groups, I mean the chamber was of course like it was on a much larger scale, and they had lots of events, and then you also had opportunities where you would have the 60 seconds to stand up and introduce your business, I could even take samples to the meetings if I wanted to, so that was when I really started to get my introduction.

[00:11:14] My name out there.

[00:11:16] **David Crabill:** So when did you feel like your business started to really take off?

[00:11:19] **Shupan Abraham:** I will say when I met Chef Amanda, Schonberg,

[00:11:24] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So Amanda, Amanda was on the show. What maybe episode? 80 a little while ago. So you're her student and when did you meet her?

[00:11:33] **Shupan Abraham:** About seven years ago, I think. I'm not sure now, but it's been a few years since I met Chef, when she was a part of her other partnership. That's when we first met for them um, solely with Baking for Business. Which is awesome. So she's been very instrumental in my growth. I must say.

[00:11:56] **David Crabill:** So that was seven years ago, maybe 2017, 2016 or so. And what do you remember learning from her that really moved the needle in your business?

[00:12:07] **Shupan Abraham:** Where do I start? It's just all of the um, marketing tips and examples that she she shows us things that she does herself in her business that she has experienced and has seen results. That she has passed on to me and others in the group. She's really, I would say, a marketing guru slash expert.

[00:12:33] And there are lots of tips and tricks that we learned from her or that I've learned from her that I've managed to implement in my own business. That has really moved the needle tremendously.

[00:12:44] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I mean, I love Amanda and And she shared a lot of those marketing tips and tricks on her episode. I'll link to that in the show notes. But it's cool to see that, you know, it's really made a difference in your business. And it just be interested in know like what you're doing now that maybe you weren't doing before, like, you know, social media, were you not active on that before and are active on that now?

[00:13:09] Or like seeing that you're pretty active on Google. Is that something that changed? You know, seven years ago or so.

[00:13:15] **Shupan Abraham:** Yes. So. Chef Amanda, we have a portal that we can go into and take different masterclasses on just about anything business wise, for an example, setting up Google My Business. Which is where I

typically right now get 99%, I would say, of my customers. So I have that. And then we set up accounts with Yelp, it's another thing that she advises us to do.

[00:13:43] Others will be, of course, definitely having a website having an email list. Stay in touch with your customers and there are other marketing essentials that she's advised us to take. For an example, I might make some cupcakes, some mini cupcakes, package them really nicely, add my information on it, and just drop off at different businesses in the area and just introduce myself and leave.

[00:14:12] Another thing is to just visit different, maybe you can go to a salon or barbershop and sell your products. Just get out there, put yourself out there. She wants us to be present, be persistent, don't sit down and just wait for the phone to ring. There are other things that you can do that will allow you to gain business. So don't just sit and wait on a post to work. Don't just sit in front of your computer. there are other actions that you can take that will help you gain business.

[00:14:43] Even if you introduce yourself to your kids school you can sign up to do community classes. There's just so many things that you can do that will help you gain more business, and the list is endless, and it's just all left with me to take action and be persistent.

[00:15:01] **David Crabill:** you said 99 percent of your new customers come from Google?

[00:15:05] **Shupan Abraham:** yes. Google my business.

[00:15:08] **David Crabill:** Are you just referring to online customers? I'd imagine that you have a number of word of mouth customers that come to you as well.

[00:15:15] **Shupan Abraham:** Oh, definitely. the bulk comes from Google, and then there is referrals, where I'll do a cake for you, you'll have your event, and then somebody's like, oh, who made that cake? Oh yes, cakes. us for information. Well, I always have my label on the box anyway with my QR code. So they'll scan the code and that's how they are connected to my website.

[00:15:39] And if they have an event, they can go to my website, fill out an inquiry, and then I'll, get in contact with them. so there's Google, there's referrals, and then there's just people who might find me maybe like on like a wedding platform or. They might just be talking to somebody else who, you

know. Like online is somebody might like, Oh, I need a cake for this. Do you know anybody? And then I've seen people like kick Spicey and call her. So it just comes from different places. But Google is the number one place where new customers find me.

[00:16:11] **David Crabill:** So after you listed yourself on Google My Business, do you remember how long it took for you to start getting traffic and customers from Google.

[00:16:22] **Shupan Abraham:** I don't remember, but I wouldn't say that it took a long time at all because after you set up Google My Business, we also have to update our photos on there. So one of the marketing activities that we are told to do by Chef Amanda is to upload pictures, maybe four to five times a week on Google My Business.

[00:16:47] So I'm not saying that I always stick to that, but I am regular on Google My Business.

[00:16:53] **David Crabill:** I do see that you're also pretty active on social media. But I guess you're not getting a whole lot of orders there. I see you have over 4, 000 Instagram followers. So, are you seeing any activity coming from there or what's causing you to put so much effort into social media?

[00:17:12] **Shupan Abraham:** I have seen some effort. I am seeing some effort, but nothing compared to what comes in from Google, my business. But then again, sometimes they'll see me on, on social media, and then they'll contact me through Google. cause I always ask Like, on my order from like, how did you find us?

[00:17:34] Something like that. And most of the time it's Google my business, but sometimes again, it will say Instagram. But I put a lot of effort into social media because that is what's in and what's big right now and you get a lot of exposure. Social media, I can talk to my customers directly, post pictures and videos.

[00:17:56] So Google my business, you're, I'm not sure if I can do videos on there, but I know definitely to do pictures. But for sure is more interactive. And I keep up with that to stay relevant, to let my followers know what's going on with Cakes by Shupan. All of the new things that we do, how we can, how they can serve me.

[00:18:18] And I also have my website. And call to action there, where, in which way they will be able to contact me. doing that.

[00:18:26] **David Crabill:** Now, I know you're very active on social media right now. I did see you. really didn't post much before 2021. What was it that, changed and caused you to start getting active in 2021?

[00:18:42] **Shupan Abraham:** Woo! Chef, chef, chef. Chef Amanda. Yeah, but Chef always encourages us to be active on, our main platform of choice. And there's also lots of stuff in the portal too that shows how to show up on Instagram. how your feed should look, because everything on your feed represents you represents your work.

[00:19:07] So, there are certain guidelines that we have to follow to make it up to par, like she said, to stop the scroll. I enjoy doing that. I mean, it's a lot of work to keep up with, but I know that it's something that I have to do, and it's very important to the growth of my business, so I Take the time to do that.

[00:19:23] **David Crabill:** So when you started back in 2006, I don't know for sure, but I don't think that Georgia even had a cottage food law at that point. Was that something that you looked into?

[00:19:36] **Shupan Abraham:** No.

[00:19:37] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So you just, you just started selling, which is very common. I don't even remember when they passed their cottage food law. When did you really start to look into legalizing your business?

[00:19:50] **Shupan Abraham:** I think I got the license um, or I don't remember now. Again, like I said, David, it was just lack of education, lack of guidance.

[00:20:05] **David Crabill:** So let's talk a little bit about what you sell. We know you sell cakes but is your specialty? What is your focus?

[00:20:13] **Shupan Abraham:** So I specialize in children's cakes, even though I make other kinds of cakes. Birthdays and weddings. It's all celebrations, cakes for all occasions, but my specialty is in designing children's cakes.

[00:20:30] **David Crabill:** I must say, That's not common. Like, I know a lot of cakers, they specialize in wedding cakes or adult cakes. I actually think Amanda specializes in adult cakes. But I don't run across a lot of people who specialize in children's cakes. Why did you decide that focus?

[00:20:49] **Shupan Abraham:** I really like the joy that it brings the children. I like the smiles that I see on their faces, the expressions. I love the pictures that the parents will send me of the celebration. When they're cutting the cake, when they see the cake, when everybody's around them. It's just, I have some priceless photos that just makes my heart so happy and makes me want to keep on doing this.

[00:21:20] another thing is that children's cakes are bright and they are colorful and they are playful and I really enjoy designing it because It doesn't seem like work to me. It seems like I'm playing.

[00:21:31] **David Crabill:** I'm just speculating but I kind of always figured that the reason why a lot of people don't focus on children's cakes is because they're not as lucrative. Like you can't charge as high of a price as you could for obviously a wedding cake or even a cake targeted towards adults or businesses.

[00:21:51] So you say that that's true? Do you feel like you don't make quite as much money because of this specialty?

[00:21:58] **Shupan Abraham:** Well, of course you'll make more with a wedding cake, but you do there are some children's cakes that are very elaborate. I have this one customer who has just one daughter and every year she goes all out. When she turned one year old, I made three cakes because there were three different parties and it was more than a thousand dollars.

[00:22:22] **David Crabill:** Wow, that really is going all out. I don't think I've ever heard anyone who does three parties for someone's children's birthday.

[00:22:31] **Shupan Abraham:** Grandparents spend a lot of money on their grandchildren's cakes too. must say it is, it is lucrative. Not as much as a wedding cake all the time, but you can really make some good money with children's cakes.

[00:22:46] **David Crabill:** Well, and you shared your current pricing a little earlier, and can tell you have definitely pretty high pricing. So yeah, I mean, it sounds like you found a niche that's really working for you. And I see that you call yourself not just a cake artist, but a celebration artist.

[00:23:03] **Shupan Abraham:** Yes because we are crafting something for your celebrating celebration. yes, we make the cake and people just see that cake, but we are celebrating the occasion. just like how you have your ballon artist, you have your decorators. In the sense of things, we craft the cake, so we produce

this artistic edible piece that is like the center of the celebration, the center of the occasion. I don't know if you've heard this, but when you have a celebration, everybody's like, ooh, where's the cake? Where's the cake? But a cake is like a, it's the main event. of the entire celebration. So when you do a particular design, you want it to stand out and you want your guests to ooh and ah over it and be awed of it.

[00:23:55] And that makes the whole celebration, the cake is the centerpiece.

[00:23:58] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like that's something that you learned, like, realizing that you're not just selling cakes, that you're selling this feeling or this celebration. Like, did your marketing angle change over time?

[00:24:13] **Shupan Abraham:** Yes. Yes. So we're in the happy, feel good business. You're actually selling that. You're selling the memories. You're selling the experience, and the cake just comes after You selling that feeling, the happiness, the joy that it brings, that person, and it's just all represented by that cake. So definitely

[00:24:37] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like changing your mindset about that is what allowed you or made you comfortable to charge what you're worth?

[00:24:48] **Shupan Abraham:** yes, and also my experience. And education all plays into what I charge. Your time, your work, your experience, your education, your ingredients. All put together.

[00:25:04] **David Crabill:** So you do cakes, You do cupcakes. What else do you sell?

[00:25:10] **Shupan Abraham:** custom cakes cupcakes, of course, different tiers of cupcakes. Mini desserts I like to do. When you're having like a brother shower, baby shower, cute little mini desserts like shooters, mini brownies, cake pops, those cute little things I like, I also enjoy doing. But the bulk of it is custom cakes.

[00:25:33] **David Crabill:** And what flavors do you offer for your cakes?

[00:25:37] **Shupan Abraham:** My main flavor is my vanilla cream cheesecake, which I have to sometimes explain to people that is not a cheesecake, but cream cheese is incorporated in the batter. It's a very light cake. 9 when I do weddings, that's the flavor people pick, the vanilla cream cheesecake. So there's also an almond cream cheesecake.

[00:26:03] Which is the same as the vanilla cream cheesecake, except that we switch out the flavors to almond instead of the vanilla. I have my deluxe strawberry, which is a very good cake also. And then there is the buttermilk chocolate, which is very, very, very moist. There's also red velvet, which is a super moist cake too. Those are all really, really good recipes, and those are the popular ones that I do like almost all the time. Nine times out of 10, another cream cheese. It is, that's what the number one cake that people usually request for celebrations?

[00:26:38] **David Crabill:** And I see on your website you have simple flavors, and then you have premium flavors that you charge more for. But how often do people choose the premium flavors?

[00:26:48] **Shupan Abraham:** Not often, not that often, because most times when people having celebrations, you wanna keep it. Simple. Something like vanilla is a safe flavor because everybody likes vanilla. and even if they want to do chocolate, I'm like, you know your guests, so you know what they like and what they won't like.

[00:27:08] If it's a tiered cake, of course, they have to find the same, but I always suggest that if it's a tiered cake, maybe do the largest tier of vanilla cake because that's the cake you're sure that everybody will like. If the guest of honor likes chocolate, then yes, you can do maybe like one of the smaller tiers chocolate. Vanilla is always the number one.

[00:27:27] **David Crabill:** Now I see that you are this year starting to offer single slices of cake.

[00:27:35] **Shupan Abraham:** Yes, I'm starting to do I started doing that. Yes.

[00:27:39] **David Crabill:** What pushed you to start to sell individual slices?

[00:27:44] **Shupan Abraham:** It's just another marketing thing that we learned. like, instead of letting the business come to you, you may go out and look for the business. And sometimes, everybody doesn't want a whole cake, but they just want like a slice of something. And that prompted me to start doing slices so that you can just get, you just want something Like a little dessert, but you don't actually need a whole cake, you can just get a slice of cake and be satisfied.

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[00:28:15] **David Crabill:** So I also wanted to ask you about the pandemic. It sounds like you started to move forward with your business a lot more, you know, before the pandemic. And then obviously you're, you're in the celebration business. So um, a lot of gatherings didn't happen during the pandemic. How did that affect you?

[00:28:33] **Shupan Abraham:** I guess like it did everybody else. Everything was kind of shut down and slow and just didn't do anything.

[00:28:41] **David Crabill:** So you didn't find that you sold, you know, like still sold celebration cakes, but just for drive by parties or. Stuff like that.

[00:28:51] **Shupan Abraham:** a few here and there, but not, anything substantial at all.

[00:28:56] **David Crabill:** So, well, where do you sell your cakes? Are you selling them just from home and delivering? Have you sold at markets?

[00:29:06] **Shupan Abraham:** I sell them at home. my customers would place an order online and when I fulfilled the order, then they would set up a meeting time for them to pick it up.

[00:29:17] **David Crabill:** And I see that you do sell certain items on your website, just a few that something that people buy from or what is the purpose of having just a few of your items on your site for sale?

[00:29:31] **Shupan Abraham:** That was actually just like a test to see what was going to happen. But I haven't found that people order the few items that I have on the website. They would just normally, even if they see it, they would just fill out the inquiry and then I'll get it and fulfill it. But they've never ordered like through the shop page on the website. They may request the same thing, but the order doesn't come through that.

[00:29:56] **David Crabill:** I saw a post of yours that you said you've reinvested your profits into just educating yourself, attending conferences, doing. Shows. What are some of the, the things you've attended or I didn't know if that included trade shows, for instance.

[00:30:14] **Shupan Abraham:** Um, bridal shows, and then the classes. I used to do a lot of classes with, the late Chef Nicholas Lodge.

[00:30:26] he had a school and he, he would bring people from all over the country. Sometimes out of the country that have expertise in certain elements of the cake decorating industry. And they'll come and do a class. And I used to take a lot of those classes to learn from them.

[00:30:45] So this way you have all like different classes and demonstrations. And then pastry life also used to come to Atlanta and it still stopped that too. Again, different classes, different vendors, different demonstrations.

[00:31:01] Those are the type of things that I. reinvested my income into just to learn and improve and keep in the know of everything in the cake industry, the new trends, new techniques, new equipments, new mixers, everything.

[00:31:16] **David Crabill:** I see that you now sell a class on your site. have you done a lot of in person classes? Have you mostly focused on selling Online classes.

[00:31:28] **Shupan Abraham:** Well, the in person classes I've done were mainly been during the holidays. So right now I'm in the process of looking for some space that I'll be able to use on an as needed basis so that I can host these in person classes. To do more of them.

[00:31:48] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I saw you, you've done a lot of like sip and decorate classes.

[00:31:54] So was that at a venue? Was that at your house?

[00:31:58] **Shupan Abraham:** This sip and Decorate was actually at a salon My hair stylist as a matter of fact, I was getting my hair done one day And I was telling her about all these things that I was planning on doing and she was like, hmm Why don't you have it here? I was like, yeah, she was like, yes we can move this and move that.

[00:32:21] She, she has a beautiful salon and she's the only person in her space. And it's very large. And so we're able to host the sip and decorate there. And it was really, really, a really fun event. The other sip and decorate I did was with a gingerbread house. And this was at a wine store here. And so this is where I'll bring the gingerbread houses, everything's put together. And when the customers come, they will just sit, decorate their houses. I have all the candy and icing, everything you need to make your house look pretty. So they just purchased their wine from the wine store and decorate the houses and it was a

very fun event. Best of all, you get to take your cake home, you get to take your gingerbread house home.

[00:33:09] But then again, you know, you make new friends, you will have great conversations and we laugh and had a great time.

[00:33:15] **David Crabill:** So how much do you typically charge for your classes?

[00:33:19] **Shupan Abraham:** Those were \$65 each, \$65 per person.

[00:33:23] **David Crabill:** I do see that you've done a lot of lives on your Instagram feed and teaching people. You know, when did you start that? Is that, something that you've been doing a lot more of more recently?

[00:33:36] **Shupan Abraham:** I am trying. Chef always tells us to show our face, show your face, show your face. and I guess it's like anything, the more you do it, the more comfortable you get with it. But it's, it doesn't come easy to me or for me, but I know that it's something, again, that I have to do for the growth of the business and show. I should say, you always have to just put yourself out there, and that's what I'm trying to do. It's

[00:34:05] **David Crabill:** Well, that's fascinating to me because I would have never guessed that that was hard for you to do because when I look at your social feeds, your face is all over them, you know? Like, you You're very good about putting yourself out there. And I guess it's because of, of what Amanda's guiding you to do.

[00:34:24] But so yeah, you're just an introvert. And I guess this has not been the easiest thing to do.

[00:34:29] **Shupan Abraham:** No. not the easiest thing to do.

[00:34:33] **David Crabill:** Well, have you noticed a difference? Like when you did start to put yourself out there and show people more about yourself?

[00:34:40] **Shupan Abraham:** Oh yeah, people love it, it's just taking a step to do it. It's just taking a step to do it, just being, let's just say, be consistent.

[00:34:48] **David Crabill:** So how long have you done the Instagram lives? Because I know showing up on lives is like, it's definitely something that a lot of entrepreneurs are pretty nervous about.

[00:34:59] **Shupan Abraham:** Probably in the last few years, it's nothing that I've done like, say, 10 years or more. It's just, just in the last few years.

[00:35:07] **David Crabill:** Do you feel comfortable with it now?

[00:35:10] **Shupan Abraham:** It's getting more and more comfortable. it's work in progress forever.

[00:35:15] **David Crabill:** Now, are these for customers or is it more because you're just trying to build up your own brand and sell classes and, teach to other entrepreneurs?

[00:35:25] **Shupan Abraham:** Both, because there are also people who are also just starting off in the industry and if they can learn something, then I'm cool with it.

[00:35:33] **David Crabill:** So how do your lives generate sales if they're for customers?

[00:35:39] **Shupan Abraham:** Well, if I Do a live, making something in particular, then maybe somebody might want that and order it. Or, my customers can at least have a little peek as to what goes on behind the scenes. See how I work, what I do. You can never tell what will resonate with somebody.

[00:35:59] **David Crabill:** And going back to Google, I saw that you have well over 100 five star reviews on Google. How do you get people to actually leave a review?

[00:36:14] **Shupan Abraham:** so after I make your cake and you pick it, when you pick it up, I always say that I'll be in touch within a few days, is that okay? And they'll say yes. Because I always want to know what the food that is good or bad. The bad, I'll work on what the person to fix. improve myself.

[00:36:36] And of course, even if it's good, I want to know what about it was good. So after that conversation, my next thing is, do you mind writing me a Google review? This is how new customers like yourself find me. And of course they're like, sure. But then it's not always as easy as them just going ahead and writing that review.

[00:36:58] So after a week. If there's nothing, I'll go back and I'm like, Hey, David, this is just a friendly reminder for you to please write me that Google review that you promise I will greatly appreciate it. And most times they do.

[00:37:12] **David Crabill:** Do you people with a future discount code or something?

[00:37:19] **Shupan Abraham:** Now, I have not done that for a review. sometimes it's not like just one message. They'll say, Hey, this is just a friendly reminder. Sometimes it's two, three messages. Before I'll get that review and sometimes I never, even though they promise,

[00:37:34] **David Crabill:** Another thing that you have to convince people to do is join your email list. I know you have a Newsletter have an email list. So how have you gotten people to join that?

[00:37:46] **Shupan Abraham:** I'll ask them to when I do orders for, for my customers, I always ask them if they would like to join my email list, cause this is how you know what's going on with Cakes by Shupan. And when you'll be the first to know and we'll have sales or events. And 9 times out of 10, they'll say, yeah., or they can just sign up from the website to be on the email list. I've had people do that too.

[00:38:10] **David Crabill:** How often do you send emails to your list?

[00:38:14] **Shupan Abraham:** Ooh, that's the part I'm bad about. I would like to do it once a month. Sometimes I don't do it as one thing that I need to get better at sending out monthly emails. The thing about it is. In my head, I'm like, if I do once a month, it's only 12 for the year, except during maybe holidays or something special going on, then I might send, I'll need to send maybe two more, but typically 12 a year.

[00:38:42] And it sounds so easy, but I just. That's all of the bandwagon every time I try, but it's something that I have to get better at.

[00:38:49] **David Crabill:** Well, I'm sure anyone that's done email marketing can relate to that. Just, it is hard to be consistent. Do you find that when you send an email to your list that it generates sales?

[00:39:02] **Shupan Abraham:** I haven't found that yet. Maybe I need to be more consistent and watch that, maybe because of the inconsistency, I'm not sure, but I need to get better at that.

[00:39:13] **David Crabill:** Well, I wonder if it's because you sell celebration cakes, right? So, if you send an email. It might not be when somebody happens to be celebrating and if you sent, you know, them throughout the year and kept, on people's mind, then whenever their celebration came along, then it would be the time for them to buy.

[00:39:32] But yeah, I could see maybe how consistency would help in that case, just because, you're not selling impulse buy products.

[00:39:40] **Shupan Abraham:** Right. You got a point there.

[00:39:42] **David Crabill:** So As you think back on your business, are there any stories that stick out to you?

[00:39:49] **Shupan Abraham:** Good stories or bad stories?

[00:39:53] **David Crabill:** Oh, both.

[00:39:55] **Shupan Abraham:** I can't even think of a bad story, but I'm sure there is. good story. So every year I make cakes for this family. And then this one year, I told the mom, Heather, that I was going to be delivering the cake that evening because something was going on. But when I took the cake It was maybe like 7, 7. 30 in the evening, 8 o'clock.

[00:40:21] And when she opened the door, you know, I had just parked my car, and I like text her, I say, Heather, I'm here. And she opened the door, and Chloe, her daughter, she's just jumping and she's jumping and she's jumping. And she was so happy. She was so happy and her mom like, Chloe will not sit still. She cannot wait for you to come.

[00:40:42] She couldn't wait to see the cake. She is just so excited. And when I finally walk up from the car that little girl like right now I can still see the smile on her face and see the expression and like I said, this is what keeps me going She was so happy. So so so happy. She made me feel so good and she was just Schooling and eyeing and everything about that cake.

[00:41:08] So stories like that, that makes me feel so, so, so, so good and keeps me going.

[00:41:12] Another mom I did a cake for her son was turning 1-year-old and it was like a baseball thing, so we did a baseball just for him. And then we did a two tier baseball thing just for I guess everybody else. So the smash cake, which

was the baseball cake for the little boy, the pictures that she sent It is like about a million bucks, the smile on his face. It was, she was like, when she called me, she was like, he stole the show. the cake is like everywhere on his face, everywhere around his mouth and his hands. It's just. It was priceless to say, stories that I have in mind that just want me to stay in this business and continue to do children's cakes because it's just, it warms my heart to see the joy that I bring them when they have their cakes. Um, Bad story, which is never good, but you learn from your mistakes and I made and I quite frankly, I cannot even tell you what happened. I played this in my mind over and over and over and again, and I don't know what she did. But so I did this cake for this girl. It was her daughter's birthday. She picked up the cake and the cake was fine. The next day when she sent me a picture of I guess when it got to the facility, when they were having the party, we had drip on the cake, but everything had just

[00:42:54] I don't know if it was the heat from the car or heat in the, I cannot tell you what happened, but they called and I was like, I didn't know what I could do at that point. I didn't feel like it was my fault. But I just offered to do them another cake at another time, because when she picked up the cake for me, it was fine.

[00:43:14] I had it here. I had finished it the night before. It was in the refrigerator. She picked it up, everything fine, boxed it, and she drove home. Fine. Get to the event. And all this disaster happened somewhere along the way, I don't know. so even though, like I said, I don't feel like technically it was my fault, but I felt bad because it was their celebration and now there was no cake. So, I just promised them that I would make them something else and then I did when, I said, whenever you're having an event or whenever, you know, you're having people over at your house, just let me know and then I'll make you something else. and I did that for her, but it was, it was not a good feeling at all.

[00:43:55] It was not a good feeling.

[00:43:57] **David Crabill:** Have you ever had to deal with unhappy customers?

[00:44:01] **Shupan Abraham:** Yes. whenever that happens I just asked them, you know, what is it? That I can do that will satisfy you. Because making excuses is never going to solve the problem, but that's not what your customer wants to hear. They want to know, how can you make this right? If you want a refund, I'll give you a refund.

[00:44:24] If you want me to make you another cake for another event, I'll do that for you. Just let me know. And even when they tell me I'll let you know

when I'm having an event. When that event comes, say if the cake is for, it is a 10 inch cake, 100 percent of the time I'll do maybe like a 12 inch cake.

[00:44:44] Whatever they tell me, I make it bigger and better just so they are genuinely satisfied. And I'll ask them too, you know, is this, would this, would this work for you? You know, were you happy with the redo? And so far, It's worked.

[00:44:59] **David Crabill:** Well, I saw last year you took a trip to Africa. I thought that was a pretty cool story. Can you share a little bit about that?

[00:45:07] **Shupan Abraham:** Yes. So originally I am from Liberia. My husband and I decided to take a trip back home for Christmas. This was last Christmas. So it had been 32 years for me and 40 for him, so quite a long time, but we didn't know what to expect or anything. But when we got there, of course, everything was different, but it was a really good time, you know, catching up with old friends and relatives. But I was fortunate to see and get together with one of my classmates from high school who has a kick school.

[00:45:50] So when I got in touch with her, I was like, look, I'm here for X number of days. You have one day with me because it was just not enough time, you know, wanted to go everywhere and see everything. So I was like, you have one day, pick me up, tell me what you want to learn. And then we will just spend a day doing this.

[00:46:10] And she was very appreciative. She picked me up. She always wanted to learn how to work with fondant. Now, living here in America, we have everything at our disposal. I can always get on my phone, order from Amazon, and it's here the next day or two. Or I can just go to any particular website and order whatever and I'll get it.

[00:46:32] Back in Liberia, that is not the case. There's such difficulty in getting things readily they always have to order it from out of the country, from another, whatever, maybe it's China or wherever. So when I got there, she had already made a fondant. I was like, you made this?

[00:46:53] Because I've never made fondant before. I just know that I can just get on my phone or just go take a drive to the kick store and order and get a bucket of fondant. But she actually made it because there's no way there for her to buy it. well she had the fondant, I played with it, and it was very, it was very good.

[00:47:11] She did a great job. I don't know how she made it, but it was, it was very good, very pliable. And then, she had her kicks. The kicks were already baked, so we didn't do any of the baking part. The buttercream icing was another shock to me, because it didn't look anything like the buttercream icing that I use here every day.

[00:47:30] It was kind of pasty. And I was like did you make this? And she said, yes. I was like, okay, so why isn't it, why can't I just stir it with my spatula and like, smear it onto the cake? Well, she said that because of the humidity over there, buttercream that we would normally use wouldn't work there because it's so hot because Liberia is a tropical country. And so there is A lot of heat and the icing wouldn't stand the heat. So whatever way that they made it is what they normally use. So instead of using your spatula, like I would to apply the buttercream icing to the cake, they use their fingers and paste the bare version of the buttercream icing all over the cake before we could cover it with the fondant. So she had a few of her students there. technically school had closed because it was, it was in December. So that was like what we call summertime. It was their like vacation time since there was no school, but she was able to have a few students come in that day. So we pasted the buttercream onto the cake and I showed them how to work with the fondant, how to knead it real good to make it pliable, how to roll it out. I showed them how you measure to know if this size of the fondant that you've rolled out will cover this particular cake.

[00:48:59] How do you know that it's enough? How to cover the cake, how to cut it out and make it smooth, and it was such a really good time and it was It was rewarding. It was inspiring. I wish I was there for a longer time to do more with them because I see the need, but it's not as easy to help in that way if I'm not there physically.

[00:49:24] So they do what they can with what they have and they make some really nice cakes. You know, they're very beautiful to look at, but it's just that I just, it could be. A much simpler or easier way to do it if they had all the tools and equipment and ingredients I have access to over here. So my goal is to help them get some of the tools that they need to make the work a little bit easier. Even their baking pans, when she showed me the pans that she used to bake her cakes in, I was like, where did you buy this? And she's like, no, we didn't buy it. We made, we had it made. They have to pay somebody to make it I'm like, okay, so what did he use to make this? How do you get it around?

[00:50:20] Cause like the pans here, it's all in one. And what I mean is that if you look at theirs, there's a round and then there's a bottom that is attached to

the side of the pan. I'm like, so how did he make it? And he's like, we take. Just like we have aluminum, they have zinc, and he cuts it to the size that we need and just cut around.

[00:50:43] If you want an 8 inch pan, he'll cut an 8 inch round from zinc, and then for the bottom, and then cut out the sides, and I don't know how they attach the sides to the bottom, but that's what they use. So I really would like to help her in that way, just get her some items that would help her help the business run better, even though they're used to what they're doing. And I guess it's not a struggle for them because that's how they've been doing it. But I feel like with some new items, you know, equipments and tools, she'll see the difference and make it better for her students. But it was very rewarding. Very, very, very rewarding. I really wish I was there for a longer time to help.

[00:51:22] **David Crabill:** Well, it definitely seems like your love for children really drives you in this business. As you look forward into the future, what are your plans? Where do you plan to take the business?

[00:51:37] **Shupan Abraham:** I would like to do more in person classes, community classes. Like I said before, I am looking for a space that I can use on an as needed basis to host these classes because I would like to do more of those. Plus, we have so much fun during the holidays. And I'm also looking into signing up to be a vendor with DoorDash. That's my new adventure for 2024, Is the DoorDash, do you think, just you're going to get less into custom orders and try to focus more on just delivering basic cakes to people.

[00:52:15] no, no, no, no, no, I'm going to do, I'm going to still do the custom cakes. When I say DoorDash as a vendor, this is where I'll provide, whether it's cupcakes or slices. And then people order off the app and the dasher will come and pick it up and deliver it to them.

[00:52:34] **David Crabill:** So it just seems like you're, you're focusing a lot on sort of these everyday sales, right? And instead of necessarily big orders.

[00:52:45] **Shupan Abraham:** Well, big orders, I'm still, I'm still focusing on that, but that one I just have to continue the marketing for that. And I still do get those, but I think that the everyday sales is just another, it's just another income avenue. Cause like I said, you may not want a whole cake every time. Sometimes you just want a slice of something. So this is where this DoorDash comes in if you're at work and you, you order your lunch and you want dessert, you can get a slice of cake. You're not going to get a whole cake full of dessert for lunch when you're at work or when you're at home. It's in the evening and

you're having dinner and you want something sweet. You may not necessarily want a whole cake. You just want a slice of something. You can get it.

[00:53:34] **David Crabill:** Yeah, it definitely makes sense. So you eventually want to move into a storefront or into a commercial kitchen at some point?

[00:53:44] **Shupan Abraham:** Right here, right now, no. I'm happy where I am. I like the flexibility of being at home. I can work on my own schedule. I can, say I'm closed when I want to be closed. I can be open when I want to be open. And I can just work at my own pace. Set my schedule, set my goals and work at it. A commercial space is a whole new ballgame.

[00:54:07] I don't see that in my future.

[00:54:09] **David Crabill:** So what drives you to want to make it bigger or, or do more? So

[00:54:16] **Shupan Abraham:** I think it's just another

[00:54:18] way to grow

[00:54:20]. I really enjoy what I do and I'm just finding more avenues that I can do it. And at the same time, get some income with that.

[00:54:28] **David Crabill:** you've obviously been. Running your business for a very long time. As you think about all that you've learned, what is some advice that you would give to someone who's just starting out?

[00:54:40] **Shupan Abraham:** well, I would tell that person. To be open minded they need to be coachable, ask questions from people who are in the industry who do have experience, who've been there and done that, and take advice. Listen to what they're saying, because they will, it could help you with a lot of headache. when I first started, I didn't have anybody to ask questions to. I didn't know anything. I was just all over the place. But if you have the opportunity to find somebody, maybe like a business coach, of course, do your due diligence by asking questions, interviewing this business coach. Make sure you guys, make sure your coaches Preferably in the same business as that you would like to get into and make sure you guys are compatible. Ask questions and take advice. Another thing is you have to be confident in what you want to do. Lastly, you are going to make mistakes, but don't let that you from the big picture. Always learn from your mistakes. Use your mistakes as a learning tool, because We all will make mistakes, even if you don't feel like you are, you will

make mistakes, but Mistakes can be good because it will help you in the future to do better and to help you grow your business.

[00:56:06] **David Crabill:** Well, Shupan, thank you so much for coming on the show today. Now, if someone would like to learn more about you, where can they find you or how can they reach out?

[00:56:16] **Shupan Abraham:** I am on Instagram @cakes_by_shupan. My Facebook is the same Cakes by Shupan and my website is cakesbyshupan.net. Google is just it's just Cakes by Shupan also.

[00:56:35] **David Crabill:** Perfect. Well, I will put links to all those in the show notes and thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:56:43] **Shupan Abraham:** Thank you so much David, it was my pleasure.

[00:56:45] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager podcast. For more information about this episode, go to forrager.com/podcast/109. And If you're 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 help others like you find this podcast. 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.

[00:57:18] To get the course Go to cottagefoodcourse.com. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.