

# Kristi Otto with One More Bite Organic Desserts

**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 Kristi Otto. But first, ConvertKit is rebranding to Kit, and recently made a pretty big announcement that is great news for cottage food entrepreneurs.

[00:00:22] If you have listened to the show for a while, you know that I'm a big fan of using ConvertKit to build an email marketing list. ConvertKit has always had a great free tier for their platform, but now it is even better. Now you can use ConvertKit for free for up to 10, 000 email subscribers.

[00:00:39] Plus they will allow you to use one automation sequence for free as well. Now if that doesn't mean much to you right now, trust me when I say that it is by far the best free email marketing option that I have ever seen. So if you still haven't hopped on the email marketing bandwagon, now is a great time to do so.

[00:00:57] To get started and learn more, you can watch my free email marketing tutorial at [forrager.com/email](http://forrager.com/email).

[00:01:04] All right, so I have Kristi on the show today. She lives in Fort Myers, Florida, and sells organic desserts with her cottage food business, One More Bite Organic Desserts.

[00:01:16] Kristi has three decades worth of experience in the food industry, and she built two unrelated businesses before starting her bakery. So perhaps it's no surprise that her cottage food business has been quite successful.

[00:01:30] But that doesn't mean that it's been an easy road. Kristi started this business shortly after moving from Minnesota to Florida, and she found that her products did not resonate with her new community like she expected them to. As a result, her business looks much different than she initially envisioned, but she's managed to adapt and find products that both she and her community are passionate about.

[00:01:53] And with that, let's jump right into this episode.

[00:01:57] Welcome to the show, Kristi. Nice to have you here.

[00:02:03] **Kristi Otto:** Thank you for the invite, David. I really appreciate you giving me this opportunity to share my business.

[00:02:07] **David Crabill:** Well, Kristi, I know you've been in this industry for a very long time. Can you take me back to how it all got started?

[00:02:16] **Kristi Otto:** Well, my family opened a restaurant in Minnesota called Cafe Cravings in 1995, And we were the first drive thru coffee bar in Minnesota. I was the only one with restaurant experience when they opened. I worked in the restaurant industry as a server starting college. So I worked with my family and I still do. It's currently still open. Even though I don't live in Minnesota anymore, I help them with all the operational and social media and employee and computer issues. so I've been doing that for a long time.

[00:02:49] **David Crabill:** Yeah, I'm thinking it's still running today. It started in 1995. It's almost 30 years in January. So clearly a very successful business and continues to be. What do you think allowed your family to be as successful as you were?

[00:03:06] **Kristi Otto:** Well, My dad is extremely frugal and sharp, and I think when people open restaurants and businesses, they're excited about getting things from food service. and hiring people to do everything for them.

[00:03:23] And they don't actually want to work there. And my parents actually put the hours in and worked all the time. He unplugs every clog that was in any toilet. and he does all the shopping. Not now. He has people, cause he moved to Florida and does this back and forth, but he has, uh, a couple, People that he can count on. All of the restaurant shopping at Restaurant Depot and Sam's Club and Costco and he actually physically goes and does all that rather than a food service. You're buying the exact same products for a fraction of the cost. Both my parents taught me all those procedures that help you to not have waste and have the lowest food cost possible.

[00:04:06] **David Crabill:** Now, obviously this is your parents' business. How involved were you in it?

[00:04:12] **Kristi Otto:** Very involved. When they first opened, I was Working up front and I was quite unquote managing. And, I had my son, I got married that first year, had my son their second year. and then I was away for a little bit

from physically working. And then I came back and worked in the kitchen and I always did whatever needed to be done.

[00:04:35] And then I went back and worked up front again. And then I started doing more remotely. As I was home raising our son but then COVID hit and my sister was working there. We have a big family. So every, every kid's worked there in some way, shape or form.

[00:04:49] But my sister was there during COVID and in Minnesota, they shut everything down. We had the drive thru and we had an office. An online computer system that I had created, but it didn't have online ordering. So I guess that we had a computer system that was digital, but it wasn't online. And I pushed to quickly move us, and I programmed a whole system for us to do online ordering.

[00:05:12] And we were one of the only people that was doing that. In our community, which is right outside St. Paul and we never missed a beat and actually got busier during COVID.

[00:05:26] **David Crabill:** And then what caused you to move to Florida?

[00:05:29] **Kristi Otto:** I moved to Florida, one, because my parents had bought a place in Florida, just before COVID. And I loved being down there. I'm cold all the time, and I love being outside and got tired of falling on the ice. And also, COVID, the restrictions in Minnesota were really hard. I wanted a little freedom and, uh, the sunshine, getting older.

[00:05:52] **David Crabill:** Well, needless to say, you already had plenty of food service experience when you started your cottage food business. What do you feel like was different when you started your cottage food business or what was new that you had to learn?

[00:06:09] **Kristi Otto:** Well, I didn't even know that cottage food businesses existed. I always had the dream of having an organic food truck, and my dad encouraged me to not do that, in Minnesota, because of the business climate. And we were planning the move to Florida, and I was watching the news that summer of 2021. And the local news was talking about the cottage food baking industry and the changing of regulations in 2021 to accommodate for the COVID stuff. And I'd never heard of it. I jumped up out of the chair and went to the computer and looked it up and looked up the Florida regulations. I was really surprised about the amount of money that you could make working from home. And that day in the summer of 2021, I decided I was going to do it. very

different from a restaurant because it's just you and all of the limitations. I was surprised at all the limitations for Florida specifically that I couldn't use butter.

[00:07:07] I couldn't have any frosting. It didn't make sense to me, but I adapted.

[00:07:12] **David Crabill:** It doesn't make any sense to me either for the record.

[00:07:16] **Kristi Otto:** Here's a funny story. I called up there. I wanted to know about making Rice Krispie Bars, and they told me I could make them. And I said, Okay, so Rice Krispie Bar has melted butter in it. That's okay. And they said, Yes. And I said, And the frosting has butter in it. And they said, Yes. And I said, I can't do the frosting.

[00:07:36] But I can do Rice Krispie Bars. And they said, yes, that's just the rule. And then she said, it's not like we're going to come after you. That's just the guideline. She didn't know what to say, but she made it clear that they're probably not going to do anything about it. I opted though.

[00:07:52] To just follow all the rules because I had bigger visions. And as I got out and about in the cottage food baking world in Florida, there's a lot of people breaking every single rule. They're selling cheesecakes. They're doing all sorts of things in the heat. And I am so deep. experience in food safety and regulations.

[00:08:15] And I wasn't going to do that. And I didn't want people talking about me saying, Kristi at One More Bite Organics, she's breaking these rules. slicing things fresh. Everything I do is exactly by the rules. Everything's packaged, labeled properly. I only do what The state of Florida requires.

[00:08:34] **David Crabill:** there were some. new things that you had to deal with when you started your cottage food business. What were some of the things you feel like your restaurant experience helped you out with when you started the food business?

[00:08:50] **Kristi Otto:** So significant were the processes and procedures that my mom created in the kitchen, the fact that almost everything can be made in advance. The doughs can all be made and frozen and many, many, many dessert items can be baked and frozen immediately.

[00:09:09] And then just used. as needed. The reality is that most restaurants purchase frozen desserts from food service companies. They're all frozen. And they're charging people very high dollar amounts for those frozen desserts.

[00:09:23] One thing, I don't do cookies anymore , but cookies are so easy to make and ball and freeze you can bake off two fresh cookies or a dozen fresh cookies and it, it's so easy.

[00:09:34] I don't know why somebody wouldn't do that. Brownie batters, cake batters, sweet bread batters, all of that kind of stuff can all be made ahead of time and frozen and then baked fresh. you have to take each individual.

[00:09:48] item and how you're doing it and taste it and see how it works.

[00:09:53] **David Crabill:** So you move to Florida with. , you know, maybe desire to start a food truck And can you tell me a little bit more about why you were just inclined to start a food truck? Because Some people would be overwhelmed with some aspects that you already had a ton of experience with. So what, was the breaking point there that caused you to say, no, it's not worth it?

[00:10:16] **Kristi Otto:** Well, The number one thing is I live in an HOA, you can't put your food truck in your driveway. And then you have to find a place to store it, the cost involved, when you're selling a dessert at five or six dollars a piece, you have to sell an awful lot of those desserts to make the basic cost.

[00:10:36] I mean, I bought a tent four years ago and it's still the same tent and the same banquet tables and the same tablecloths. And everything that I've purchased is stuff that I can use personally.

[00:10:47] Or would be easy to resell, like all my freezers and refrigerators and that kind of thing. The investment is low and I don't have that pressure of having to sell a certain number of desserts to pay for those base costs.

[00:11:01] **David Crabill:** So when you started the cottage food business, why did you decide to go in this direction of all organic and, you know, very highly diet specific products?

[00:11:14] **Kristi Otto:** I guess it goes back to my son. Our son, Austin, is anaphylactic to peanuts, bananas, and cashews. Out of those three, peanuts are highly transferable. It's a very specific allergy where even cross contamination can make, make or break whether a person goes to the hospital or dies.

[00:11:35] And my son, I carried him twice into the hospital not breathing. It's a very serious allergy. And it was very difficult for him to enjoy desserts unless I made them. So that was the kind of the number one thing is that whatever I would do would be peanut free. Also, about 15 years ago, he had a lot of medical issues, and I had done a lot of research on how you can heal with food and organics and non GMO

[00:12:01] and I healed him with food. He had digestive issues. We thought he had all sorts of different problems and I was able to heal it with the food and the organics. So that was a passion for me because that's how I choose to eat And I didn't want to do something that didn't represent who I was as a person. It's really expensive to make these kinds of foods, and use these kinds of ingredients, these premium ingredients. And many times my mom coming from the restaurant industry says, just use regular ingredients and you won't have to deal with these problems of finding your supplies and shortages and the cost.

[00:12:38] But if I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it the way I want to do it and where I have a passion and a joy. This isn't just a business. This is a passion and a joy and a purpose,

[00:12:48] **David Crabill:** do you feel like that has limited your business or do you feel like focusing on this specific niche has attracted A certain type of customer that makes your business more successful.

[00:13:01] **Kristi Otto:** It's definitely hurt my business. I can tell you, we go to tented events. We go to places with a different population of people. Maybe a little bit older, which a lot of Southwest Florida is, although it's changing. And they see the word organic.

[00:13:18] They see the word gluten free. Any of those things that were on my banner, and they turn away. They think that means it doesn't taste good, and they walk away from me. That was hard. In fact, that first whole year, there were a lot of tears because that's where my mom said, just don't do that anymore. My husband said, we have to change the signs. And we did. We changed our signs. So we just changed it to decadent desserts. And the organic is downplayed a little bit. It bothers me to do that, but I'm still putting out the exact same product, but I'm not focusing on it as much. But even when I make all my flyers, I always want to put soy free, corn free, I want to put all of that stuff out there.

[00:14:03] And then my husband will look at it and say, Hey, you don't need to put all of that on there. people know. Because I'm not reaching the people I want

to reach. I really want to reach the peanut free community and I have not done that yet. I don't know where those people are but it's a huge group of people and I'm not finding them yet, but I will. I'm finding a lot of vegan people. Actually, two years ago I didn't know what vegan was. It was something that people kept coming up to me and saying, What are you vegan? And I finally said to somebody, tell me what it means to be vegan. And they told me. And I went home and I looked at all of my ingredients and they all said that they were vegan already.

[00:14:42] So I had already picked all of these ingredients, so I just had to create recipes using these ingredients that were already vegan. And that was the most painful experience, trying to figure out good quality recipes that were vegan. handedly off of my Google SEO I get more calls from people looking for vegan. Unfortunately, they usually only buy one or two things, and then I don't hear from them again for quite a long time. they're not a great amount of my sales, but I have a lot of buzz about my vegan stuff. And I'm hoping that maybe online, I'll be able to ship it to their door. I'll be able to expand all of that.

[00:15:21] **David Crabill:** two and a half years ago, when you started this cottage food business, what did you think that it would look like? What was your vision?

[00:15:31] **Kristi Otto:** My vision? Oh, I thought I was gonna sell all sorts of cookies. I loved cookies. I wanted big half pound cookies. I had all these cakes, these little cakes I wanted to make. Oh, I had so many different dreams. it's not at all what I originally envisioned. There's a certain number of things that are still the same, I obviously never knew what a vegan anything was, so I never imagined that.

[00:15:59] had to really change based on my environment. I didn't know what living in Southwest Florida was like and all of this planning was done in Minnesota. So I got here and Costco didn't carry any of the same ingredients that they did in the Minnesota Costco. I called up the sales rep for this region from Costco and they said well, we don't have the demand and it's so expensive to get it at our price point to this lower tip of the country. And I didn't know what to do. So it was a lot of finding resources, changing recipes, putting a lot of stuff to the side. Cookies. I love cookies. I make great cookies, but they don't do well in the heat and humidity of Florida. You basically get 12 hours, maybe. I'd get people ordering cookies for a day or two later, and then they'd call me and say they were soggy.

[00:16:46] **David Crabill:** Was there a point in that first year or two that you almost gave up?

[00:16:53] **Kristi Otto:** No, I just changed. Resiliency. That's huge.

[00:16:58] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like your business would have been more successful if you built it in Minnesota?

[00:17:04] **Kristi Otto:** Yes. And our son misses us terribly, and he keeps telling me I do so much better in Minnesota. Minnesota's really into the Organic, they're into all the dietary stuff and the weather is more conducive to it, but they have different laws too. They have different rules for the cottage food baking.

[00:17:23] **David Crabill:** So you do organic and you are obviously now vegan, um, I also saw on your site that gluten free is a big thing for you. I'm not sure if your son is gluten free or not, but, I see that you sell things that have gluten in them. Was that something you thought you would focus on more?

[00:17:43] **Kristi Otto:** I eat gluten free, so I eat organic, gluten free, soy free, corn free, and potato free. And I'm married to a man that eats gluten, and my kitchen will never be celiac friendly, so I may as well just make the gluten items because the majority of the people buy gluten items here in Southwest Florida.

[00:18:05] I have a huge group of people that follow me and purchase for me because I have the gluten free, dairy free, vegan, but if we're at a brewery, which is my preferred place to be, we're mostly selling gluten rich items.

[00:18:19] **David Crabill:** Now you're, You're obviously very diet specific in a lot of ways, but you don't yet have sugar free, correct?

[00:18:29] **Kristi Otto:** Haha, that's the loaded question, isn't it? That is a tough nut and I really struggle with it because sugar is super bad for us.

[00:18:39] And I struggle with it personally because I love treats. Sugar is a very subjective ingredient. If somebody asks for a sugar free item, do they mean that it has no sweetener? Do they mean that it doesn't have refined sugar? Is it coconut sugar? Is it maple syrup? Is it honey?

[00:18:59] Is it xylitol? Is it sucralose? there's so many. And people will come up to me and say, you should really, try my sugar replacement in something. And what I decided as I was taking in all that input that first year is that I'm



going to know my lane and I'm going to stay in my lane and that if somebody wants to have a sugar free bakery, they can do that.

[00:19:22] I don't like sugar substitutes. I have made certain products with coconut sugar, maple syrup, and honey. They don't sell. Maybe one person would want them. But they don't sell. When I'm at the brewery, nobody's asking about sugar free. that aren't supposed to be eating sugar shouldn't eat sugar.

[00:19:43] If they're diabetic, they shouldn't be eating my product. Or, they should cut it into teeny tiny pieces, which is, my business is called One More Bite. All of my stuff is freezer friendly. I suggest they open it up, cut it into four or six pieces.

[00:19:58] Eat one piece, put it back in the freezer and learn self control. We all eat treats. 90 percent of the people out there eat treats. Have one of my desserts instead of having a snicker bar at the gas station. Much better for you. Well, we know that your business looks a lot different than you expected. So what do you sell now? What's currently on your menu?

[00:20:22] So what I sell is brownies, bars, and breads. I sell gluten rich brownies and bars, a limited amount, and sweetbreads. Sweetbreads really only work with gluten. The gluten free sweetbreads, when I would make them, I didn't want to eat the leftovers. So I took them off the menu. So that's what I sell for gluten.

[00:20:46] And then I try to make almost everything I do as special, gluten free, so it's accessible to all. And I do a wide variety of bars, gluten free, brownies and bars. And then I have a couple vegan items, my vegan sweetbread, my oatmeal banana sweetbread. I eat every single day. If I was going to pick one thing I had to eat every day.

[00:21:09] Out of my menu, it would be that. I love that bread.

[00:21:12] **David Crabill:** Well, Obviously with the fact that you use organic ingredients, your pricing is going to be pretty high. And you mentioned that. Your area, people aren't very focused on organic. I mean, How are you able to make the pricing work if people don't actually care?

[00:21:33] **Kristi Otto:** To be honest with you, rarely, if ever, does anybody say anything about the price. One time, we were at our favorite place, Fort Myers Brewing Company, and this older guy came up to me and he looked at my

brownies and they were \$6 at the time. They're \$6.50 now because the price of chocolate doubled over the summer.

[00:21:53] And he said a few swear words, and how in the world can you charge \$6 for a brownie? And I said, well, sir, that's the cost of the ingredients, but you don't have to buy one. I'll give you a free sample. And he had a sample and then he bought a brownie and he came back and the brownie's hefty. It's like six to seven ounces. And he came back and he said that was the best swear word brownie that I've ever had. Then he sent over all the other guys from his table and they all bought desserts. I just, I don't hear people complaining about the price at all. I feel I'm fair. I offer a 5 price point for the lowest price item.

[00:22:35] So people spend \$12, \$14, \$16 on a dessert at a restaurant and don't bat an eye at it. I don't do farmer's markets because farmer's markets aren't my customer. We sell decadent desserts. You don't eat a decadent dessert at eight in the morning. When a farmer's market is happening. And so we were getting people at the time when they actually wanted to eat dessert. and I like breweries because people are there to have a good time, and they're more than willing to pay.

[00:23:05] Tap to pay on a phone is the best thing ever for my business. They don't look at the prices, they just pick up what they want, they tap their phone and they're off.

[00:23:13] **David Crabill:** Now when you are selling at the breweries, are you the only person selling there, or are you there with other vendors?

[00:23:21] **Kristi Otto:** Usually I'm there with, depending on the night of the week, one to four or five food trucks that sell savory food. I'm the only dessert vendor.

[00:23:32] **David Crabill:** Why do you think others don't sell at the breweries?

[00:23:37] **Kristi Otto:** Believe the main brewery that we're at is Fort Myers Brewing Company. One, they're just fantastic people. We worked really, really, really hard to get in there. My husband went there over and over and over with samples to try to convince them to add a dessert because desserts are messy. They had ice cream and different things and We're very tidy.

[00:24:01] All of our stuff is pre packaged. There's no lines. People walk up, they get their stuff, they leave. They don't need forks or anything like that. It's

portable and our stuff can all get wrapped right back up into the bag. It comes in and gets disposed of. They like that. We're very professional.

[00:24:18] We show up Wherever we're committed and we only take up a tiny space because we're a 10 by 10 tent. We're easy. There's a lot of people that come and go in the food industry, and we've made a name for being reliable and having a really high quality product.

[00:24:35] **David Crabill:** Now you said that a lot of times people don't even blink about the price, they don't care about the price. Why don't you charge more in that case?

[00:24:43] **Kristi Otto:** because I charge what I feel is fair. I know what my costs are and. I have kind of a little formula that I use, and I know I could charge more. There's one particular item that people always would say to me, my oatmeal Carmelita bar, you could always charge more for that. but I want to be fair

[00:25:02] **David Crabill:** You mentioned a formula that you use, what is that formula?

[00:25:07] **Kristi Otto:** Generally, I do it four times. you can get into the weeds with how much time it takes for you to make it, and how much electricity, and all of this kind of stuff. And I did. I took My main recipes, and I timed myself making them,

[00:25:25] and I was right on. on the fourth. And I kind of know the industry standard for restaurants is typically times two and a half to three. so I just went four times. and that covers any extra costs or price fluctuations and it's a premium product.

[00:25:42] **David Crabill:** So you don't use any kind of like, Software or anything to figure out your costs.

[00:25:48] **Kristi Otto:** I use Bake Diary and I pay. I can't remember how much it is, more than I should have to pay for it because I really don't need it anymore but I keep it because all my stuff is on there. But I have Bake Diary open pretty much every day of the week and I use it for my mileage and I use it for my supplies and packaging. And now with adding shipping boxes, they have an area there where you can make bundles. And so I'm using it to bundle prices to kind of figure out what price I wanted to charge for my shipping boxes.

[00:26:20] **David Crabill:** So shipping, I mean, Florida is very unique in that they do allow shipping across the nation under their cottage food law. Is that something that you've only recently been doing?

[00:26:30] **Kristi Otto:** Yes, it was my goal for 2023 and I just loaded it in the last couple weeks. I don't know, David, if it was fear, It is so hot down here. and you're dealing with all of the weather and to send it somewhere in the country, I want it to arrive like I would expect it to arrive.

[00:26:51] the quality of the product really, really matters to me. So there was a lot of, a lot of product testing, a lot of shipping boxes. And I think we have it right, but I'm still so scared.

[00:27:02] Nobody's ordered yet, so I'm, I'm trying to figure out how to get that word out too, and I want to find the peanut free people.

[00:27:09] I want to find that market of the people that will care about what I'm doing and get them on board because one of the podcasts you did was with Vermont Nut Free. I was listening to his podcast and I said, wait, I ordered from them.

[00:27:25] So for all of my son's birthdays and you know, Halloween and Christmas, I ordered from them, you know, so it was really fun to hear their story because they were the only place I could find peanut free chocolate.

[00:27:37] **David Crabill:** I noticed that you are offering free shipping. What went into that decision?

[00:27:45] **Kristi Otto:** I'm a free shipping gal, and I know sometimes we end up paying more, and I went back and forth on this, I polled people I knew, and they said they'd rather know exactly how much they're paying for shipping, but what they all said to me is I would choose slower shipping to save money.

[00:28:04] I can't send my product any slower than two days. Because it doesn't have preservatives it's just not going to have the exceptional quality if it arrives longer. And then one of the people She doesn't know that she mentored me, but online, there's a woman called The Blondery, and she got big because some celebrity tried her bars. And she blew up. And she's mostly a shipping company that started just like I am, but I did it backwards. And she talks a lot about free shipping. And I kind of modeled after what she did cause it resonated with me.

[00:28:43] **David Crabill:** I've actually done a pretty much side by side comparison of the two models. And I will say free works well, if it causes the customer to buy more, in order to get the free shipping. And in your case, it looks like you're offering bite boxes. So you're offering combo boxes that I believe are the only things that could be shipped. Is that correct?

[00:29:09] **Kristi Otto:** Correct.

[00:29:11] **David Crabill:** So that it makes sense for you because you're looking at a total order value over \$50. So that's I assume where the shipping cost works, but even still UPS two day shipping, it's got to be pretty expensive, right?

[00:29:27] **Kristi Otto:** It's so expensive. depending on where you are in the country and the size of the bucket, I mean, it's a minimum of \$22. Minimum. And then there's the packaging costs and the ice. All of that stuff is it's, it's a lot.

[00:29:41] **David Crabill:** if you added up the things that are in the box? And somebody bought those from you locally, what would the cost be? Like, what's the comparison of how much they get versus how much additional you're marking that up for the shipping and packaging and all that?

[00:29:59] **Kristi Otto:** It's double the cost. I When I was looking at it, if you have a box that costs 36 like six bars, six, 6 bars, that's going to cost. me almost 30 to ship it to you.

[00:30:15] So it's almost double. And if you break that down, people are going to look at that and think I'm not going to pay \$30 to ship something that costs \$30.

[00:30:25] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like you're too expensive then? Like, you're offering \$60 bite boxes. Do you feel like people get those boxes and feel let down by how much is in them? Or do you feel like you've done the research that proves that there's a market at that price.

[00:30:43] **Kristi Otto:** Oh, I absolutely have done the research by buying all of these boxes. David, I threw away so many brownies that I purchased that I paid \$55 to have a box of brownies sent to me and they were not good. I was very disappointed in what I was purchasing. I believe I'm the only person that's offering what I'm offering.

[00:31:06] There are people that offer similar things, but I'm the only person offering. The organic, peanut free, dietary, allergen-friendly items. There's a growing group of people that this is how they eat, this is how they consume, and this is how they give. And my goal is to be their person. that will provide that.

[00:31:24] **David Crabill:** Is there anything that you're doing to try to reach those people?

[00:31:29] **Kristi Otto:** Not yet, because I just launched it last week, or about two weeks ago I put it live. I don't know how to reach those people. That's kind of my next thing.

[00:31:40] I have to work on my SEO for those products. I didn't put any of that in yet. And that's a huge part. If people can search for me and find me on Google, that will be helpful. I have really good SEO for locals. But I was advised by the gal that helped me that it's very challenging on a national level to compete against national SEO.

[00:32:03] I don't know how to do that myself without paying somebody, and I'm not at the point where I want to pay anybody for that help.

[00:32:11] **David Crabill:** What do you do to have such good SEO on a local level?

[00:32:17] **Kristi Otto:** Funny thing I did when I was at my son's place in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, I was trying to figure out how to do my Shopify website because I used to use Square and I switched everything over last year in anticipation of going to the shipping. didn't know how to do this. I put on a buy nothing page.

[00:32:37] The local buy nothing page asked if in search of someone to give me 20 minutes of their time on SEO. And a young gal that lived in the community messaged me and said she'd help me. And she said, you have exactly 20 minutes. Use it well. And she started the stopwatch and I used every bit of advice she gave me.

[00:32:58] And I have a great local response from Google. Being very, very specific on keywords for exactly what you want people to be searching on. So, If you want them to be searching for gluten free, dairy free, vegan, peanut free, organic, that better be in every single one of your descriptions.

[00:33:17] and the community in which you're with

[00:33:19] **David Crabill:** And then how much do you focus on social media?

[00:33:23] **Kristi Otto:** Well, I try really hard to do something at least twice a week. I don't like social media. It's the hardest part of this business. I'm trying to find relevant things to communicate. I'm dismayed by the lack of participation from people. I don't know if they don't see it or they don't care. The trend these days is to make the business about the person running the business. I'm not comfortable with that. I feel like this country, our world has, it's all about exploiting yourself and I'm not comfortable with that.

[00:33:58] And every time that I've tried filming myself to put it on social media, I end up deleting it.

[00:34:05] I can't get past it. I want it to be about my product and what I'm doing. It makes it tough to build that personal relationship with the customer. That's where I'm really struggling with social media because of that.

[00:34:17] **David Crabill:** Are you actually morally opposed to showing your face because you feel like the country is going in the wrong direction? Or do you feel like it's mainly that you're just not comfortable putting your face out there and you're just more of an introverted personality type?

[00:34:37] **Kristi Otto:** So I don't know that morally opposed is right, but I'm just, I'm not big on the TikTok thing. exploiting yourself to achieve something is something I'm just not comfortable personally doing. I'm a middle aged average looking, you know. a person that I don't like the sound of my voice. I'm sure I'm not going to love listening to my recording on this podcast, but I have a lot to share about health and wellness and that kind of thing.

[00:35:08] I'm just not particularly comfortable with it myself and I don't know how to get over that. One of the mentor people that I watched and observed was Tiffany from Pink Crumbb, Think Pink Bakers, and you know, she's doing this really well. And I follow her Instagram every day. I follow Rosell from, she's a, How To Sourdough, I can't remember what the name of her Instagram is, but she's fabulous.

[00:35:37] And they're just, they're moms doing exactly what I'm doing, but they seem so much more comfortable doing it in front of the camera. And I try to watch them to learn, but then when I go to do it myself, I'm just, I can't do it.

[00:35:52] **David Crabill:** Well, It's funny because you're on one hand saying you don't like how people have to exploit themselves in order to be successful.

But then you're also finding value in following other entrepreneurs or influencers,

[00:36:08] **Kristi Otto:** I am, I'm trying to learn, I'm trying to learn a way to, to do what they're doing, but then I try it and I don't feel comfortable. But Tiffany went in a whole different direction with her business.

[00:36:20] She's less of a baker now and now she's more of a business person. She's selling packaging and she's selling memberships and information

[00:36:26] . And I think that that has a lot of value in itself, of watching how somebody recreates themselves. not to stay in one space.

[00:36:35] So just because I'm at this space in this time, a year from now, I want to make sure that doors are open, that if I am drawn to walk through them, you know, if God leads me in that direction, that I will go that way.

[00:36:48] **David Crabill:** I'm just digging into this a little bit because I feel like I've dealt with the same internal conflict. You know, I'm an introvert. I never felt comfortable promoting myself, right? But through a lot of trial and error, I feel like I've learned that people don't want to follow a product.

[00:37:09] I actually feel like that's something that, you know, if you go back decades, like that's what marketing used to be about was just like, this is our product. If we get in front of you at least seven times and you'll come to love it and buy it, but now it's so much more personal where people want that authentic connection with another person and not just.

[00:37:28] The like, connection with a thing. So I've been trying to learn myself, like how to be more comfortable about showing who I am, because I feel like that's what people want these days. And I never really thought about it as exploiting myself. More so just like getting past my own fears of showing people who I really am.

[00:37:53] And allowing them into my world, if that makes sense.

[00:37:58] **Kristi Otto:** You know, it makes sense. I don't know how to transfer what happens. My tent and that connection with the customer that I'm just chatting with, you know, like last night, it was the end of the night, we were packing up, and two young gals, Ruby and Reagan, walked up to get dessert. And I started talking to them, and one of my little things is I have bracelets for kids that have positive affirmations on them. I pray when I bake, and prayer is a



very important part of Who I am. And you have to be really careful putting too much of that in front of people because of the world that we live in. And in reflecting on how I could bring that to the forefront without being too pushy, I came up with these bracelets.

[00:38:42] they're colored bracelets, and they say things like, You are worthy, you are blessed, you are loved, you are beautiful, you are kind, you are joyful, those kinds of things. So there's four sayings on each bracelet, and they're pretty colors. And I give them to kids, and the only deal is they get to pick the color, but I get to read it to them.

[00:39:02] And I get down on their level, and I look them in the eye, and I tell them, You are beautiful, you are kind, you are loved. Sometimes the parents are crying. So these two young girls come up, and I'm talking to them, and they buy their treats. And my husband hands me the bin that has the bracelets.

[00:39:18] And so I came around front and I said, would you like a bracelet? And I gave it to them and I read that to them and they were really excited. And they said, we miss our mom so much. You're just like a mom. And I said well, I am a mom. And I said, I miss my son. Do you want a hug? And they both got really good mom hugs.

[00:39:38] It was so special. That's why I'm in business. It's for those moments. I don't know how that translates to social media.

[00:39:45] **David Crabill:** Well, I don't think there's any way that social media is going to replace an authentic in person moment. But I was going to say it definitely sounds like this business is much more to you than just a business.

[00:40:01] **Kristi Otto:** Yes, it's a passion. It's a joy. It's not about making the money, but I do want to make the money to cover my costs and my time.

[00:40:09] **David Crabill:** I mean, That was a very special story. Are there any other moments or stories that come to your mind over the past few years of running this business?

[00:40:22] **Kristi Otto:** Yeah, I have a few. So one of the ones back to the brewery and our events, my husband's idea was to make menus. I just make a menu every other week. We change our menus and it's just a printed half sheet of paper.

[00:40:40] And it's really windy in southwest Florida. So we had to have rocks to hold them down. First we started just picking the rocks up that were in the landscaping at the brewery. And they're these ugly brown rocks.

[00:40:51] And then my husband found some nicer landscape rocks and we started using those. And the lady came up to me and she said, your rocks are so beautiful and smooth. I love painting rocks. Could I paint some rocks for you? And so we were like, sure, go ahead. So she painted rocks for us and we started getting other people that like to make rocks. And so we have got some of the most stunning rocks that you've ever seen that hold on our menus. Originally I gave them a list.

[00:41:21] I wanted them to have inspirational things like joy and inspiration and gratitude and love and you know that kind of thing. What's on the bracelets? so that our first batch was like that. And then this new lady that's been doing it, I said I want patriotic rocks. So then she did a whole bunch of patriotic rocks.

[00:41:40] And then she's done just all sorts of beautiful things. Beautiful, stunning rocks. They're works of art. The only thing is people take them because they're so beautiful. They decide they like them or they speak to them. So we are constantly out of rocks, but that's one cool thing about our business.

[00:41:57] It's kind of unique to us. We also did a donation last year to a local Facebook. They did 24 days of Christmas. And we were, I think, day five, and I got a call on the day that we were featured, or maybe it was the day after we were featured, and they said that the local news station, Wink News, was going to do a feature on their giveaway, because this is, they'd been doing it multiple years.

[00:42:26] And they asked if we could get there in the next hour. So we quickly got our uniform shirts on and got in the car. And southwest Florida is notorious for traffic problems. and 75 is the one and only freeway. And if there's an accident on 75, basically you're in a parking lot for hours.

[00:42:46] And of course, we were not even a mile from the exit we had to get off on and everything came to a total stop. And for over an hour, we sat in the car and tears were coming down. This was our opportunity to be on the news. And my husband, a retired police officer, was in the right hand lane. I said, can you just go on the side and just go?

[00:43:07] Cause we could see the exit. You know, We were that close. And he said uh, no, we're not going on the side. And you will just be patient. And I kept

texting the people that we were meeting and they said, just get here as soon as you can, the news crew's not here yet. So we showed up finally, and guess who was right behind us?

[00:43:26] The news crew was stuck in the same traffic. We made it, we got our news piece. It was very fun. So that was a good story. And Again, I was praying because I'm a person of prayer. I was sure that somehow we would get there in time. One other story that was good is our first year I knew somebody that worked for the Minnesota Twins and they do spring training in Fort Myers and There was a strike, and they had a shortened season, and a way of appreciation to the families and the players of the Minnesota Twins, she was able to coordinate where we did 50 gift bags for the players.

[00:44:07] I was really excited, because I've only been in business for like two A few months and I made up 50 gift bags with three desserts each and we brought them and they were given them as they entered the plane after spring training on their way to start the season. That was really cool.

[00:44:24] **David Crabill:** So real quick, quick tips for new entrepreneurs. Do you have any?

[00:44:32] **Kristi Otto:** I do follow your state's cottage food guidelines. As a business owner, it is your responsibility before opening a business to know what the rules are. Research them, take that time, and follow them. I think people need to treat this as a business. If you are feeding other people, this is not a hobby.

[00:44:54] You need to make sure your space is clean, that you're putting proper ingredients on and labeling it properly, packaging it properly. I'm trusting you as a business owner. You need to do that for me as a consumer. I would say adjust as needed. Just because you plan to be a cookie person as I did, maybe that just doesn't work. And that to adapt and grow and change, but also balance it. you can't do everything that your customers ask you to do, you have to kind of find your lane that you're comfortable with and keep it joyful, keep it happy.

[00:45:32] You want to get up every day and go to that kitchen and want to be making what you're making. Like I mentioned, if I was making certain items that I didn't want to eat the leftovers, why do I want to make that for other people? That's not good business practice. And I guess to trust yourself. And, my mom's a business owner. Outside of the restaurant. I come from a very entrepreneurial family, so my parents have multiple businesses. But the one

business my mom's had my whole life, since I was a child, she's the only one that does this work in our country.

[00:46:04] One of the very few. And she always said, never undervalue yourself. Don't undercharge. So this is my third business that I've had, and that was, advice has always been in my head is never to undervalue yourself. Know what you're worth.

[00:46:20] **David Crabill:** Did you say what your mom does that is like the only person in the country that does it?

[00:46:27] **Kristi Otto:** So she has a business called Leather Prize and she does leather finishing for finished needlepoints. She has more work than she'll ever be able to do. She works so much and I think she lives down the street from me, a mile away. She's really a role model for the business. She's always been in our home.

[00:46:48] She always did her business in her home. And even though she's working and she's in her mid 70s and she works all the time, she's so talented, very specialized. She loves what she does.

[00:46:59] **David Crabill:** And you said this is your third business, so what were the first two?

[00:47:05] **Kristi Otto:** My first business was early on in the computer age. My son was small. And I did desktop publishing for nonprofits. So I made their newsletters things like that. Because people didn't know how to do that kind of stuff and it was creative. And then from that business, I started doing memory videos. My business was called by Kristi.

[00:47:29] And I created memory videos for graduations, weddings, funerals. And I did that quite well, for many years, until people could just do it themselves. They didn't do it with the skill I did, and they didn't do it with the tender care of, you know, putting it, I would look at the pictures and put them to video, or you know, to the music, just timed perfectly.

[00:47:54] But it gets to that point where You know, the cost benefit analysis doesn't work for a consumer and they do it themselves. And so I just transitioned, and I sprinkled a lot of heavy volunteer stuff in between, and ran huge events as a volunteer. That was baking at our church.

[00:48:11] We had an annual festival and I was in charge. I created Sweet Mary's Bakery. And people always called it Sweet Kristi's Bakery on the side, so I made cookies and brownies and Rice Krispie bars. And I had the most profitable booth at our festival, at our church. I did that for many years until I moved away,

[00:48:32] **David Crabill:** and I'm also hearing like you have a photography background, video background. And I've noticed that your photos are very good.

[00:48:44] **Kristi Otto:** I do not, I appreciate that about my photos. I do not have a photography or video background at all. For the video business, I took people's existing photos and put them to music.

[00:48:56] I wish I had more experience with photography.

[00:49:00] **David Crabill:** And now Google does that for you. So,

[00:49:04] **Kristi Otto:** Wait, what do you mean?

[00:49:06] **David Crabill:** Well, like I, all of my photos, go on to Google photos, Oh, yes. Yeah. Oh, you making the

[00:49:12] And then they just will, like, create random, I'm not, I'm not saying that they were as good as yours or anything, I mean, they're not good at all, but they do, like, take your videos and then just, like, AI will create them.

[00:49:26] a memory video or something.

[00:49:27] **Kristi Otto:** You know, David, that's another tip. If anybody in a business is not using the AI to ChatGPT, it's amazing. I was really afraid of it, but my son taught me and then his girlfriend has a little bit of a specialty in it and she gave me more advice. I use it so often and even the other day, so I ordered these small poly bags.

[00:49:53] Uh, for Sticker Mule, they ended up being really small. They were like stand up pouches, but they were way smaller than I thought, and I didn't know what to do with them. So I thought I'd make a little mix to sell. So I came up with a one minute brownie mix. You pour the pouch in, and then just add a few ingredients, and you can put it in a mug into your microwave.

[00:50:12] So of course, I had a million things to do, but I decided to do this. It's like the night before we're supposed to go to the brewery. Not very smart. But, this is how I roll. So then I needed to make a label for it. So I was on ChatGPT and you can even have them make you a label. they'll make you a picture.

[00:50:30] So I said, you know, this is the kind of product I want to label. And they made me a graphic. I didn't use that graphic, but it spurs me on. Creativity for me. It takes all the heavy lifting away. So if you're not using that for just guidance for social media posts, I'm not saying I use it all the time, but I use it for inspiration or if I have time I'll plop in what I already have for social media and I will write it in a different tone.

[00:50:56] It's huge. And even like with packaging I ask it, how do I do a package? I want to ship a premium dessert package. What kind of packaging should I do? What are the things I should remember? Give me 10 examples. Blah, blah, blah. And it will tell me exactly what to do. It's fantastic.

[00:51:16] **David Crabill:** So for the person who has not jumped into the chat GPT or the AI world yet, and it's still pretty intimidated by it. What is the first thing that you would recommend that they do? To dip their toe in the water that would help them with their business.

[00:51:35] **Kristi Otto:** Well, That's a loaded question because I had help from a young person that guided me. And that's probably the best to go to somebody that's like 30 or under and ask them for help. Otherwise, I'd probably do a search on On YouTube for how to use it, or I just open it up, make an account and start putting it in there, you know, what you're looking for, the thing is, is without some kind of explanation from somebody that has used it, you're not going to get its full advantage.

[00:52:08] It almost eliminates the need for Google because it searches in such a different way than even a Google search. I've heard about people who've planned entire trips to Europe on ChatGPT and they just put their parameters in what they're looking for and the whole itinerary spits out. And then you communicate with it like you were talking to a human.

[00:52:31] So yeah, I really like that, one thing that I was told from um, my son's girlfriend, she told me, you can ask for 50 suggestions. So one of the things she suggested with my business, with the shipping, she said, why would people order a dessert to be shipped? What are the top reasons? And so I put that actually into ChatGPT and I asked, give me 50 reasons or emotions for why someone would order a dessert box shipped to another person. And if you could

try to understand what motivates people to make their purchasing decisions, you can tailor your marketing and your efforts towards them. Now that's all fine and good. Once you have that information, then you have to figure out a way to utilize it, whereas I struggle.

[00:53:20] So I've gotten the information, now I have to implement it with my set of skills a little harder.

[00:53:26] I am just chronically ADD with ideas.

[00:53:30] I have way too many skews. I have a whole file book box filled with all of the products and ideas that I've tried once or twice. You know, I just need to constantly be doing something.

[00:53:42] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like creativity is a big aspect of this business for you. What keeps you focused, or how do you keep your menu from getting too big?

[00:53:54] **Kristi Otto:** Kevin and Austin, my husband and my son. Every morning, I go walking and I pray and I come back with some harebrained idea of something I think we should try.

[00:54:06] And either they help me through that process or they try to gently take me down and lead me in a different direction. Um, Also, I'm physically one person and I have to have balance in my life. I have to sleep. I had to walk and could only do so much. So I've, over the years have, you know, we're going into our fourth season doing this business. I've learned, I can't do everything for everybody.

[00:54:34] I have to limit what I can do. My husband made me promise we'll never have more than 12 items. When we go to a, you know, an event, please, Kristi, only 12 items. And that's hard because I'm like well, I can't leave these people out and I can't leave this out. But I, I've just really tried to tone it down.

[00:54:53] you talk about the why of this business, like what is your purpose of this business? I had to realize right now my purpose is just to kind of settle into this business. And expanding and coming up with more SKUs is probably not helping and that's, it's hard. I have to be honest, you know, I look across the street, they're doing a development, it's going to be a commercial development.

[00:55:16] People are so angry about this development, but we're in a An area where that's bound to happen, but all I see is dollar signs over there and I keep thinking, how can I use this to my advantage? How can I share my business?

[00:55:31] And then I think, what if there was a little corner somewhere where I could have A little kitchen with a storefront where I, it was just me, but I would have normal hours because I live in an HOA. It's not like I can't have a stand or a side of the road thing or anything like that, you know.

[00:55:48] So I'm dependent on all of these other people to sell my product, you know, whether people will let me put something in front of their store or be at their place. I can't really do it independently, but then I file back to my parents and their restaurant and. I know that that's probably Just not a good idea.

[00:56:06] And I know I don't want to deal with employees and overhead and I can manage what I'm doing right now. And that's so important to not get in over your head.

[00:56:14] **David Crabill:** Well, you have a full and successful restaurant career under your belt. What causes you or drives you to pursue this business or want to grow bigger or want to make more money? Like what is pushing you to keep going with this cottage food business?

[00:56:35] **Kristi Otto:** I don't know. Drive. I don't know. I don't know what's making me push so hard to continue. I still have a job to do. I have to find those peanut free folks. I gotta find the moms and dads that have that kiddo that can't eat anything good because of the peanut free. I have to find that market.

[00:56:57] That's still an untapped thing. And I think that will tie in with the shipping. And so it's a challenge ahead of me. I have another dream. I put in an application for the Minnesota State Fair. And I don't really know how I would do it. I would really give just about anything to make that happen, to be able to go back to my hometown and be at one of the biggest fairs in the country and share my product.

[00:57:22] And I have all these people that have said that if we got selected that they'd help me. But I don't know how I'd do it, but I, I would do it. So I still have a few of those things. You know, I'm good at this. I have something so unique and I do it really well. I like treats and I can't eat other people's treats and my son can't eat other people's treats.



[00:57:43] So I know there's other people like me and I just really thrive on learning new things and trying new things. I'm a type A go getter kind of person and this has become my identity.

[00:57:58] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much, Kristi, 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?

[00:58:09] **Kristi Otto:** I'd love them to find us online at [onemorebiteorganic.com](http://onemorebiteorganic.com). Follow us on Facebook or Instagram @onemorebiteorganic. And just a reminder, we're offering free nationwide shipping on our dessert boxes. We'd love to ship our desserts too.

[00:58:24] **David Crabill:** Awesome. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:58:29] **Kristi Otto:** Thank you, David. I really appreciate you caring about Cottage Food Bakers.

[00:58:34] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode podcast.

[00:58:40] For more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast/126](http://forrager.com/podcast/126).

[00:58:45] 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 the show and help others like you find this podcast.

[00:59:00] 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).

[00:59:13] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.