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How Andrea Slinde Launched Her Own Organic Food Startup



Andrea Slinde



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Andrea Slinde

Founder, **Golden Root**

\$4K

REVENUE/MO



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Hello! Who are you and what business did you start?

Hi all! My name is Andrea and I'm the founder of [Golden Root](#). I manufacture and sell a caffeine-free Turmeric Latte Mix in Denver, CO.

I make an Original and Sugar-Free turmeric latte mix that helps fight inflammation, improve mood, build immunity, and provide natural energy. Both mixes are made with 100% organic and non-GMO ingredients, and I'm really really proud of this product and the anti-inflammatory benefits that it offers!

Currently, I sell Golden Root online from my e-commerce site and to over 50 coffee shops nationwide. After a very eventful and strong finish to 2018, Golden Root is making an average of \$4k/mo.



What's your backstory and how did you come up with the idea?

I became increasingly passionate about food and nutrition after spending 3ish years working in traditional healthcare both during and after college.

“ The process of launching the business was a lot like putting together a puzzle with a couple pieces always missing. It may feel like you need more of the details ironed out before you can start, but I assure you that starting is the most crucial step in learning more concrete details about your concept.

I took a major left turn in life when I quit my job as a Phlebotomist at a Veterans Affairs Hospital in order to work on a small organic CSA farm in Madison, WI. After spending a season getting more intimately involved with my food and gaining a better understanding of my local food supply chain, I moved to Denver, CO where I founded or worked for a number of natural food startups. My experience on the farm lit a fire in my belly and inspired me to create and provide more healthful and healing foods to people.

After moving to the mile high city, climbing a flight of stairs and learning how to stay active at altitude was quite an adjustment for me. I was working in the natural foods industry when I heard about the health benefits of turmeric, so I started experimenting with it in my diet to try and battle the every-day fatigue and inflammation I felt from walking, running, hiking, and skiing at altitude.

Turmeric is a root that is predominantly grown in India and Southeast Asia, and has been touted as one of the world's most powerful and natural anti-inflammatories. It has been used in Indian

as one of the world's most powerful and natural anti-inflammatories. It has been used in Indian culture as a medicinal and culinary staple for centuries, and it is the ingredient that gives curry its vibrant yellow color.

In my search to better understand the benefits of turmeric, I learned about Golden Milk, a traditional Indian beverage used to reduce inflammation and build immunity and decided to try and make it.

Once I started making Golden Milk regularly, I felt like I had finally found something that soothed my body and mind, and that I could actually enjoy consistently. Based off of the incredible health benefits alone, I couldn't believe that turmeric wasn't everywhere and in everything.

When I started to search grocery stores and markets for fresh turmeric, it was nowhere to be found. It was in this moment that I realized I could create a powdered version of my Golden Milk recipe that was shelf stable, more accessible to more people, and could be shared or taken on the go. This is when the real work began.



Take us through the process of designing, prototyping, and manufacturing your first product.

Developing my recipe took time, patience, and lots of taste testing.

The most important part of product and recipe development is creating a feedback cycle that allows you to iterate quickly on the first, second, and third+ drafts.

A few months after starting Golden Root, I realized that a lot of my customers were folks who

participated in the Whole30 reset program because they started to ask if we had a sugar free version. They loved our Original turmeric latte mix, and wanted to have a mix that they could enjoy while doing a Whole30.

When I was developing the Sugar Free turmeric latte mix, I wanted to find people who knew my product or brand well enough to give constructive feedback so that I could respond to the consumer demand and bring the product to market quickly. I sent out sample pouches of the recipe to the customers that were asking for Whole30 compliant mix as well as Whole30 influencers/coaches, athletes, family members and other entrepreneurs.

I kept this feedback group relatively small so that I could learn from their feedback, and not get overwhelmed or inundated with too many data points that could hinder progress. Through surveys, people were able to provide feedback by commenting on the spice level, texture, overall taste, and also make comparisons to the Original mix.

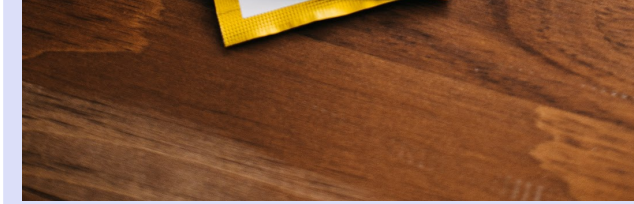
Packaging

As for packaging, the most crucial thing I did was utilize a focus group to get feedback on my initial product label and copy variations. I was working part-time at a coworking space and tech education company called Galvanize at the time, so I easily found volunteers who were willing to be part of a focus group.

The small group was made up of instructors, students, and members who volunteered to give honest feedback and provide thoughtful ideas. Most importantly, they were all engaged consumers with very real questions and consumer feedback. Some of the consistent points of confusion from the participants were, “How can it be caffeine-free and vegan if it is a latte?” and, “Your Sugar Free mix doesn’t have any sugar at all, but when I see ‘Sugar Free’ it makes me think that there is an artificial sweetener used.

This feedback has guided my next label and packaging designs and helped me understand the importance of consumer feedback. I imagine that focus groups will continue to be part of my business far into the future.





I'm constantly working to improve the quality of my product and the process of making it -- I even spent part of my production shift this morning vetting and testing out new ingredients and recipes! Finally two years into the business, I am in a position where I can focus on allocating resources towards improving the quality of my product and ingredients!



Describe the process of launching the business.

The process of launching the business was a lot like putting together a puzzle with a couple pieces always missing. It may feel like you need more of the details ironed out before you can start, but I assure you that starting is the most crucial step in learning more concrete details about your concept.

“ Your vision is a flame that you hold in your hands. It is your responsibility to protect your vision, refine your vision, and communicate your vision to others. You are obligated to keep the flame alive by sharing it with others.

I used [Shopify](#) to build my e-commerce site, and [ShipStation](#) and [QuickBooks Online](#) on the back end to process and fulfill orders. Initially, I focused on my wholesale channel while I built out the infrastructure for the e-commerce channel. The revenue from my first few coffee shop customers was able to partially support the launch of my online store.

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The business was initially (and still currently is) funded and subsidized with personal funds and labor. Because I am bootstrapping Golden Root, it means that every dollar and hour spent matters and is thoughtfully considered.

But as painfully frugal as I can be as a business owner, I learned something very important early on: if you want to make money (or simply even stay in business), you have to spend money.

Spending money has never been so scary in my life, but when I spend money on improvements, Golden Root is often times rewarded with more potential for growth and more opportunities.

Since launch, what has worked to attract and retain customers?

A combination of networking, social media, event marketing, and partnerships has allowed me to reach, attract, and retain customers for my business.

When starting up, I focused on using quality social media and blog content to create a brand and messaging that matched my product and simple packaging. Once this was established, I worked to create real life, supportive relationships with my wholesale customers (coffee shop partners) to help expand my reach and create long-term partnerships.

Initially, trying to sell Golden Root to coffee shops was a bit soul-crushing. I heard a lot of no's and also did a lot of educating because turmeric lattes were not widely adopted in the mainstream market quite yet. However, I was able to sell to a couple of coffee shops early on for a couple of different reasons.

In Denver, my first coffee shop partner, [SloHi Coffee](#), was ahead of the wellness curve. They were one of the first coffee shops in town to offer CBD coffee on the menu, so they were willing to take a risk on offering a turmeric latte to their health-focused community.

In New York, however, I found that many coffee shops were looking for a product like mine because turmeric was becoming more popular in the city. I was able to sell to an Australian-style cafe called [Saltwater Coffee](#) in NY just in time for their big opening in 2017, and it's been so wonderful to watch them serve East Village ever since.

The partnerships that I have with small, independent coffee shops now feeds my soul. I love working hard to help support and highlight their business and offer more healthy options on their menus. In return, these coffee shops actively support Golden Root and our mission. It really is a beautiful cycle that I want to continue to nurture and grow.

I haven't spent a considerable amount on paid ads or partnerships over the past two years because I found that playing the long-game is more effective and fulfilling. This past holiday season I sold Golden Root at holiday markets and pop-ups for the first time in Denver. Selling at well-established markets allow small businesses to be seen on a larger stage and create the kind of value within the local community that I deeply believe in.

Leading up to the holiday markets, I did some email campaigning, events, and demos to get the brand out into the world and let people know where they can buy Golden Root throughout the

brand out into the world and let people know where they can buy Golden Root throughout the holiday market season. This helped drive people to the markets so that I could truly *connect* with my customers in person.

The markets also helped me reach new customers because many people purchased Golden Root as a holiday gift for family and friends in other parts of the country. Participating in the holiday market season allowed me to finish the year with two record breaking months in a row and helped convert many market customers into e-commerce customers following the holiday season. This additional revenue has been critical in funding many projects and new opportunities into the new year.

How are you doing today and what does the future look like?

After this first successful season of holiday markets, it is my goal to keep the momentum going into 2019 and continue putting the revenue back into the business. I'm ready to remain laser focused on sales and make constant improvements to my product.

“ Becoming more focused on solutions has helped alter the way I think and act, and as a result, I have been more capable of welcoming the support and advice that people are willing to give.

One thing that I never thought I would realize about starting a business is how rewarding sales could be. I'm not talking about the sales transaction itself. I'm talking about the act of traveling in search of new coffee shop partners, exploring a new city through its coffee shops, and having the opportunity meet and sit down with coffee shop owners - it has been incredibly rewarding.

I'm excited to continue traveling and meeting with coffee shop owners to learn more about their businesses and how Golden Root can better serve them and their customers. As our wholesale channel continues to expand, I will be working to prepare Golden Root for new distribution channels by making packaging updates and improving packaging costs.

The biggest long-term goal for the future is to emerge into the traditional grocery channel to reach more people, build out other product lines, establish equitable partnerships with suppliers, and support social and environmental organizations that our supply chain touches and impacts.

The future feels bright and full of possibility and I'm ready to take on the new year!

Through starting the business, have you learned anything particularly helpful or advantageous?

Be constantly on the hunt for solutions. This is something that I have to actively work on and practice every day, especially when I'm feeling depleted or lonely in this endeavor.

Becoming more focused on solutions has helped alter the way I think and act, and as a result, I have been more capable of welcoming the support and advice that people are willing to give.

I have also learned that the more I put myself out there to work, collaborate, ask for help, and

have also learned that the more I put myself out there to work, collaborate, ask for help, and brainstorm with others, the more fulfilled and energized I am by my product and my business.

What platform/tools do you use for your business?

- **Shopify** - I use Shopify for my e-commerce site. They have the best customer service and app integrations. If you have an issue with your site, they have great online resources or will help walk through a solution or put you in touch with a representative from the app that you need assistance with.
- **Recharge** (Shopify App) - Recharge helps manage all of our subscription options and integrates easily with Shopify.
- **Chatra** - I use Chatra for it's chat bot feature on my site. I am able to interact with my customers in real-time to answer quick, one-off questions, or I can follow up with them over email later.
- **Mailchimp** - The epicenter for creating and storing all email lists and email campaigns.
- **Shipstation** - I use Shipstation to manage and fulfill all of my wholesale and e-commerce orders.
- **QuickBooks Online** - The easiest way to manage finances, expenses and financial reporting.

What have been the most influential books, podcasts, or other resources?

How I Built This - Whenever I'm feeling stuck or defeated, this NPR podcast leaves me feeling inspired by other entrepreneurs and their journeys.

The Art of Startup Fundraising - This book has helped me look ahead and compartmentalize when, how, and why to seek investment for my business.

Advice for other entrepreneurs who want to get started or are just starting out?

JUST DO IT! Don't let perfect get in the way of progress.

Candice Olson, the co-owner of one of our coffee shop partners called **Local Coffee House** and the first woman to take a company public, recently shared some advice that I really needed to hear at the time.

She explained that as a founder and entrepreneur, your vision is a flame that you hold in your hands. It is your responsibility to protect your vision, refine your vision, and communicate your vision to others. You are obligated to keep the flame alive by sharing it with others.

*Advice that I wish I had implemented sooner: ask for help, find advisors, share your vision!

Are you looking to hire for certain positions right now?

I'm currently on the hunt for a part-time production/fulfillment assistant to help me out in the kitchen! I'm ready to bring on support for production, packaging, tracking and fulfillment during our 1-3 production shifts per week

our 100 production shirts per week.


I'm also looking to hire two channel sales directors responsible for different sides of the business. One would be responsible for coffee shop and independent grocery store sales, while the other would be responsible for building out and managing e-commerce growth.


If you're interested or know someone who would be, just holler at me to find out more!

Where can we go to learn more?

- Website: www.goldenroot.co
- Instagram: [@golden.root](https://www.instagram.com/golden.root)
- Facebook: [@goldenrootco](https://www.facebook.com/goldenrootco)
- Twitter: [@goldenroot_](https://twitter.com/goldenroot_)
- Email: andrea@goldenroot.co

If you have any questions or comments, drop a comment below!

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Andrea Slinde, Founder of Golden Root


Pat Walls, Founder of Starter Story

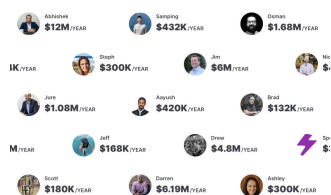
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Hey! 📧 I'm Pat Walls, the founder of Starter Story.

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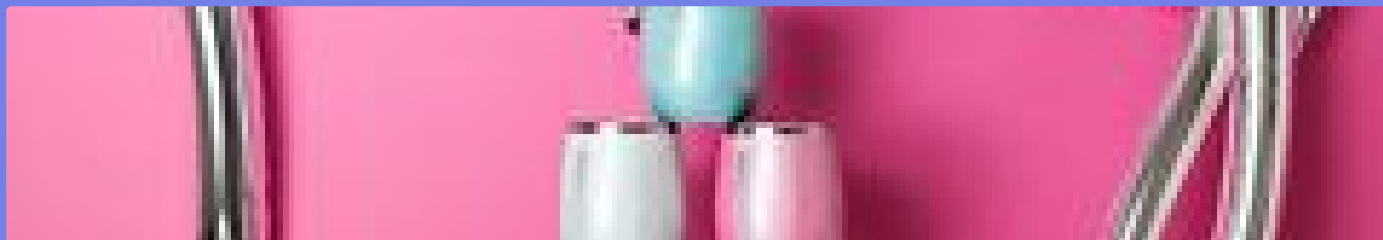
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Scott
\$300K/YEAR



Chad
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Garrett
\$300K/YEAR

Resources to keep you building

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Abhishek
\$12M/YEAR

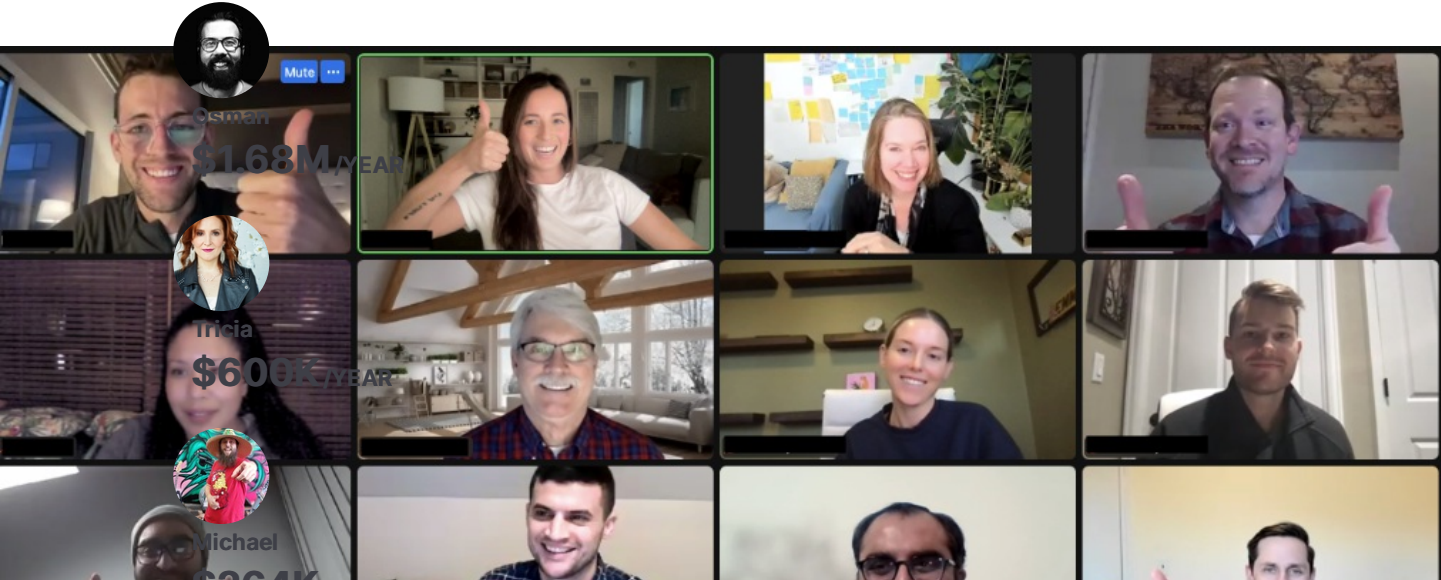
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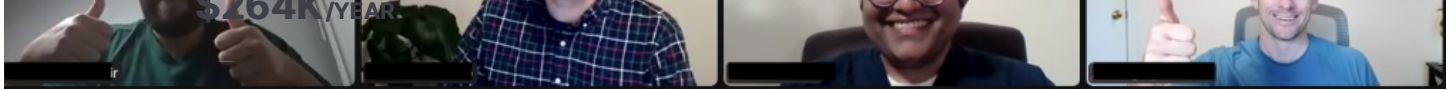
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Sam Parr

My First Million

I love this website.



Rand Fishkin

Moz / SparkToro

Love Starter Story's transparency.



John Vong

Jonnie Vang

Be The Match

You can't find this information anywhere else.



Trent Baren

Instagram

So much valuable information.



Bilal Budhani

Entrepreneur

I was hooked on Starter Story as soon as I discovered it. Resonated with me right off the bat.



Jenn Leach

Millennial Nextdoor

I made over \$5,000 from my Starter Story membership in a week!



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Jamie

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Michael

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