

Audio file

[Interview with Syd Kottu Mar 14.m4a](#)

Transcript

00:00:00 Amritha

Yeah. So I want to understand like how has your experience been running pop ups and doing events and and what are the top challenges that you have faced during the whole process?

00:00:15 Syd

I'll say I'm very lucky because I've been doing this almost 15 or 16 years in Seattle, so I know a.

00:00:20 Syd

Lot of places I see the biggest challenge.

00:00:24 Syd

It's like a one man small business. It's like, you know, just trying to, trying to make sure my time is spent wisely and like so with locations, you know, it's it's not like a big business where like if it's a bummer, it's like it's cool. We can just write it off. Like if I go to a location.

00:00:43 Syd

Nice swinging mess it really affects.

00:00:45 Syd

Like my bottom line pretty heavily.

00:00:48 Syd

So I guess like.

00:00:49 Syd

The biggest thing with the pop up is like, yeah, like one, we have winter months, which means seven months a year. No one really goes outside. Like you're saying you're freezing. And even though we're covered at the market, like it's still cold.

00:01:00 Syd

You know.

00:01:00 Syd

And yeah, so it's like my biggest problem is like I have 5 months a year, so I gotta make enough money in five months to support my me and my family for 12 months, you know?

00:01:09 Syd

And and then I think the second part is yeah, just making sure every location is a banger. I get a lot of calls. I'm like, hey, you got this party and like, come on down like I.

00:01:17 Syd

Was gonna play.

00:01:18 Syd

Dude, like unless you're giving me.

00:01:20 Syd

A guarantee I can't do it cause.

00:01:22 Syd

If I come with like \$1000 worth of food and I sell 100, that's it. 900 bucks. I don't want pocket, you know? So it's not just my time. It's it's it's products and everything else though.

00:01:32 Amritha

Got it. And how do you find these locations which you must have right now you you do it so often that you know where it sells?

00:01:42 Amritha

But before, how did you do your research on?

00:01:46 Syd

Yeah, it was. It was just.

00:01:46 Amritha

Finding the right.

00:01:49 Syd

Like I you know, my dish is unique. It's something that like.

00:01:57 Syd

Not a lot of people have heard of because it's never.

00:01:59 Syd

Really, you know.

00:01:59 Syd

It's kind of a weird thing and so I really like the fact that I'm in places like farmers markets and the Fremont market and like where there's like a bunch of different. First of all, there's six other people and then two that there's like.

00:02:16 Syd

A bunch of different options, but I don't do great like at breweries where I'm the only option, but people kind of look at it and I don't know what this is and you know they'll walk away. Whereas if I'm gonna play like the Fremont market, people will smell it.

00:02:28 Syd

And like one out of 10 people might be interested. But you know, there's 5000 people coming. There's still a lot of.

00:02:33 Syd

People you.

00:02:33 Syd

Know. So that's that's kind.

00:02:35 Syd

Of my model.

00:02:36 Amritha

OK. And how do you get into those markets, right? Like I've heard that there's an application process. So how does that work?

00:02:49 Syd

Yeah, that's pretty much it. The application process for the markets.

00:02:54 Syd

And.

00:02:55 Syd

You know, obviously there's a little bit of grandfathering in so like and there's, I don't wanna say politics, but you know, like I'm a very trustworthy person. I show up. I'm supposed to show up and like so so markets like me like, you know, I'm pretty giant on the spot.

00:03:15 Syd

You know other people like it's it's got it's like.

00:03:18 Syd

It's like being.

00:03:19 Syd

In a band or like what you're doing, starting like a new thing, it's.

00:03:21 Syd

Like it's a lot of ***** grinding. It's.

00:03:24 Syd

It's, you know, you go out in your location and and you build a fan base and the first couple years might suck is like you are and then like then you just keep on riding, riding, riding and you get your point where like, I want to have my own fan base that comes wherever I go. And then two, like, you know, people see that and then.

00:03:45 Syd

You know, they're they're more willing to try it with the fuel line Council so.

00:03:51 Syd

Yeah, I guess, yeah. But like for you're starting brand new, yes, application process, you go to these different kinds of like market.com or like you know Seattle St. seattle.com and so on that and reply and some of them are like Seattle.

00:04:09 Syd

Same day and like just go over grabs and grab them. Some of the farmers markets like they really, really analyze everything you do. So for example like to be part of the farmers market at least like 9%, maybe 20% of your product has.

00:04:22 Syd

To come from Washington Park.

00:04:24 Syd

Like we get audited and like you know, people come and make sure that you're you're you're following those guidelines and like, there's not stuff like that.

00:04:34 Amritha

Got it. And.

00:04:36 Amritha

In the in, I've heard that in some of the places when they for a repeat.

00:04:45 Amritha

For a repeat.

00:04:48 Amritha

Place. I mean, I don't know for you to get it repeatedly in a place. Do you? Do they check your financial how well you performed in that market?

00:05:03 Syd

Yes, yes and no. So so they what they do is you pay a certain percentage on the market, you pay a certain percentage and yeah. So like if you're not doing good and you're not bringing clients and customers like, yeah, like you might not make it like I do very well and I.

00:05:20 Syd

Pay my fees and I'm honest.

00:05:21 Syd

Adam, so like I get invited back.

00:05:24 Amritha

Got it. OK. Yeah, you do have like a.

00:05:28 Amritha

Really huge fan for it.

00:05:31 Syd

I do pretty well.

00:05:34 Amritha

Yeah, that's amazing. So did you have, like, any trouble during pandemic? How did you do?

00:05:44 Amritha

During that time.

00:05:45 Syd

So, so we actually did better than usual. Food trucks did really well because we went to neighborhoods where people weren't going out. And so we just went to these.

00:05:45 Amritha

Did you have?

00:05:48 Amritha

Oh, OK.

00:05:54 Syd

Weird neighborhoods that like.

00:05:56 Syd

You know, had to be whole, you know, it's kind of like a festival would just be a neighborhood and they would now, you know, they would advertise and say, hey, like this trucks coming here like no ones up their house in two weeks, like come out and get some food and stay 6 feet away from each other. You.

00:06:08 Syd

Know.

00:06:08 Syd

And and so yeah. So that's how that works.

00:06:13 Amritha

Got it. And like currently what are your challenges like I know you mentioned about like finding the right Ave. but are there any other challenges that might be you know like hindering your?

00:06:31 Amritha

Day-to-day.

00:06:32 Syd

Oh, there's everything. There's. If there's too windy, if it rains, if prices go up for chicken or beef for lamb like, you know, if you're in a car accident. If gas prices go up, if you know, if I get a flat tire, there's about a billion reasons for me not to operate.

00:06:51 Amritha

Yeah, those are like very uncontrollable things. Yeah. OK.

00:06:56 Syd

Yeah, exactly.

00:06:58 Syd

So it's a gamble.

00:07:01 Amritha

Yeah. And like, do you have any challenges with respect to accounting or is that like very established?

00:07:12 Amritha

You know you use something with this.

00:07:13 Syd

You know, you I I don't. I don't know. I I I'm a one man operation I run really punk rock. So like what I mean is like I don't know like I I pay my rent and I go out and work and the money goes to my account but I don't I don't do a lot of accounting. I just hope that it works out every day.

00:07:30 Syd

Because I'm a cook and that accountant. Yeah.

00:07:30 Syd

OK.

00:07:33 Amritha

OK. And how do you like, do you you have to work with a lot of suppliers as well, right with respect to?

00:07:42 Amritha

So how has that been like, have you had any challenges there?

00:07:48 Syd

Yeah, like, OK, that's a good example. So like for me, it's like there's certain things like every day I get better or every, you know, month or whatever where it's like.

00:07:58 Syd

For example, like when I started, I was paying a lot of money for certain things because I just had time to shop around and like, that's what happened in this day. Like every day I'm figuring out ways to do things because I have such a unique product that somebody, greens are kind of weird. So it just mattered like, because, you know, I.

00:08:04 Syd

Mr. beer.

00:08:16 Syd

Work about.

00:08:18 Syd

100 hours a week, so it's like and I have three kids and run multiple businesses. So it's like there is not a lot of time to sit there and go, OK, what's the cheapest way to do this? Like, I just kind of go with what I've already done, whereas like next week I got Cisco coming in. They're gonna give me attention. Hey, here's how we can we can save you money and maybe it'll work. Maybe it won't work, but.

00:08:39 Syd

Seeing where I have the time or the resources to like go out and shop for you know the price chopper.

00:08:46 Amritha

Got it. Have you thought of?

00:08:49 Amritha

Getting somebody to help you with that.

00:08:52 Syd

Nope, Nope. I used to run a restaurant group and I had, you know, 60 employees. And it's us, I do.

00:08:57 Syd

M.

00:09:00 Syd

Not want any employees.

00:09:03 Amritha

OK. All right.

00:09:05 Syd

I'll say I'm very I'm very, very unique in that situation. Everyone else in the world actually expand and get bigger, and most other restaurants.

00:09:13 Syd

You talk to.

00:09:14 Syd

Will say that I mean.

00:09:16 Amritha

No, actually that's not that uncommon that people want to be. You know, they are happy with what they set.

00:09:24 Amritha

They have like, yeah, I mean I yeah that's that's a move.

00:09:30 Syd

I think that's also that's that's very much like a post COVID thing.

00:09:34 Syd

M.

00:09:36 Syd

Back in the.

00:09:36 Syd

Day everyone wanted to get bigger, you know.

00:09:39 Syd

Because that's how you made money. But now after went through, you know, quarantine to a little more gun shy, a little more like, you know, if it doesn't work out like we've seen it not looked at.

00:09:51 Syd

You know, so.

00:09:53 Amritha

Yeah. OK.

00:09:57 Syd

I.

00:10:00 Amritha

Just a minute.

00:10:01 Syd

You can cut.

00:10:02 Syd

Them and put them in those pans.

00:10:03 Amritha

Sorry.

00:10:08 Amritha

So I I wanted to also ask like when you get these suppliers or like you know find them like did you?

00:10:15 Syd

For me, I have I.

00:10:17 Syd

Have a cat and Terry for midweek.

00:10:19 Syd

So.

00:10:23 Amritha

Sorry, I didn't understand the last.

00:10:26 Syd

Cash and carry.

00:10:28 Syd

It's like a store, so there's 1-4 minutes away from my from my kitchen. So like it's not always some best pricing, but it's very, very convenient.

00:10:35 Amritha

Got it. And do you collaborate with other folks like I I've seen in your thing that you collaborate with other pop-ups as well, like?

00:10:46 Syd

Yeah, yeah, totally.

00:10:50 Syd

My thing? Yep.

00:10:51 Amritha

What is the intention behind it? Is it like supporting small businesses?

00:10:55 Syd

Kathleen.

00:10:59 Amritha

OK.

00:11:00 Syd

So sometimes yeah. Like so, like, you know, I don't know. I do a podcast, go see a restaurant podcast. So it's like I I have two new guests every week. And you talk about

these kind of issues, you know. And so I do that to like, you know, meet people and expand. And yeah, like, grow my brand.

00:11:17 Syd

So it's a.

00:11:17 Syd

Little bit of growing your brand, getting getting your brand?

00:11:20 Syd

In front of new eyeballs.

00:11:22 Syd

But it's also, you know, it's fun to work with your friends like as a one man show. I get a little crazy. Do anything by myself. So like, let's do a Taco party here. Let's do some fun dessert thing like, yeah, I like. I like I. I like that answer.

00:11:38 Amritha

Got it. Yeah, I saw your podcast list. I started listening to it, but then I didn't. Well, I made some bangle to completely listen to all of them. Yeah, it sounded very fun.

00:11:49 Syd

Yeah, there's a lot.

00:11:54 Amritha

So, like, how did you start your podcast? Like was it just?

00:11:58 Amritha

To you know.

00:12:00 Syd

Don't don't take this the wrong way, but I just got sick of people that work in tech telling me I make too much money and that's why I started the podcast. Because you get a lot of people that were Microsoft, Amazon media, all these places that move to the city, they get very high.

00:12:09 Amritha

Oh.

00:12:18 Syd

Calories. They make the rent go high and then you know and then you get some *****
***** with Amazon badge that comes up to you. It's like ohh, why is your fee like \$18.00?
But I get paid like, you know, \$160,000 a year like and you know, so like, this is frustration
that like a lot of these sorry severely underpaid.

00:12:39 Syd

Have have you know they have any last ship from techbros?

00:12:42 Amritha

Yeah, I'm not taking it as an offense, to be honest. Like, there is a reason why I quit.

00:12:47 Amritha

As well.

00:12:48 Amritha

I was hated the.

00:12:52 Amritha

Lifestyle and I don't think they give us as well. So yeah, that's why I was like, OK, I need to
do it was a lot of brain drain to be.

00:12:56 Syd

Yeah.

00:13:02 Amritha

Honest.

00:13:03 Syd

Yeah, yeah.

00:13:04 Amritha

Yeah.

00:13:05 Syd

And and you.

00:13:06 Syd

Know there. There's, you know, that's just my argument. So that's.

00:13:09 Syd

Why I started the podcast?

00:13:10 Syd

And you know, I don't really say it that way all the time, but.

00:13:14 Syd

You know, just kind of showing that this just like what our daily grind was like and like what we really put into it like that was 90 hours a week and I barely see my kids cause like this this because my, you know, my rent is \$4300 a month. Like for my house, you know, so it's like I gotta I gotta forget how to how to pay the bills you know.

00:13:34 Amritha

Yeah. And like so when you work with other pop-ups, right?

00:13:40 Syd

Like.

00:13:41 Amritha

How do you find them? Just through your friend circle or network? Or are you open to?

00:13:47 Syd

It's it's one I like to go out and eat and support the community as much as possible. These people face to face or I meet them when they come on the podcast or you know I I do a market with them like.

00:14:00 Syd

And I'm next to him on his Instagram.

00:14:04 Amritha

Yeah. OK. Alright, I think I.

00:14:10 Amritha

All the questions answered I wanted to ask you one more thing. Like right now we are trying to talk to as many businesses as possible.

00:14:14 Syd

Cool.

00:14:26 Amritha

So like, do you have any recommendations whom I can contact or I'm not asking? Yeah.

00:14:32 Syd

Yeah.

00:14:35 Syd

Check out the Seattle what is it? Good Business Network, Seattle. Good Business Network. OK, cool. Yeah, that that's probably my only. Like, my big thing is, like, hit them up. They're very resourceful. They love supporting things like this. And I used to own hot sauce companies like, I used to be a part of it.

00:14:40 Amritha

Yeah, I'm already on.

00:14:42 Amritha

It.

00:14:55 Syd

And I'm a little too busy to do hot sauce. I don't really. Seattle made check out Seattle made. They're a good.

00:15:03 Amritha

OK. So are you like active on that?

00:15:03 Syd

Research as well.

00:15:06 Syd

Yeah.

00:15:09 Syd

No, not anymore, because I literally. I'm. I'm. I'm in a very like I value like my schedule is like pretty booked up for like October you know so like I don't I.

00:15:21 Syd

Don't have the.

00:15:22 Syd

Resources and time to like you know, come through everything to see if there's a better opportunity. Like I set my schedule and I.

00:15:28 Syd

Believe that that you know. So, so you know, I used to be more involved and I was like, oh, I need photography. But like I I just.

00:15:39 Syd

You know, I just don't have.

00:15:40 Syd

The time anymore.

00:15:41 Amritha

OK. When you were active?

00:15:44 Syd

Then.

00:15:45 Amritha

So like you mentioned, you found photographer there or you know, like how else did you feel that they helped the small businesses?

00:15:54 Syd

Yeah, there's a great filter for all the noise. So like when you start a business, the first thing that.

00:16:01 Syd

Happens like Yelp is.

00:16:02 Syd

Gonna call you 5000 times and like.

00:16:04 Syd

Because your your, your number becomes.

00:16:05 Syd

Public. And so like when.

00:16:07 Syd

You get all these scam callers and like.

00:16:09 Syd

You know, like hey, like I see sort of business you need this and this and this. So like there's a lot of people trying to like trade small businesses or, you know, just imagine them where like the the Seattle may thing, there's things that e-mail and like kind of filter them and say like, hey, here's a really great opportunity and like to get into the airport, like, come to this meeting and like.

00:16:29 Syd

I do that my my hot sauce gets a little bigger for it. So like, you know, there's just a lot of ***** to wade through when you're small.

00:16:34 Syd

Business owner and like there were a really good way to.

00:16:36 Syd

Like.

00:16:37 Syd

The the other side.

00:16:39 Syd

Like a great example is like Eventbrite. They they had a grant for \$10,000 to like put on a van. And like I found out found out about it through.

00:16:43 Syd

MHM.

00:16:53 Syd

Seattle made, and I applied. I ended up winning it. So like there's stuff like that where, you know, there's there's really good game information out about, like grant, especially during Oakland about Grant and like.

00:17:05 Syd

That's.

00:17:06 Amritha

And do you think they are like everyone knows about?

00:17:10 Amritha

It or like.

00:17:11 Amritha

Is there a discoverable?

00:17:12 Syd

I mean.

00:17:14 Syd

Don't know about Seattle, made like most of the like the you know, any small maker like like a chocolate.

00:17:20 Syd

Maker or hot sauce or?

00:17:22 Syd

Spices those kind of guys. Yeah, they.

00:17:24 Syd

All know about it.

00:17:25 Amritha

Got it. OK. Yeah. So I'll check it out like I have a meeting with one of those program manager next week anyways. Yeah, and thank you so much for taking your time.

00:17:38 Amritha

I wanted to ask you, would you be open to, you know, like testing or answering, you know, like checking out our product in the future, if that helps?

00:17:50 Syd

Yeah, it is not. It is not in those five months of summer, sure, but like summers, like every single hours but.

00:17:59 Syd

Before may.

00:18:00 Amritha

Of course. OK. Alright. Thank you so much.

00:18:03 Syd

OK. I would say my, my, my, my let me give you a little bit of advice just from my opinion. You know small business is always very weary about people trying to get like while you're developing your business model also you need to get paid and you need to make up salary as well. But just give my life you're very, very sensitive.

00:18:20 Syd

Like like you're like, if you're I don't know, your model is to make money.

00:18:24 Syd

But like not.

00:18:25 Syd

Many people are really interested in subscription or like.

00:18:28 Syd

Yeah, just just.

00:18:29 Syd

Like the best.

00:18:30 Syd

Way to make money is through advertising and not charging the client. But you know like.

00:18:36 Amritha

Yeah. We actually our business model is not, it's just small businesses because that is not a good way to attract them because they're already there's so many apps where they're being served. So yeah, we don't have a appetite on that. So we're still.

00:18:46 Syd

Right.

00:18:51 Syd

Yeah.

00:18:56 Syd

Right on.

00:18:57 Amritha

Yeah. OK. Yeah. Thanks, Sid. Really appreciate your time. Yeah. Bye.

00:19:05 Syd

I'll see you next time. Yeah, thanks. Bye.