

Audio file

[Interview with Ian Diaspora Mar 12.m4a](#)

Transcript

00:00:01 Ian

Catering permit. And then it turned out that was the wrong type of permit and we actually needed a temporary events permit and and it took, you know, it was like it took like two months to get my \$900 permit application fee back and blah, blah, blah. And they were like, well, it's not our fault. We would do the wrong thing. You know, it's like you didn't explain it well enough.

00:00:20 Ian

I was.

00:00:20 Ian

Like.

00:00:21 Ian

Yeah. So, anyway, so kind of, you know, kind of, I definitely, yeah, have felt that as a new you know somebody entering the foodservice realm for the first time, I I feel the pain and.

00:00:39 Ian

Yeah. Yeah, that's it.

00:00:41 Amritha

Yeah, yeah, that before we start the interview, is it OK if we record the interview? It's just purely for, you know, reading through transcripts and nothing else.

00:00:52 Ian

Yeah, that's.

00:00:53 Amritha

Fine. OK, alright. Yeah. So I just wanted to ask you like start off the interview with like what were your biggest pain point when you started with you know doing pop ups and all of that like what one thing you mentioned was permitting, but apart from that?

00:01:12 Ian

Apart from that, let's see.

00:01:22 Ian

Permitting. Well, we were originally looking at getting like a mobile food cart or something, but the restrictions on the like the, the rules around where you can put it and the sidewalk clearances.

00:01:38 Ian

And the cost and of doing all that was was still high, even though supposedly they're, like making it better, but.

00:01:46 Ian

So again, that kind of it kind of comes back to permitting, but.

00:01:51 Ian

We got kind of lucky in terms of actually getting like we even we haven't even really had to do pop-ups because we got right into the you know, some of the biggest markets in town because we took the step of doing like a community tasting and we invited a bunch of of our friends and family out and we also invited the the vendor agents from the like big vendor market.

00:02:11 Ian

Companies.

00:02:13 Ian

And so that was really, that was a really successful.

00:02:18 Ian

That was a really successful strategy because we were able to get.

00:02:25 Ian

We're able to get.

00:02:28 Ian

Into those markets within like a month of even starting our business like we were basically accepted and that's pretty unusual, so.

00:02:36 Ian

That was just sort of a a good decision that we made.

00:02:43 Ian

That, and we avoided the pain point of like, how do we get accepted to markets and how do we find pop-ups. And so I don't know. I can't really think of any other ones. I mean, the other pain points, of course, is like financing and like.

00:02:54 Ian

You know where does the money come from and how? And bookkeeping is especially one that I'm not having fun with at all. Bookkeeping sex, but I don't know if that's what you guys are trying to help. It's so anyway. Yeah.

00:03:08 Bhargav

If you ever heard that a couple of times with small businesses talking about bookkeeping being one.

00:03:12 Amritha

Yeah. And they've they've mentioned that they prefer to, you know, work on the creative aspect.

00:03:19 Amritha

Not the financial, even though it is important. But yeah. And like, can you elaborate a little bit more about permitting? Like did you get?

00:03:24 Ian

Yeah.

00:03:30 Amritha

Wrong information from the.

00:03:32 Ian

Yeah. Yes, we did. So what happened was I I called up King County Health and I was like, hey, can you tell me this is what we're planning on doing? Can you tell me what we need to

do? And he said you need to get a catering permit. And I told him we were doing this market and blah, blah, blah. Turns out we get the permit like a month goes by.

00:03:52 Ian

Trying to be super proactive and.

00:03:56 Ian

Month goes by and we're like getting we're getting ready for the markets they're about to come up and and then somebody sees that and they're like, wait, sorry, you have you've sent in the wrong application. We just noticed this and you need to get a temporary permit, a temporary event permit. And I was like, well, your guy told me that we needed a catering.

00:04:15 Ian

And they said it doesn't matter. We'll refund you, but you still need to apply for this other thing. And you need to go get your all these other different trainings that you weren't, like, a booth operator trainings and all this stuff that we didn't know we needed.

00:04:31 Ian

So you know it all worked out like we ended up, you know, we got it all done, but it felt it was very stressful at the.

00:04:38 Ian

Time, yeah.

00:04:40 Amritha

Yeah. And like, how did you come across the farmers market booth? Was there any application process that you had to go through and?

00:04:51 Amritha

Was it tough? Like how? How was?

00:04:53 Ian

It well, so there's a website called manage my market and the the Northwest Marketplaces Company uses that. Now we don't do farmers markets. We don't do like what are legally called farmers markets in Washington. We haven't done any of those. We just do vendor markets and St. markets and the company that.

00:05:11 Ian

Manages northwest marketplaces that manages the most of the ones that we do. There's two main companies.

00:05:18 Ian

The northwest marketplaces, they have a website called manage my market that's pretty easy, no problem. And I think a lot of the farmers markets are actually on that same platform. So it's a pretty, you know it's it's a little bit old fashioned, but it's fine. It's it's not hard to use. And then the other company.

00:05:36 Ian

Just do like Eventbrite and emails, so not quite as well organized, but it's.

00:05:43 Ian

But they're a lot easier to get into and not, as you know, not as high of, like, not as high stakes. So it's relatively.

00:05:52 Ian

Relatively straightforward. I have getting into the the market applications and scheduling and stuff itself has not been particularly challenging. So.

00:06:06 Amritha

OK, so you have. Have you heard of like palpable or pure space?

00:06:12 Amritha

Or, you know, hosting events? Or is it only like Eventbrite that you have used?

00:06:20 Ian

We've that we've used for hosting event or that we've well I guess I both sides. So yeah, we've used party full event, right Facebook we don't really do Facebook anymore.

00:06:35 Ian

And manage my market and Instagram. One of our one of the markets just that uses like Instagram and e-mail, that's pretty much it. I can't really think of any other.

00:06:47 Ian

Ones that we've used.

00:06:48 Amritha

Yeah, OK. And how was your marketing process like I see that you've used Instagram as a really good.

00:06:57 Amritha

Marketing tool like showing showcasing your product is there like how did you go about that?

00:07:11 Ian

Well, Instagram is like the only social media that we both feel comfortable on like Facebook sucks. TikTok sucks. Twitter's not worth it for us. It doesn't really match our in our audience like our whole our, our our goal is to be like a local company so.

00:07:27 Ian

Instagram has by far.

00:07:29 Ian

The most relevant tools for us, Facebook could be good, but both of us just really dislike the both the Facebook interface and the like. Facebook like the just the quality of content and like spamminess of it and stuff. So.

00:07:48 Ian

We don't. Yeah, we don't even have a Facebook account anymore. We did, and we deleted it because it was just not worth it. Not worth the the effort. Yeah, that's why we picked Instagram. You know, it's just the only one that we felt good on.

00:08:03 Bhargav

Yeah, just to double click that a little bit, I guess.

00:08:06 Bhargav

Off the top of my head, when I think about Instagram, how do you communicate your story as and as your brand or your product? How do you communicate that?

00:08:13 Bhargav

Beyond just the photos.

00:08:15 Ian

So we also have a newsletter, so once a month we send out a usually like I would say like maybe 1000 word newsletter to our e-mail list which currently is somewhere around like 1200.

00:08:27 Ian

People or 1100 people with details about what else is going on in our different art projects and everything that we're working on so.

00:08:38 Ian

Because yeah, to your point, yeah, Instagram is, you know, somewhat, somewhat limited. So we do use a newsletter also.

00:08:45 Amritha

Got.

00:08:45 Amritha

It got it. And like, have you collaborated with other like businesses yet? I know that you, you know, like open your booth in vending vending.

00:08:58 Amritha

Places, but apart from that, like have we collaborated with other like minded businesses.

00:09:09 Bhargav

Like I guess if there was a business that was selling some cookies and cookies and your coffee was going really well.

00:09:12 Ian

Yeah.

00:09:14 Bhargav

Would you partner up?

00:09:14 Ian

Right, right. So yeah, we just started, we just started kind of doing that a little bit well, working on that a little more actively. So we're talking to a couple of ice cream companies about doing an ice cream flavor. And I actually got connected with one through our commercial kitchen slack channel. So our commercial kitchen has like a slack and there's a page.

00:09:35 Ian

On the slack for potential collaborations and I just post it on there, like, hey, does anybody here make ice cream?

00:09:41 Ian

And I don't know if that's going to go anywhere, but.

00:09:47 Ian

But yeah, we honestly, like, haven't really had.

00:09:50 Ian

One, like the supply we're trying to maximize our margins right now because the supply of our plant, we're we're like one of the biggest even in our tiny stage size right now, we're probably the largest single corporate buyer outside of like.

00:10:11 Ian

We're the largest thing like independent company buying this plant and we're the we're the only one getting it at the price that we're getting it at. So we have to really stretch because even the price that we're getting it at compared to like coffee or tea is very high, right, tea and coffee are massive industries with very, you know, lots of lots of volume.

00:10:31 Ian

And you can get it even you know, even if it's low quality, you can get it for really low price. So we have to really stretch out our margins and the best way to stretch out our margins is to just do what we do and and so.

00:10:41 Ian

Beverages directly to the customers. Collaborations are cool, but our problem is not demand. We don't have a demand problem. We have a supply and margin challenge that we're that we're working on. So we are looking at doing like an ice cream club that.

00:10:54 Ian

Would be cool but.

00:10:58 Ian

Other than the one that I met through our commercial kitchen, I just we just started like reaching out directly to ice cream companies and just dropping in and.

00:11:05 Ian

Talking to them, we are.

00:11:07 Ian

We are trying to get into cafes, but it's again it's the same problem which is.

00:11:11 Ian

As much as fun as it would be to have a cafe serving our beverage, we just don't have enough material and they want it for such a low price that it's not worth it to us to work with other businesses at this point. So eventually, you know, we'll get there, but it's it's a little ways out and this is kind of a unique problem for us specifically like.

00:11:31 Ian

I don't think there are that many companies with this with this challenge.

00:11:37 Ian

But yeah, we're just doing something you know, very.

00:11:38 Ian

Different.

00:11:39 Bhargav

And how have you had? Have you had luck finding alternative suppliers for your plant that you need?

00:11:44 Ian

No, no, not really. So we've talked to a few, but no, either the price is too high, the quality is not good enough or we just don't want to work. We like there's companies that we don't want to work with. So we haven't found any solid secondary supplier. We have like one company that we really would like to work with and has a reasonable price.

00:12:05 Ian

The flavor is not good. Another one.

00:12:08 Ian

The flavor is all right, but the price is like way too high. And then the other one, the one that's like our backup backup option, the one that like actually could work.

00:12:19 Ian

We just want to work with them cause we've heard a bunch of times that they were, they kind.

00:12:22 Ian

Of stuck to.

00:12:23 Ian

Work with so.

00:12:24 Bhargav

Yep. And how are you going around getting leads for these various people that you can talk to?

00:12:32 Ian

The yaupon farming industry is very small. There's only like 4 companies growing it, so it's pretty easy to figure out. You know who our options are. We've we've known from day one. I think the only one that we found out about a little bit later was the one.

00:12:47 Ian

That I mentioned that.

00:12:48 Ian

Has good quality and good taste.

00:12:50 Ian

But but the price is, yeah, like two or three times higher than it needs to be. And they don't seem, which is. I don't. I don't really get what they're doing because they're they're demand is, you know, they're not.

00:13:02 Ian

They're not preparing it right and I it's just surprising to me that they haven't been willing to talk about price, but we also haven't pushed them right. Like we're happy with our current supplier. So. But yeah, again, again, it's kind of unique in in our that our industry like you know in the coffee industry, there's literally 100,000 potential sources of coffee.

00:13:22 Ian

In the yelpin industry, there's like 4, so just very different as of today.

00:13:27 Amritha

So like, were you like when you were starting out, did you seek out community support like through maybe bias or any like nonprofit orgs?

00:13:43 Ian

Yeah, we're we're plugged in with the Seattle good food.

00:13:47 Ian

Network this you know, the city of Seattle's thing.

00:13:49 Ian

That they do.

00:13:51 Ian

And sorry, turn this off. And so we're plugging with them. Who else? The small business alliance or what is that SBA Small Business Association, small business, SBA, we've worked with them a little bit. The main thing that I'm struggling to you know.

00:14:11 Ian

Deal with right now is is again is bookkeeping and it's not like it's not like. I don't know you know how to do it.

00:14:20 Ian

It's just I don't have time. You know I have. I still have a full time job and it's really hard to find, like, pro bono bookkeeping. You know what I mean? There's not. There's not a lot of people that are willing to do to do that for free. So until we're like, I just filed our taxes and it was fine. But until we're bigger.

00:14:41 Ian

Bookkeeping is just like taking a backseat, and I just have to.

00:14:44 Ian

Kind of trust.

00:14:44 Ian

That our our, our gross margins are roughly reflective of our Net margin. You know probably a dog ran off down here anyway.

00:15:00 Ian

So that is, you know we have connected with we yeah. So we have connected with some some of the nonprofits and stuff, but.

00:15:16 Amritha

Yeah. Have they been helpful?

00:15:19 Ian

Yeah. Yeah, they have. Yeah. We've gotten good, good advice on marketing, good advice on legal questions.

00:15:28 Ian

And.

00:15:33 Ian

What else? The Seattle Good Food Network? I mean, we got a ton of contacts through that lots.

00:15:37 Ian

Of good interest.

00:15:40 Ian

Even some people that expressed interest in investing, but we're not really.

00:15:44 Ian

We're not really in need of investment right now, so until we get to that point, we're not really following up on those leads too much, but.

00:15:54 Ian

Yeah. Overall they've been, they've been useful. You know, I wish I had more time to connect with stuff, but right now we're just like, we clearly found a really good.

00:16:04 Ian

Niche like we found a unique and good product that nobody else has ever made. Like we're the first ones to to prepare you upon the way that we're doing it. And so we have a really solid.

00:16:17 Ian

Product, it's just a matter of.

00:16:19 Ian

Actually you know the other biggest thing we need.

00:16:21 Ian

Right now is.

00:16:24 Ian

We need a third partner who is we need to hire. We basically need to hire someone who's an experienced barista because neither of us have barista. Well, do we have a barista experience now? But we need a third person who we can count on as like a backup who's like, really solid professional, does what they're doing and.

00:16:44 Ian

Shows up on time is organized like 100% consistent and has various experience and so I posted on in.

00:16:52 Ian

Feed.

00:16:53 Ian

And I found I got a bunch of leads. Most of them were meth and we've, you know, we've also worked with some of our friends, which has been fine. But, you know, they have jobs. So that is another. Yeah. Hiring is another, you know, area of interest because indeed indeed is expensive.

00:17:13 Ian

It's kind of it doesn't, you know, you don't always get the best.

00:17:17 Ian

You get people who are just kind of looking for their next, you know, job to kind of barely try, you know?

00:17:26 Ian

So hiring is a big one. They're finding finding good employees and honestly not we're really we're really looking for someone who's not just an employee, but somebody who actually wants to be like a Co, like also have ownership stake in the company, like the next that we.

00:17:39 Ian

Bring on.

00:17:41 Ian

And pay we we want them to be an actual, like partner, not just a employee.

00:17:46 Amritha

Yeah. Yeah, that's.

00:17:47 Amritha

Yeah, I I hear you and I wanted to ask you one more thing like I you are if are you looking to expand anytime soon or you know maybe a brick and mortar later because I I see you've got a really good following.

00:17:54 Ian

Mm-hmm.

00:18:01 Ian

Yeah.

00:18:09 Ian

Yeah, that OK, so that is actually our biggest challenge right now, but this is for, I mean this one's hard. This one's not an easy one to to to fix, but we really we're really looking for like a a brick and mortar spot. And I'm on, I use Biz buy sell to find leads and I found a couple leads.

00:18:25 Ian

But not fast enough, basically. And so we're hoping that we'll be able to find something on on Biz buy sell like a a brick and mortar location for lease. We want to start with something pretty small. That's the only place I've been able to find any like.

00:18:46 Ian

Steady stream of potential locations.

00:18:49 Bhargav

I guess if I want to double click on that when you see it not fast enough, could you explain that a little?

00:18:56 Ian

Not fast. What? In what context? Sorry, I don't know.

00:18:59 Bhargav

I guess when you say you couldn't find leads fast enough, is it? Is it that they're Co vanishing?

00:19:02 Ian

No, I didn't. I didn't.

00:19:04 Ian

I didn't follow up with them fast enough. Like by the time that I started, by the time that I started reaching out, they had already been. They had already been contacted.

00:19:15 Ian

Yes. Hey.

00:19:18 Ian

He's been.

00:19:19 Bhargav

And why Best Buy sells over something like Loopnet or Crecy, which are traditionally commercial real estate focused.

00:19:25 Ian

Luke net.

00:19:26 Bhargav

Yeah.

00:19:28 Ian

Not familiar? Loopnet. Ohh, cool. Yeah, I don't know biz myself. I guess when I started just Googling for, like Seattle specifically, that's the one that Biz buy sell was one that came up the most often on Google with.

00:19:46 Ian

With interesting options, because I think that thing about like Loopnet like this is, I mean they do have, OK, they have restaurant retail. There are some that do that that are like bigger for commercial roaster but that don't really cater to like real estate real retail or.

00:20:04 Ian

Cafe type location.

00:20:08 Amritha

Like, have you also thought of like reaching out to bias like in your your locations and?

00:20:16 Amritha

Because they do have a repository of landlords. Who are, you know, like looking for people. Have you reached out to them or have were you aware of that?

00:20:28 Ian

No, no, I'm not sure what that is.

00:20:31 Amritha

Like U District, BI is one of them and I'm not sure like if you have like I can connect you with someone who is there in it.

00:20:41 Ian

Yeah, business providers.

00:20:46 Ian

Yeah. We have not connected with them because they have what they have like certain areas that might have openings or.

00:20:52 Bhargav

Something. Yeah, they're usually interested in growing their area that they're responsible with, so they find good brokers that have businesses, good land, laws that work with businesses and so on and so forth.

00:21:02 Ian

Yeah. Gotcha. No, I mean, I see this guy, Casey Rogers. Looks like he's like the one for Seattle. Maybe. But no, we have not. I wasn't aware of this at all.

00:21:12 Amritha

Yeah, yeah. Also, are you aware of Seattle restore? That's one more Ave.

00:21:18 Ian

Yeah, I do know about Seattle restored most of the stuff they do is a little bit too big for us, though. We're not really looking for a large space. We're like over something to start with. There's way too many businesses that are closing right now because you know they get into some.

00:21:33 Ian

Big space and costs balloon, and there's no way that they're going to be able to pay those off and then they close, you know, which is not what we want. So something small.

00:21:45 Ian

Small, you know, permanent something that's not like a temporary pop-up situation.

00:21:51 Amritha

Yeah, I think I've covered all the questions that I've had. Do you have any questions?

00:22:01 Bhargav

No questions as such. So I guess a quick statement would be that at this point we're also trying to figure out exactly how we can help businesses in the most meaningful way.

00:22:10 Bhargav

And what is the problem that we can solve? Both of us have significant background in technology and that's in that's in. That's what we're trying to leverage. How can we use?

00:22:18 Bhargav

Technology to solve these problems.

00:22:20 Ian

Sure.

00:22:22 Bhargav

Right. And so far we're.

00:22:23 Amritha

And we have one more.

00:22:24 Bhargav

Just going ahead and collecting various businesses, getting the information and then trying to build a network of those businesses eventually with the idea that through this network we'll figure out some of these pattern problems that we can solve cohesively.

00:22:36 Ian

Yeah.

00:22:37 Ian

Yeah, definitely, definitely.

00:22:39 Amritha

And so I wanted to ask like, would you be interested in like participating in testing like when we do?

00:22:48 Amritha

Our product out. Yeah, it's not like you're bound to it. It's up to you if you have the.

00:22:56 Ian

Time and bandwidth? Yeah. And yeah, generally. Yeah. You know, we love working with local local initiatives and. Yeah, so I'd love to, you know, keep in touch. And if you do have any information on the BI.

00:23:08 Ian

Thing that you mentioned I'm like.

00:23:09 Amritha

Yeah, I'll definitely connect you with Don and Daniel who are who are in U District, BI and also Emman, who is also another small business owner.

00:23:23 Amritha

Yeah, he owns OSD zone. So yeah. And you know from there, you can see how it goes.

00:23:33 Amritha

All right.

00:23:34 Bhargav

Thank you so much for your time today.

00:23:36 Ian

Yeah, of course. Thank you.

00:23:37 Ian

Both appreciate it.

00:23:39 Amritha

All the best.

00:23:40 Ian

Take care.

00:23:41 Bhargav

Take.

00:23:41 Bhargav

Care bye.

00:23:43 Amritha

Bye.