



In this episode, we talk about next steps for a small business with a focus on ecommerce for increased sales exposure. Topics covered include digital commerce, online sales and the importance of online brand representation. Explore these important aspects of doing business today through insights and real-world examples provided by the featured guests.

Host:

- Teddy Wilson, Media and Television Personality

Guests:

- Matt Dean Pettit, Co-Founder, PowerPlant Superfoods
- Sierra Johnston, Director of Merchandising, Health & Beauty, Save-On-Foods
- Eileen Mac Donald, CEO and President, GS1 Canada

Teddy Wilson:

Small businesses are the backbone of the economy and the heart of communities across Canada. They represent our innovative spirit, our diverse cultures, and our common needs. In support of the small businesses who tirelessly keep our economy growing and those who proudly carry their products, this is Barcodes and Beyond, an original podcast brought to you by GS1 Canada for anyone interested in small businesses and entrepreneurship.

Welcome. I'm your host, Teddy Wilson. The small business community is made up of dreamers and doers who expertly adapt, pivot, and innovate to keep their businesses growing. And with the increase of Canadian consumers flocking to the internet for their shopping needs, the demand for brands to have online presence has never been greater. But how do small businesses ensure their customers have the same experience online as in store? This is where GS1 Canada can help provide partners with the specific data they need to eliminate missed listing opportunities. In this episode of Barcodes and Beyond, we explore the key to growing your business with our guest, mushroom aficionado and president of Power Plant Superfoods, Inc. Matt Dean Pettit. Hey, so Matt, let's start with a question that I've admittedly never asked anybody before. Tell me about your passion for functional mushrooms. How did this start?

Matt Dean Pettit:

I'm a chef by trade. I've been around restaurants and food for now 30 years. As a chef, I'm a believer of trying to understand food for what it's used and its background, its history. So generally if I'm interested in something, I sort of go on a real rabbit hole and I deep dive. Functional mushrooms, it started all around sort of COVID. It was really about discovering sort of natural medicine just as me to put in my own body.

Teddy Wilson:

What exactly are functional mushrooms good for? What can they do for us?

Matt Dean Pettit:

Yeah, so functional first being legal mushrooms. So let's start with chaga. Chaga is typically found here in Ontario or in Quebec. It's a mushroom and fungus that's been

here for thousands of years. I talk about the indigenous community using this naturally forever. Put it into teas, put it into tinctures. When you think of chaga, I want you to think of defense. It is an immune booster, so it is taking like your vitamin C times 10 is chaga. Lion's mane is for your cognitive focus, clarity, really zoning in which we all need. And then the third one is reishi. Reishi is something to really just tone you down, help you chill, go to sleep. Those are literally as simple as that.

Teddy Wilson: Yeah. How do you go from that interest in mushrooms to saying, I'm going to start a business around it?

Matt Dean Pettit: I found functional mushrooms. I was like, how do I use them? How do I put them into teas, coffee, stalk, stuff that I'll consume? I started doing it. I started playing with it. I'm a chef. I started making tinctures and potions and all these kind of funky things. As I started building this out, there's other people that are thinking like me, one from a business side, two from a community and a customer base. So I called two of my best friends that I've known for 30 years, Ryan Warnock and Mark Fraud. Shout out to the guys. One is a coffee roaster and one lives in Copan, Honduras with his wife and young son, and they are coffee experts. And I said, wait a second. What do we consume? As we're doing this show together, Teddy, you just took a sip of coffee I believe.

Teddy Wilson: I did.

Matt Dean Pettit: Right.

Teddy Wilson: No mushrooms in this one.

Matt Dean Pettit: Well, we'll get you some.

Teddy Wilson: Nice.

Matt Dean Pettit: It's okay. Nobody's perfect. But you had a sip of coffee.

Teddy Wilson: It's true.

Matt Dean Pettit: Canadians consume more coffee per day than they do water. I'm not saying that's a good thing. I mean, not a good thing. It's a bad thing actually. We should be drinking our water. Drink your water, everybody. But with that being said, there's a consumer base. So what do we do? Let's put these great healthy items such as functional mushrooms in stuff that we consume every day. Coffee, we drink it. So let's really focus there. Mark and Ryan, that's the business they were in. I said, boys, holy bleep. I think I've got something here.

Teddy Wilson: So it sounds like the initial factor was your interest in mushrooms, and then you thought, what can I use as the conduit? And the coffee came from the fact that it is so prevalent and you knew a few people in that business. Does that kind of sum it up?

Matt Dean Pettit: No, that's it. I'm a big believer of keeping things within your circle. Mark literally lives in the sustainable, organic coffee fields with his family and he is with the farmers every

day. That's his life. That's my network. So it was really from a passion to an idea on a piece of paper to calling round table real quick execution, let's go.

Teddy Wilson: You definitely have something here. And you've been an entrepreneur for a long time. How did your past business experiences help you this time around with this business?

Matt Dean Pettit: Everything's on the entrepreneur. Everything is on the individual or a team. We've got to wear multiple hats. You have to be really super nimble. Going back to COVID, it taught us to be, again, that P word, right? Everybody talked about the pivot.

Teddy Wilson: Yeah.

Matt Dean Pettit: You know I was going to say pivot.

Teddy Wilson: Right.

Matt Dean Pettit: It was pivoting all day. As an entrepreneur, in any situation, any small business that you're in, you have to learn to really move quick. The experience taking it from my previous life is that you're going to fail. You're going to fail. You have to take risks. All these things sound so cliché, but it is the exact DNA of an entrepreneur.

Teddy Wilson: I've been there.

Matt Dean Pettit: Exactly. Right? But we've got to pick ourselves off the floor, learn from it and keep going. And it's like, okay, what can we do maybe different or what's the situation for the next opportunity? So I think it's always trying to just keep going, pushing. So as I continually grow and build out these businesses such as Power Plant Superfoods, it is about surrounding myself with the best people to know really what they're doing.

Teddy Wilson: I know some of your past businesses were not focused around e-commerce. This business now is very much focused around e-commerce. So how has that helped you grow your business? And when I say grow, I don't mean the actual mushrooms, I mean the business.

Matt Dean Pettit: I've had restaurants. I've sold products in national grocery stores throughout North America, all the chains, Loblaws, Sobeys. These are products that are tangible products that are in a grocery store. Again, the world changed very quickly with the pandemic that has forced North America to change the way we shop, to change the way we buy, the way we look online. Businesses in turn had to react. I think I heard a stat, again, don't quote me the exact number, but I think e-commerce would've had to take 10 years was done in seven months in terms of the learning process, for you as a consumer and me as a company.

I had to teach myself to do everything. People still love to go to the store and there's nothing wrong with that, but you want to have offline and online. So we're selling Power Plant coffee to people in Australia. Without these tools, I would never be able to do that. And more and more people are, as from a consumer side, they're feeling comfortable. My mom buys everything. She'll buy online like crazy now. Pre-pandemic,

would she have done that? Maybe not. I actually can tell you she wouldn't, but she now comfortably does, right? My sister, same situation.

Teddy Wilson: They represent a lot of people.

Matt Dean Pettit: They represent a lot of people. Right? And again, e-commerce doesn't have to be for a millennial or young person, there's people of all ages.

Teddy Wilson: So you've got a product that you're passionate about, but then how do you take it from there to getting it into people's hands?

Matt Dean Pettit: It's like entrepreneur 101, how do I start? So idea, start developing it. Maybe you're in your basement, your shed, your backyard, whatever you're doing, your home office. You've come up with your great idea. You've got your brand names. Then you go on something like GoDaddy, Power Plant Superfoods, is it there? See if it exists. So boom, great, I grab that. You sign up, now that's one subscription you have.

Teddy Wilson: You buy the domain name.

Matt Dean Pettit: You buy the domain name. Now you look at your business model. Am I going to go to retail or am I going to go to direct to consumers? So D2C, which is selling, again, e-commerce. In our case, we went both sides because I believe you should be in both avenues. And I don't mean that you need to be in the largest grocery store overnight. It could be in independent shops, it could be a couple corner stores. Got to get the product out because again, people try things where they see it, the experience is there, and then they go online and they buy it at home and they ship it to their place. So direct to consumer, you need to set up a Shopify account, for example, which I did. I had to teach myself. So I literally with this wanted to teach myself.

You then get that purchase order. How am I shipping it? In our case, and I recommend this to people, whether it's selling something light, T-shirts, coffee, something of the nature where you don't want to do the day-to-day task. You set up a 3PL, like a third party logistics company, 3PL. So we have a 3PL where we are here in Toronto, somebody orders anywhere in the world, the order goes to them and me. Their team picks it, meaning takes that coffee bag, puts it in a box or a bag, we use environmentally friendly packaging, gets put in, sent, address, packing slip, gone.

They do that for us for a fee. You have to look at those numbers and make sure that works into your budget. Because again, the one thing I will say with direct to consumer, you're paying for somebody to do that in a 3PL. But remember, you're no longer paying somebody on retail that same margin. So understanding your margin. Now the product is being shipped all over and then the rest is like building out a strong marketing campaign, have great photography, clear messaging, and I'm sort of really simplifying things here, but for people that want to be in retail, you have to start knocking on doors and you're just going to have to knock on doors. Some people say yes, most will say no. In the beginning most say no.

Teddy Wilson: Keep knocking.

- Matt Dean Pettit: Keep knocking. Because once you establish it, they come back.
- Teddy Wilson: Yeah.
- Matt Dean Pettit: Put yourself out there. Sample, liquid on lips or any tasting. If you own a T-shirt company, drop some off, handwritten notes.
- Teddy Wilson: Yeah, personal touch.
- Matt Dean Pettit: Personal touch, right? Find your messaging, find your story. You have to have products in places so people can touch, try it and have these touchpoints. And then from a direct to consumer and online e-commerce model, it's exactly how we can grow our business. You have to set yourself apart.
- Teddy Wilson: All sorts of challenges to building a business from the ground up. What are the specific challenges in terms of selling commodity items?
- Matt Dean Pettit: So coffee's a commodity just for everybody that does not know that. It fluctuates just like the dollar, it goes up and down. So we use 100% organic Hondurian coffee, so from Honduras, from Copan, and it fluctuates. Just like Brazil, it goes up and down, people buy and sell.
- Teddy Wilson: Yeah.
- Matt Dean Pettit: I will say this my good friend Teddy that we, part of our business model is because Mark lives in Copan, my partner, he actually has a direct single trade, hand-to-hand relationship with these farmers now for 10 years. So we buy direct trade. Direct trade means that we do not purchase from a commissary or a company. We purchase directly from the farmer itself that is importing it to our logistics company, logistics company delivers it to us. So we're not using these middle people so to speak, because in any kind of business, the more hands, the more people that they have their hands in the pie, the more expensive it is. Everybody has to take their margin. We sell that bag of coffee at a good price because we don't have that same markup that a retailer per se would be in.
- Teddy Wilson: And this can insulate you to some degree from the fluctuations of commodities.
- Matt Dean Pettit: Exactly.
- Teddy Wilson: Right. So you're great at brand identity and at branding. So how much focus have you put into branding online and building that online branded presence?
- Matt Dean Pettit: Thank you for saying I brand well I guess.
- Teddy Wilson: It's true.
- Matt Dean Pettit: Thank you. It's so important. You have only a couple seconds that somebody's either going to look on their phone, be engaged, whether they see it in a store, the talk point,

the name, everything has to connect. So I think how have we really online pushed that is, again, like I always say to people, you have to have some really cool, and I use the word cool loosely, but you have to have really great edgy on brand with what you're doing on point direct messaging, call to action, social media of course. You've got to have that presence because again, everyone's Instagram, everyone's Twitter, if you will, maybe to a little bit of a lesser extent, but even Facebook of course, certainly something like TikTok now, as you know, if you're not on these platforms from a person, a brand, a company, that's where people look as your business card.

They hear that. So it's like, hey, Power Plant, what is that? Oh, cool. You can be anywhere in the world and pull up Instagram right now and you go on and you see Power Plant Superfoods. You have an idea and you're like, okay. And I've used this statement of perceptions reality. And I don't mean that in a slimy way. I mean that in a way of, if you're reading and seeing online what our brand positioning is, I want you to get it quickly. I want you to know, believe and feel trust that you're getting a great organic coffee in our case or in functional mushrooms. You're getting everything that you love in a coffee cup, but you're getting it with healthy benefits. And we try to convey that message very cleanly, very simple, but in a fun way. You've got to be hip, you've got to be on it.

Teddy Wilson: Can you tell me a bit about how GS1 Canada has helped you on your journey?

Matt Dean Pettit: So for me and our company in Power Plant Superfoods, GS1 Canada has really helped us in the fact that we wanted to grow. We went from testing popups, farmer's market, influencer campaigns, getting it to people. Okay, that's great. But then when you want to get to the next level, whether it be in retail and even selling direct to consumer, somebody like a partner like Amazon or whatever it might need, you have to have these codes. You have to have these [inaudible 00:13:14] codes. You need to work with GS1 Canada. It's just that natural evolution in the business.

And not every entrepreneur has to do it day one, but again, we talk about planning and being ready for the next step, right? Planning for these things, it has been imperative for us and for me, truthfully, coming from using the exact example with Power Plant Superfoods, GS1 Canada has been a great partner in the riding. The customer service, incredible. Myself or Ryan or any of our partners have called many times and it's like I am stuck, I would call and I'd be like, I don't know what to do here. How do I register this piece over here? And they'll walk you through.

Teddy Wilson: That's cool. It can be a bad feeling being stuck.

Matt Dean Pettit: It's horrible. And again, especially from a service base where I don't write codes, I don't know anything about it, I'm not a coder. I don't know how to move things around. I know how to brand, market, sell, make you a great cup of coffee or a protein shake or a seltzer, but again, as a small business owner, you don't know how to do that stuff.

Teddy Wilson: Do you think it's important, if somebody's thinking about starting a business, to start from a position of passion to focus on a thing that you are outside of business interested in or fascinated by in the same way that you got fascinated by mushrooms?

- Matt Dean Pettit: As an entrepreneur, you have to be passionate about what you do and find that thing that you think, as I said, the aha moment where it's like, okay, can we make a business out of this? You might make the best butter tarts in the world and you want to sell them all over the world, but is there a business? Why are you different? What is going to make your butter tart stand out? What is your branding? What is your name? What's your hook? What's your catch, right?
- Teddy Wilson: Yeah.
- Matt Dean Pettit: There's got to be, and that's sort of the brass tacks of any small business, especially if you're speaking of e-commerce because there's just a gazillion things out there.
- Teddy Wilson: For a business owner listening who's maybe going through some growing pains with their business, you've gone through growing pains with your business, what's your best advice for dealing with those challenging times?
- Matt Dean Pettit: Yeah. I would always say, you know what? Plan for a rainy day. Entrepreneurs have a habit of getting really excited. But from a financial side, again, it's a business. Whether you're an individual as a company, in a corporate corporation as a freelancer, or you've got 50 employees or a thousand employees, you really have to plan for that rainy day. And that necessarily doesn't have to just mean capital as in cash flow, but it could mean inventory. It could be how you treat your staff, how you treat yourself.
- Teddy Wilson: Those rains will always come, right?
- Matt Dean Pettit: The rains will always come. It is a punching bag game. It's like being a boxer, right? It's like you're out there battling.
- Teddy Wilson: Yeah. Sometimes you're the boxer, sometimes you're the bag.
- Matt Dean Pettit: That's right. No, but celebrate the wins.
- Teddy Wilson: Celebrate the wins.
- Matt Dean Pettit: You have to because there is days that you're just like, I don't want to do this, because it's a tough business. With that being said, when you do hit those milestones, when you do hit those winds, you celebrate it.
- Teddy Wilson: Yeah. It's going to rain one day, so celebrate a sunny day.
- Matt Dean Pettit: That's it. Sunny where we are today. I'm celebrating it. I should be wearing shorts.
- Teddy Wilson: Matt, such an awesome story and journey that you've been on. Thanks so much for sharing it with us.
- Matt Dean Pettit: Thanks, Teddy.

- Eileen Mac Donald: Hello, I'm Eileen Mac Donald, CEO and president of GS1 Canada. I hope you're enjoying the podcast. For more information on how GS1 Canada can help you get started, keep listening. We are here as a trusted strategic partner to support businesses like yours.
- Teddy Wilson: Our next guest is a longtime grocery specialist with a keen eye for innovations and upcoming trends. She's the director of merchandising, health and beauty for SaveOn Foods, Sierra Johnston. Hey, Sierra, welcome to Barcodes and Beyond.
- Sierra Johnston: Hey Teddy, how are you doing?
- Teddy Wilson: I'm great, thanks. It's great to have you here. So first off, I want to ask you, how do small businesses like Matt's maximize their growth potential?
- Sierra Johnston: First and foremost, I really think that knowing their growth goals and then really defining those growth goals, whether it's a sales target, a volume target, or just trying to expand maybe geographically to new locations. Know what your growth goals are and then what the limitations or challenges there may be around those growth goals. And then the next step would be what the plans are to promote your product. How are you going to connect with that customer via demos, giveaways, maybe there's some social media support. How are you going to connect and engage that customer? And then finally, what does your competitive landscape look like? Who are you competing against? What are they doing really, really well? Is that an area that you want to play in or do you want to differentiate yourself from that? And then how do you differentiate yourself so that you can be competitive?
- Teddy Wilson: One area that's so important is online presence. So tell me about a few of the challenges that small businesses face when they're trying to stand out and be relevant online.
- Sierra Johnston: I think a big challenge is going back to the competitive landscape.
- Teddy Wilson: Right.
- Sierra Johnston: Matt I think touched on everyone's online. We had that big shift to e-commerce through COVID and I think everybody has some sort of online customer source. So I think that one of the challenges is really knowing how are you going to get in that customer's eye? How are you going to engage with the customer through online. In the store, it's simple. It's product placement on the shelf, or it's maybe having some promotions in a price tag on the shelf, whereas online is a bit more challenging. So I always recommend that a lot of companies really look at their search engine optimization. What are those keywords? And if someone's looking for something like functional mushrooms, is your site going to come up when someone types that in and googles it?
- Teddy Wilson: How much emphasis should businesses put on marketing budgets to support their growth?
- Sierra Johnston: I think your marketing budget really has to depend on how you're going to reach that customer. If you're going online, then yes, absolutely, you might want to invest in some targeted ads, or you might want to invest in some of the search engine optimization

tactics. Whereas if you're a bit more grassroots and you just want to connect with little Mrs. Jones, then maybe it's just going out to the local farmer's market and it's not going to cost you very much to market it.

Teddy Wilson: Find out where Mrs. Jones shops, right?

Sierra Johnston: Yeah, absolutely.

Teddy Wilson: It seems like you keep coming back to that notion of know thy customer. It seems so important. How do emerging businesses and small businesses learn about their customers?

Sierra Johnston: Yeah. I mean, there's always a reason why you've started a business.

Teddy Wilson: Right.

Sierra Johnston: So if it's something that you're interested in, so let's say Matt said functional mushrooms, this is something that he knows has a lot of health benefits. You can really map out what type of customer would be looking for those health benefits. What are they shopping? Maybe it's a vegan customer, and what are they buying and what type of customer that is. And then you work to define who that customer is. And if it's Sandy who's 32 to 34 years old and she does her shopping every weekend at the local farmer's market, then how do you connect with Sandy? So giving somebody a personality and then really building all of your strategy and your marketing and your plans around that individual as your primary customer.

Teddy Wilson: We just heard from Matt about how partnering with GS1 Canada helped his brand and his journey. How important is that partnership with them on your end of the business?

Sierra Johnston: Oh, that's incredibly important. As a grocery retailer, every product needs codes and they need codes that are functional. So that's been really, really important. I know that we partner very closely with GS1 for things, and they've been amazing partners to work with.

Teddy Wilson: So Matt is working with his business. It's in a product space that's very of the moment. You might even call it trendy. A lot of people are talking about mushrooms these days. What are some of the pitfalls that he and other business owners working in more trendy spaces should be aware of as they move forward?

Sierra Johnston: I think the initial thing is educating the customer about a trendy business. I didn't know that much about functional mushrooms. I know that it's something that's trending. I know that I'm seeing it more in grocery stores. I'm seeing it more online. But until Matt shared what each mushroom was and what it was good for, I as a consumer wouldn't know what mushroom would work for me. I think a large part of the challenge with a trendy business is to really engage your customers and be able to educate them about why they would maybe need this product or what is the use.

One of the other challenges is that trendy businesses either continue to grow and they become something that's a long-term trend or they fade out and both have their challenges. If it continues to grow, you're going to experience more competition. Kombucha was something that I never saw in the shelves 10 years ago, and then as soon as it became trendy, all of a sudden there's hundreds and hundreds of kombucha suppliers out there fighting for that space. So I think that that's where really creating that customer loyalty and really building that customer base from the ground level can help you stand out in the future when there's more competition.

Teddy Wilson: You can tell by talking to him, and I'm sure you could tell by listening too, Matt is a master pitcher. He's really good at pitching. So for you though, what are you looking for when you're receiving pitches?

Sierra Johnston: We get a lot of pitches for new products, new innovations, and of course everyone's very passionate about it, but are you willing to stand behind your product? Are you willing to support that product once it gets onto the shelf and then going into the future? I think of one of probably the best examples is we work with a small supplier based out of Vancouver, and they do hot sauce in a very, very small family run operation. But this family goes into stores three years after being put on the shelf. They go into stores, they demo their product, they talk to their customers, and they'll travel all the way across provinces to do the same thing in every single store location. So it's that type of commitment that we look for as far as support and what suppliers we would be looking to bring on.

Teddy Wilson: Any kind of final thoughts or final pieces of advice that you'd like to share today?

Sierra Johnston: I think one thing that we find, especially small businesses are challenged with is that because they're so passionate about their product and they want to get it to every single store, they want to get it out everywhere is just the challenges of maintaining that growth and maintaining that supply and making sure that they can get it out to those areas. When you're small, that's easy. You're able to kind of manage maybe your growth. But once you go into, let's say, a large retailer, it's really important to know, do you have the supply to cover it? Will you be able to keep up with the demand? Do you have the packaging resources to be able to continually supply 200 to a thousand retail stores if your product's in there. They need to have realistic growth expectations. There's expectations for volume that sometimes small retailers have a challenge with.

Teddy Wilson: That's great. That's good advice for businesses. Sierra, thanks so much for joining us.

Sierra Johnston: Awesome. Thanks Teddy.

Eileen Mac Donald: Hello again. It's Eileen. Thanks for listening to Barcodes and Beyond. In this episode, we heard how Matt's partnership with GS1 Canada has helped his business grow. He talked about the challenges he faced not only getting started, but also getting his products to market, selling with a retailer and building an e-commerce website to expand his business. Matt experienced firsthand the value of working with GS1 Canada to take his business to the next level. The need for visibility on e-commerce platforms has really

accelerated over the last few years, and it's more important than ever to ensure you're providing the specific content retailers and other distributors require for selling online.

In 1973, industry leaders came together to revolutionize rotary retail with the GS1 barcode. Since the introduction of the first barcode now over 50 years ago, business needs and consumer's demand for more detailed product information has increased significantly, and we've been innovating ever since by adapting to the changing needs of industry and consumers. Today, advancements in technology have enabled the development of a new generation of smaller two-dimensional GS1 barcodes, like QR codes and the data metrics. To meet business needs for faster access to more detailed product information, these tiny barcodes are the gateway to creating new opportunities to improve trust, safety, and sustainability for consumers, patients, and the planet in the near future. We continue to support the growth of Canadian small businesses by listening to your needs and providing trusted guidance, tools and resources. Be sure to check in for more Barcode and Beyond episodes and follow GS1 Canada on social media for updates on new small business opportunities. Thanks again for listening.

Teddy Wilson:

I'm Teddy Wilson. Thanks so much for listening. This is Barcodes and Beyond, an original podcast series for small businesses brought to you by GS1 Canada, a not-for-profit association committed to providing small businesses with trusted tools and support to successfully bring their products to market. To learn how GS1 Canada can help you start and grow your small business, go to gs1ca.org.

French Translation Required