

Welcome to The Boomer Business Owner. My guest today is Pratima Aravabhoomi. Pratima is an honorary Baby Boomer, designer, quote expert, and the founder of www.CraftStreetDesign.com. She is on a mission to help you achieve your goals, be happy, and pass on the inspiration to everyone around you through her beautifully designed quote prints.

Hey, Pratima. Welcome to the show.

Thank you, Charlie. I'm so glad to be here.

I had the luxury of going to your website and checking out what you do, and obviously we broached the subject in the introduction, but perhaps you could take a few minutes and in your own words talk about your business.

Okay. I started out as a carpet career person, and I've been working in carpet for about 10 years, and I have been freelancing on the side, on the design side of everything. But I was kind of very unhappy with the carpet job. It wasn't giving me enough satisfaction. I was actually working at my dream job, at Apple, and I was very excited about it. It's just that I didn't know if I was making any difference and I couldn't see that.

So I went back, did a lot of soul-searching at that point, and came to this point of my life... At one point in my life I was very depressed and I was in a bad arranged marriage, and at that time I was extremely depressed. There was this one day I had decided to end my life, and at that point I happened to see a quote trend on my kitchen wall, and I've had this quote for a long time. At that moment when I saw this quote, it stopped me from what I was doing, it gave me a new direction to think about, and it gave me hope. The quote actually read: "The darkest hour is before dawn." That is a moment I went back to, and I realized how much it changed my life.

I turned my life around after that, started my business, and went on to do many other things. But it made me realize that it's the same for a lot of other people. Quotes are not just pieces of words on paper, but they help you pause, they help you think, they remind you of so many things. And so, I decided to start utilizing my design expertise and my life experience, and decided to start Craft Street Design. We started designing all the quote trends and selling them.

Okay. Do you use other people's quotes or are you coming up with the quotes yourself?

We do both. So we do use a lot of ancient wisdom and many different popular figures whose quotes are meaningful in different situations, but we also come up with our own which are either lighthearted or sometimes from business perspective that I myself have experienced, and I use those.

Okay. You have a quote, it is five words or four words or something like that. What you do, the value you're adding is you're making these quotes look attractive, and you're maybe framing them or something. So you're actually providing to your customer a visually attractive design of these words on paper. Is that a fair comment?

Yes, that is correct. We spend a lot of hours on designing, based on the meaning of the words itself, and we work on typography, hand lettering, and several other design skills to actually come up with a design, and that's how they're so simple and they're more presentable wherever you would like to display them.

Are all of your sales online? Do you distribute through retail stores? Do you do craft shows, things like that? How do you distribute your product?

One, obviously we have an online channel, but we also are in retail stores. We're in a couple of stores in Seattle and also in

Disney Land, and a couple of other stores are coming up in line. So we do have a wholesale retail channel open, and we also create corporate gifts, so whether that is entrepreneurs and small business owners who are trying to give gifts to their employees, or sometimes it is to their clients, but we do create corporate gifts.

Okay, that was what my next question was going to be, about customization. Clearly, if I, Charlie, am a potential corporate client, I could say: "Pratima, I'd like to have this color frame, this color matting," or something like that, and you could do that for me. Correct?

Yes. We also put your logo, or any specific quotes you might have. Sometimes you have expertise in a certain area, so we can design quotes around that area to customize it for the person who's trying to distribute it.

How customizable are one-offs? Meaning if I go to your website and you have this wonderful quote, there's a white or off-white matte, and there's a black simple frame around it, if I say: "Hey, I'd like a red frame around that," can I do that or is the item pretty much the item on a one-off basis on your website?

The design and the quote itself are customizable. If there is a quote that you would like and it's not on the site, we can design that. We customize on the design side. When it comes to framing and matting, it's pretty much fixed. So you can get the frame that is displayed on the site right now. We are planning to add a few more options, but at this point what you see is what you get, but on the design side we do customize it.

Okay. Are there any other vehicles that I could purchase this quote on other than a frame print? For example, do you sell some of the prints on mouse pads or something like that?

We don't sell on mouse pads per se, but we do have a new product that we launched just a few weeks ago. It's a small print block with 12... They're a little bit smaller size, about 4 by 4.5 inches, but they're smaller quote prints, 12 of them, they come as a bundle and you can put them on your desk. It's made it keep it on a desk or a side table, or a bedroom table, whichever you like. That's a new product that we've introduced.

Have you thought about putting this on a refrigerator magnet or a small square magnet that someone could stick on their refrigerator or someplace they could see that?

Yeah, there have been requests about that place, because it's a natural progression of having something inspiring to see every day in the morning when you're making your coffee or tea, so we are working on that product line actually.

We alluded to your mission in the introduction, but is there some kind of overarching larger mission or vision of what you're trying to achieve with your business over the coming few years?

The overarching mission is that everybody becomes whatever they wish to be, whether that is an entrepreneur, whether they want to be just happy and content, and stress-free in their life. Whatever it is that their goals are, we hope that we can be the tool that helps them get there.

Okay. We talked a little bit about how you came up with this idea. If I'm your friend, I'm your neighbor, I say: "Pratima, I'm thinking about starting a business, and I'm having a problem coming up with some ideas." Are there any tips that you would give me or any suggestions you might make to help me, Charlie, come up with some ideas for a new business?

There are a couple of things that I did follow while I was starting my own business which are applicable to you or anybody else, but I think specifically you need to know your area of expertise, your habits, and yourself first, but beyond that, knowing that kind of gives you an idea of where to start.

After that, to actually come up with ideas, my favorite way is to actually take existing business ideas that people are selling products, and you love the product, you're probably either using it or you see it, you like it. So take two products, any two products. It doesn't matter. One in technology, one in books, it doesn't matter. Just take two ideas of products and see if you can come up with a third product that is a mix of both. When you do that, there are a lot of things that happen. Sometimes it's a viable product, sometimes it's not, but it gets your wheels turning. It gets you a completely different perspective on the product itself and what kind of business to run, so it helps you think in very new ways. I've done that several times to create new products.

A lot of times the natural path that you see that you have to take may not necessarily be the correct one for you. So coming up with your own ideas by cross-pollinating them or fusionating them... It's not even a word, but you get the point. Mix two products, and I think the product that's born out of it, the ideas that are born out of that are usually very good.

That's a great concept. Let's say that I am still your neighbor and I'm just at a different place, so I say: "Pratima, I've come up with this idea and it's product that I want to do and put together, and I want to get started." There's a lot of moving pieces involved, there. Let's look at your product. What fonts am I going to use? What kind of frame? What kind of matting? What kind of website do I need to get set up? Things like that. Are there any, again, tips of things that you would suggest that I focus on early in the game to help me move in the right direction?

In order to make those choices, to answer that question I have to go back to the instance of... First, I think the very first step is if you actually have a product and if you have certain options that you're already looking at, then the best thing is to test them out in a very small way if possible. In my case I put up my prints and designs on marketplaces. I also did some LinkedIn InMail, reaching out, cold emailing people to see if I could get some traction, and if there are people even interested in buying when I first started because I had no idea if people would buy.

Based on that feedback is how you can make those choices. If you had to design whether it should be a black frame or a yellow frame, that really depends on the audience. When you're a new business and in a new product, it's kind of hard to figure out your audience, so the best way is just to test it out. See if you can perform small tests which don't take too much of your resources, whether that's money or time, and take feedback from that, and then make those decisions. I cannot define what those decisions would be for your particular business, but it's a good way to test it out.

Let me repeat what I think I heard you say. I come up with an idea, and I think it's a good idea. I may run it by you, you may think it's a good idea, but at the end of the day the person who we're building this product for has to think it's a good idea. So, a lot of people would suggest: "Talk to your friends, talk to your neighbors, talk to your family members, see if they like the idea."

But what I'm reading between the lines hearing you saying is maybe you should work out to someone, maybe some LinkedIn contacts and say: "Hey, here is a product I'm looking to do. Will you buy this from me?" I know we talked a little bit about the nuances of the framing and stuff, but it's at a very basic level, it's kind of like the product itself, and: "Will you buy this from me? Will you write me a check for this now?" Is that a fair comment?

Yes, absolutely. If the response is from a channel like LinkedIn, they come back and say: "We don't like it," then they may not be your audience at all, and you have to find the people first. Then based on that, if they say: "Okay, I will buy this if it had a pink frame or a blue frame," then that is how you go through the product. But absolutely.

Okay. A lot of our listeners are either looking to start something online, maybe they have started something online, so I want to shift and talk about how you do things online. By the way, you know what just popped into my mind? When you talked earlier about selling it on a marketplace, were you referring to something like Etsy, eBay, or someplace like that, some common marketplace?

Yes, that's right. Any place that actually has a readymade audience that you can leverage and test it out. But yes, Amazon, Handmade, eBay, any one of those.

Got it. Back to your business, I want to talk about how you do things online. So, how do you market yourself online? How does someone find out about Craft Street Designs?

Right now we do a lot of different things, but when I started I started with one technique, and that was reaching out on LinkedIn InMail and distributing flyers. Those were the two things I did when I started out because there were very few resources, and I was trying to bootstrap this whole operation. So it's kind of difficult to have resources to do many other things, but as of today, we do Instagram influencer marketing where we try to reach out to people who have relevant large followings, and we try to see if we can give them a sample of the product, and if they like it they talk about it on their feed, and that generates some traffic to not only our Instagram feed, but also our own website. That's one way we do it.

The second way we do it is, of course, building our email list and sending out relevant content and also promotional offers intermittently so that we generate traffic that way to Craft Street Design. We also create our own little videos that we send out. We don't usually post them on our own site, but on social media we do do that.

We also reach out to blog influencers to talk about our product, leave product reviews, so that way their audience also comes to our website to take a look. Of course, guest podcasting interviews. If you have something to share, just like how you would do on a blog, guest posting, and trying to get email subscribers similarly, that also generates audience.

Got it. I thought you were coming on the podcast just because you liked me.

That, too, Charlie. [Laughter]

From a technical standpoint, do you use something like Shopify? How do you have your e-commerce set up on your website?

We use the Shopify platform for the shop side of it, and for content side, the blog side of it, we use WordPress. It's all connected. It looks seamless from the front, but the blog is actually on WordPress, and the shop is on the Shopify.

Okay. If I'm your neighbor, we're going back to me being your neighbor, and I say: "Pratima, great, I've got this great idea, I put it out there, people like it, and I want to have a store just like yours." Would you counsel me that that process, learning about platforms like Shopify, WordPress, getting a site set up, and getting things integrated is really difficult, it's really easy? Would you counsel me to figure it out on my own or to hire some kind

of a consultant? Just help me think through that for a moment.

First of all, I would love you as a neighbor, Charlie, but...

I'd be asking you too many questions, right?

It makes me think, so it always helps. In order to get started, I would simplify the steps so I wouldn't try to have a store just like somebody who's been in business for a year, because that's just hard to start off at that place. When I started, the template on Shopify was not that great. We didn't have a lot of customization options, like the quote or the way it looked. So I wouldn't do too much of customization to start out with. If you have the resources... Also, again, I think it depends on what field you're in. Suppose you're in a design business, so maybe you're creating websites for other people or you're a freelancer in some form, then yes, your website really needs to be reflecting that. But if you're a writer, if you are creating some other product that's not that design-oriented, I wouldn't waste time or resources on hiring a web designer to create a beautiful thing. I wouldn't go through all of that trouble.

I would pick a template on one of the platforms, whether that is WordPress, you could use many different things. But if you have a shop, Shopify I think it's by far the best platform because it has so many plugins in the backend, so as you grow you can add them, you can pay for them, and they help you run your business without a developer. So yes, I would suggest just pick a template, put up a product, and start marketing. All your efforts when you start should be focused more on marketing, and not actually setting up the product or the website.

That's a savvy piece of advice, thank you for that. Coaching, have you ever in the past or do you currently avail yourself of the services of a coach, a mentor, maybe a mastermind group to help you build your business?

I do have mentors, but the way I meet them is not through a formal mastermind, but I do have mentors in different areas. For example, I speak to this lady from San Diego and she's a great PR consultant. She gives me advice on how to get more press coverage, or what I should be doing on my site so it looks better for the press. I get information. It's not always about technique. It's also about understanding the product with the mentor.

So I do have people around me that help me out in different areas, but overall I don't have an e-commerce coach who was in a similar field who probably shares the same personality as me. I think that's really hard to find. When I started, I had this notion that I would find somebody like that and that'll be it, I'll be able to grab on to the knowledge and wisdom. But I think instead if we look at each person contributing differently, like as long as they know something more than you in their field, they become your mentor.

Pratima, this has been a great value-add. What is the best way for our listeners to reach out, connect with you, and find out more about your products?

Of course. The website is www.CraftStreetDesign.com. If you want to talk to me or email me about any business advice or product-specific questions that you want answered, you can always reach me at Pratima@CraftStreetDesign.com.

All of the great resources mentioned in today's episode, along with a full transcript of today's episode, will be available on the show notes page at www.TheBoomerBusinessOwner.com.

Pratima, thanks so much, on behalf of all of our listeners; we really, really appreciate your help.

Thank you so much, Charlie. Thank you for having me.