



Benjie's Cookies: Freshly Baked With Love

by Rachel Payne

Based in Tampa, Florida

Mom and Pop Cookie Shop

Goosey Cookies Freshly Baked
with Love from our Oven to your Home

Benjiescookies.com

@benjies_cookies

I was introduced to Benjie Gaud and his cookies at one of the Tim Gardner Production shows. When you talk with him, his passion for his cookies is obvious and the rapid growth of his company points to the delicious taste he's created. I recently had the opportunity to hear his whole story as Benjie's Cookies is another example of a small business that has grown because of the sport of bodybuilding.

“ I'm very particular on the experience people have when they have a Benjie's Cookie and I'm very dedicated to my cookies. ”

HOW BENJIE'S COOKIES GOT STARTED

I had been working as a maintenance technician for roller coasters, but I was always on the lookout for an entrepreneurial role in food service. Maybe a food truck, I was doing a lot of research on the possibilities. I ran across a cookie business that was for sale. I contacted them to find out more and decided this was the opportunity I had been looking for. We purchased the equipment, the basic cookie recipe, licenses and began the training process. The chef walked us through the way he had done everything and after that we just ran with it and began putting our own twist on the cookie recipe. Obviously my name is Benjie and we decided to keep it simple and that's how we got to where we are today as the owners of Benjie's Cookies.

SO HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN BUSINESS

We officially started baking cookies in April 2023. We're very new, not quite a year old. I'm fortunate to have friends in the bodybuilding business, so we debuted our cookies at a small show, learned a few things and did our next event in June. By that time, we had our exhibitor display, banner, website, and more all branded with our logo and colors. We showcased a few more cookie flavors and that began a six month circuit of NPC & IFBB Pro shows. It was the perfect target audience for our products and we got some really great feedback.



HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH YOUR LOGO AND BRANDING DESIGNS?

Tim Gardner was really helpful with his experience in coming up with design concepts. He asked us to take a few pictures and he reached out to one of his old artists. He came up with a few different options and together we ended up with the design you see now. We didn't know it beforehand, but apparently the guy is an artist for a major comic book label. He's got me looking a little buff in the logo, I had to start working out to catch up to my logo! We're very grateful to Tim for reaching out to his artists and helping us out with that. We get a lot of compliments on our booth, we try to make it kind of look like a storefront.

DO YOU HAVE RETAIL LOCATION OR DO YOU RENT KITCHEN SPACE TO DO ALL YOUR BAKING?

We are under what they call the Florida Cottage Food Law, which basically allows me to produce my baked goods in my primary residence and sell direct to customers. We converted our garage into a commercial kitchen. This has been a great venture for me and my wife, Dulce.

DO YOU ONLY SELL YOUR COOKIES AT BODYBUILDING SHOWS?

We started with the show but we are slowly evolving to other fitness events, the community and have begun promoting catering for local corporate events, community events, parties and of course our online business is doing well. We are truly grateful and owe a lot to the fitness industry. We will always be there for them. Branching into clinics and hospitals, for example, is new. Doctors like to provide treats for their staff.



“ I want everybody to always get the same taste and the same quality.”



HOW MANY COOKIE FLAVORS DO YOU OFFER?

When we began, we only had four flavors. Now we offer 13 different flavored cookies plus some that are seasonal. Stuffed Peanut Butter and Cookie Monster are the two Best Selling Cookies. We also introduced mini cookies. They're especially popular for holiday parties and corporate platters. We've even started bringing milk to some of the events because nothing goes better with cookies than milk!

ARE ALL YOUR COOKIES HEALTHY COOKIES?

During this first year, all of our cookies have been what we call "reward cookies". Something an athlete would indulge in after their show or for a cheat meal as a reward for all of their hard work. We always tell our customers to Eat Responsibly! In 2024, we are coming out with protein cookies and gluten free cookies.

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR BENJIE'S COOKIES? WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF THREE YEARS, FIVE YEARS FROM NOW? WHAT IS YOUR ULTIMATE VISION WHEN YOU SIT DOWN AND THINK "THIS IS WHAT WE'RE WORKING FOR."

When we started this business I was working full time, then I would come home, prepare the cookies, pack them and go to a show. There were times I would be up baking until three in the morning and there were even times we never slept. In October, I took the leap of faith and went full time with Benjie's Cookies. We've been blessed that the business has been able to provide for us and continued to grow with the fitness industry, locally, and online. The holiday season was particularly good as we shipped out quite a few cookie holiday baskets and stocking stuffers.

We've gone back and forth in our long term vision whether we should have a storefront or just a kitchen with delivery and pick up only. Or maybe something in between like having our cookies are various locations in a similar fashion to some of the meal prep companies. Ultimately, it's important to us to grow and be able to provide jobs for our community. My biggest concern is the quality of the product and keeping it fresh.





Stuffed Reeses Peanut Buttercup

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED EXPANDING YOUR PRODUCT LINE BEYOND COOKIES?

We've talked about it the possibilities, but as far as food goes, we still want our main focus to be the cookies so we'll have to see. We are working on some merchandise opportunities.

HOW MUCH OF YOUR BUSINESS IS FACE TO FACE AND HOW MUCH IS ONLINE DIRECT TO CONSUMER?

Face-to-Face sales are approximately 75-80% and the rest is online. I think because the cookies are my passion so it's really easy for me to talk when I'm in front of somebody. It's about building relationships. I'm hoping to connect with charities in the community such as breast cancer. We have a pink cookie that we bling out on top. In addition to charities, we also have a gender reveal cookie, and we were approached to create a rainbow cookie for Pride month. Who knows what other cultures we may explore. We're fortunate with this business because we have met so many great promoters, athletes and spectators and we get to talk with them, share what we're doing, and make great friendships.

HOW HAS THE INCREASING COST OF FOODS AFFECTED YOUR BUSINESS?

Fortunately, we buy in bulk so that has helped, but some prices have gone up. I haven't adjusted my prices yet. We have made a conscious effort to try to save money on travel expenses when we go to the shows so that we don't have to increase our prices.

HOW ARE YOU GETTING THE WORD OUT TO NEW AUDIENCES?

During the peak of the bodybuilding season, we were out of town every weekend and just preparing for a show is a process because we only offer products that are fresh. Now that it's slowed down for the off-season, I'm personally going to companies, taking samples and flyers and introducing myself to let them know what we do and that we're local. I plan to contact the racing community, marathons, 5 & 10Ks, CrossFit and Strongman events this year as well. I am sure, as we continue grow we'll hire people. That's the goal. There have been a few friends who have helped us but our number one priority is to make sure our customers receive the same personal touch that they would get from me. I'm very particular on the experience people have when they eat a Benjie's Cookie. I want everybody to always get the same taste and the same quality.

CAN YOU SHARE SOME OF THE SEASONAL FLAVORS WE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO THIS YEAR?

In the very near future, for Valentine's Day we'll bring in some strawberry and cherry flavors. We want people to see our cookies as a better alternative to a bouquet of roses.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT SHOWS WE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING BENJIE'S COOKIES AT THIS YEAR?

I've been looking at the schedules and have already spoken with some of the promoters. I've been primarily in Florida but I hope to branch out in the future. Follow me on Instagram @ benjies_cookies_ to see what events I'll be at!

I think you have a great direction planned for your business moving upward. It's such an exciting time for you. Your side gig has definitely taken off! I'm wishing you the best in business so that leap of faith is a leap to success. I look forward to watching you continue to grow.



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