Matt Wagner:

Welcome to the Main Street Business Insight Podcast. I'm your host, Matt Wagner, Chief Program Officer at Main Street America, a nonprofit leading a collaborative movement dedicated to strengthening communities through place-based economic development and community preservation. Each week, join me as I travel the country and take a deep dive into the personal journeys of downtown and neighborhood entrepreneurs. The stories that far too often go unnoticed and unheard. Whether you're a small business owner who wants to learn from your peers, or a community leader looking to better support your local business base, Main Street Business Insights is here to provide you with the tools, strategies, and personal stories to help you and all of your main street businesses thrive. So subscribe now and tune in every Wednesday to get inspired by the individuals driving our communities forward.

Welcome everyone to another episode of the Main Street Business Insight Podcast. This week's show finds me in the Little Five Points neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia, where I'm sitting down with Patrice Hull, a total creative, entrepreneur, all-around community builder, and founder of Stuff We Wanna Say and shall I add, and most importantly to our discussion, a new brand of clothing and handbags called Created To Be Noticed. While barriers to entry for small-scale producers and brand creators like Patrice have certainly been lowered over the years through a whole host of technology enhancements, logistic cost reductions, and even e-commerce and social media providing greater access to markets beyond our main street storefronts, it's still tough, however, to work to penetrate the market, have your message and brand positioning breakthrough in certainly what is highly competitive markets. But some stats that might surprise you in totality as we think about small-scale production and building a brand, over 30,000 new consumer products are launched annually and only 40% of developed products, however, actually reach the market.

And among those that do, only 60% generate revenue. Now 56% of consumers learn about these new products from family or friends. And so that trust and relationship is certainly important, and it's not just a pure social media or e-commerce or digital play. You've got to build these connections and Patrice really speaks to that as you'll see in terms of her market strategy. It also takes an average of 28 weeks for a new product to actually reach its highest distribution where it's reaching a threshold of growth. Product launches can vary in costs from 10,000 to over 10 million, but I think that just simply demonstrates how the barriers to entry have been dramatically lower when you think about that price point, and especially given that typically manufacturing and establishing a brand used to be really, really expensive.

Only 3% of new products sell for more than 50 million in a year. Now that's actually seems very high to me, the 3%. I would expect 0.3% or 0.03%. While certainly challenging, my guest, Patrice has demonstrated remarkable fortitude, grit, and savviness as you might say, and reaching celeb buyers like actress, Amy Adams and tennis star, Coco Gauff, and leveraging neighborhood retailers for wholesaling opportunities as a way to build and accelerate brand exposure and adoption. So we've got a lot of cover. We're going to review that much more on this week's show. And thanks as always for joining and we'll see you on the other side.

Welcome everyone to another episode of the Main Street Business Insight Podcast. I'm actually here in Atlanta in Little Five Points and it's a great main street neighborhood commercial district, and I've got the pleasure of being with Patrice Hull and I've sort of made up her title so everyone knows, okay? I'm calling her, she's the CEO, the founder, and an awesome creator of this really just terrific store in Little Five Points called Stuff We Wanna Say. We're going to dive into that, to the name of the store as well a little bit later on. But also what's super cool about Patrice in the store is the brand that she's created called C2BN, right? The Created To Be Noticed, which is this phenomenal, now I'm going to call it global following of superstars and what will be yours truly too, post this podcast, because I need a new bag of designer bags and backpacks. So it's so wonderful to have you on the show, Patrice.

Patrice Hull:

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, it's really good to be here and I'm excited about our discussion and our conversation-

Patrice Hull:

Me too.

Matt Wagner:

... today. So let's go ahead and get started. And as always, this is really about your journey, your story, and so we would like to talk to all the listeners and viewers out there about what happened? How did you get to this spot? Yeah, that's a big one, isn't it?

Patrice Hull:

That is a big one, but you know what, I'm going to give you the cliff note.

Matt Wagner:

Okay, there we go.

Patrice Hull:

Before I opened the store, I worked in corporate America. I was an implementation specialist at a healthcare company. Now, granted that wasn't the well, my goal or my goal job, but after being laid off three times, four days before Christmas, I did not think that that was going to be my Christmas gift. So my Christmas gift was a pink slip. I thought it was going to be a tote bag and a pen, not a pink slip and a pen. And that's why I started Stuff We Wanna Say.

Matt Wagner:

That's awesome, that's awesome. But okay, let's dissect that a little bit more.

Patrice Hull:

Okay, sure.

Matt Wagner:

We get corporate America and there was a lot of that, especially around the pandemic. We had the great resignation, the great retirement, whatever you want to call it, the great pink slip. But that's a long way from like, "I'm opening up my store." So tell me a little bit more about that. What was that journey part?

Patrice Hull:

So here's what happened. I always knew that I was an entrepreneur, but in order to pay the bills, the implementation specialist job was lucrative. I worked in health insurance. It was a lot of that going around. And my business degree was professional sales. My bachelor's is business administration, so it worked. I had licenses, I was able to sell. Now, I decided that if I'm going to do it, I wanted to be in an industry where I could move up faster. And insurance, I mean, you know insurance was rocking before the, I guess, the Obama era. Insurance was going up, up, and up. But as an implementation specialist, it wasn't the most fulfilling job.

But I did a very good job because in three years I received two spot bonuses and a promotion. So I've always been good at what I do, but at the same time, that industry was kind of volatile. They wanted to bring you in, take you up, bring you in, bring somebody in, pay them a little bit less. And so Christmas, all of a sudden I'm gone and I'm thinking I was really actually a little depressed because who would think that that's going to be a Christmas gift?

Matt Wagner:

Not one any of us want.

Patrice Hull:

So it took me a little while to get up off the couch and that's really where the name of Stuff We Wanna Say came from because I was actually angry. Okay, I was a little bit more than angry. I was angry, I was depressed. I thought, "I have a house that I can't pay for. I have no job. And now I have nowhere to go and no family member to help." And I started a little in-home prep. I bought a heat press and what do you call that, a heat press and a printer. And I started making my own shirts and they weren't very PC, so I would wear them and people [inaudible 00:08:57].

Matt Wagner:

That's the name of the business, folks.

Patrice Hull:

I would wear them and people like, "Oh, let's cross the street." It's like, "No, no, I'm fine. I'm fine." And after in-home preparation, I thought, "I'm going to open up a little spot." So I went to a co-op and it was a bunch of us in there. We were just trying to do what we could, make a little money and that's really the nuts and bolts of it. That's how I got started in a very small spot, making shirts, making one-off T-shirts and putting whatever you want to say on it. A lot of times I put people's fur babies and all of that stuff on T-shirts and some people would come in and they wanted something a little outrageous, and if it didn't make me feel comfortable, I didn't do it.

But that's the really big push behind it. I had the knowledge of working corporate and being creative, but I didn't know that I was going to be forced to do that. So basically I had to build my wings on the way down. I just opened up a shop and I started flying.

Matt Wagner:

It also goes to show that how businesses get started can come from a lot of different passion areas.

Patrice Hull:

Yes.

Matt Wagner:

Some more fiery than others, perhaps.

Patrice Hull:

That's true.

Matt Wagner:

The other thing that's interesting, given that as we think about real estate and whether or not you're an online business or bricks and mortar business, you started out in co-op.

Patrice Hull:

Yes.

Matt Wagner:

How do you then make that determination that I can do this probably online, print out of somewhere, sell, versus I'm going to come to Little Five Points and open up a store. Was there something else that was burning to have that exposure or feel connected to community in some way?

Patrice Hull:

Yes, because 13 years ago when I started, the internet wasn't as booming as it is now. And a lot of people are like, "Oh, you can do it on the internet," but not if you don't... It's like have a website, but you don't give people the address. They don't know you have a website. So if I'm sitting at home in my bedroom, pressing shirts going, "I wish they would sell." And people are like, "How are you going to sell? They don't even know that you have them." So I thought, "Let me get out." I go to the co-op. The reason I was there is because you have 20 different people in there. We're sharing rent and you don't have to worry about signing a three, a four-year lease or anything like that. So in order for me not to give up on myself, I paid three months rent upfront and I said, "Well, I'll do this and it'll make me stay." And I also needed to be around people because I am a, I don't want to say a people person.

Matt Wagner:

Oh no, you're a people person. Don't let her lie here. She's a people person.

Patrice Hull:

I can't sit in the room. When I work corporate, we didn't have the work from home stuff and now everybody gets to work from home. Plus we had to get in traffic, go, and be in that cubicle. They don't even have cubicles now but...

Matt Wagner:

One of the other things that we're finding in a post-pandemic situation is there's a lot of discovery from a business perspective of what works, what doesn't, maybe had some time to think more strategically about the business. Obviously the business had its roots and the one-off shirts and that sort of thing. Tell us a little bit about how you thought about the business during that time and some of the transitions you made or had to make or inspired to make during that time.

Patrice Hull:

Okay. I would tell you and anyone else, if you're starting a small business, pre-pandemic, post-pandemic, you need to know that pivoting is going to be a part of it. And the reason is the idea you start out with may not be the idea you end up with. I started out with one-off T-shirt, I thought, "This is going to be great. People are going to love it. I love doing it." And then well quite as it kept, I didn't like doing it that much. It was a lot of time for a little bit less money and it wasn't going to pay the rent.

Matt Wagner:

So the return on investment just wasn't there.

Patrice Hull:

It was not there. So if you wanted me to do a one-off shirt and it's taken me an hour and you only want to pay $25, the rent man is like, "I don't care who's face on my shirt. I like my rent, please."

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, you don't have to be a calculus major to look at 20 bucks, how much the shirt cost, how much the electricity or the rent or whatever. You start dissecting that, what were you left for at about 25 cents after? Just have to get that down.

Patrice Hull:

Exactly. So I thought, "You know what I probably [inaudible 00:13:38] this as well as I thought." And so then I said, "Well, let's add things." So I added sunglasses and I would add little miscellaneous things because with that I could sell a unisex pair of sunglasses to anyone, but if you need a medium shirt and all I have is an extra large, you're probably not going to buy it. So I started transitioning. So I started out with the T-shirts and then I slowly thought, "Well, let's do some pants." And I really did. I have pants in this store, even though I'm now at bags. I started doing pants and again, things with sizing. So I basically, how do I say it? I've been pivoting before COVID, but then when COVID hit, ooh.

Matt Wagner:

It was a lot of pivoting.

Patrice Hull:

It was a lot of pivoting. It was a lot of pivoting.

Matt Wagner:

How did you make those decision points? Was it sort of your approach was more of a fail fast kind of concept? Like, "I'm going to try something, I'm not going to put a huge investment, see how the consumer responds, and if it doesn't, I'll shift to something else." What was your approach and your mindset with all of that?

Patrice Hull:

Well, one of the things I thought about when I started the business and pivoting, let me just back up. I've had a business before and that business was selling oils and incense and stuff that was easy to get. I was one of the first in another market and then a few years later, everybody's selling oils and incense and I thought, "This is not going to work." So fast-forward when I started Stuff We Wanna Say, and I started doing T-shirts, again, many people were like, everybody knows someone that can do T-shirts, everyone. They may not do it well, they may not do it for long. They may not do corporate, but everyone knows someone. So I thought, "Let's find other things." And then I thought, "Let's start my own brand." And the reason I started thinking that way was because if my name's on it and I'm putting the quality and the effort into it, you can't copy what I have. So now instead of pushing, I don't know, somebody else's bag, I promote my bag. Instead of promoting somebody else's wallet, I promote my wallet. So that's what...

Matt Wagner:

There's a couple of things to unpack there, I think, because there's really a couple of new lines in that thinking that you were going through at the time. And I think it's important, especially with a lot of our small business listeners and viewers out there that are probably experiencing something very similar. The opportunity to think about, one, how do I build a brand, which is a lot different than selling other people's brands.

Patrice Hull:

It is correct.

Matt Wagner:

And because now it's your story, it's your name, it's backed by you. And then there's also the coming from a pure retail perspective, which is a whole different somewhat mindset of business to consumer to now I can still sell that new brand to a consumer, but it also opens up other revenue potential or other new customers like wholesaling or what have you. Let's first just talk about that first part. What is it like to create your own brand and create a story around that?

Patrice Hull:

Okay. I guess the first part is whatever brand or branding you choose, you really want to embrace it. You have to like it. You really, in my case, I think you have to love it. I think you have to love it. You have to love your business. And the reason is because you're going to do a lot of work and you're not going to always get paid. So if you've got that in your mind, you may as well, you know.

Matt Wagner:

That's the deal you made.

Patrice Hull:

That's the deal you made. So you know that you're going to work hard, you're going to hopefully make a profit and hopefully make a difference in somebody else's life along the way. When I started Created To Be Noticed, the reason I did that was because I knew I couldn't dance. I was not going to play any sports. So I had gotten old enough to where the right knee buckles, so I was not going to be boxing or any of that, but I was created to be noticed no matter what you do. If I am person handing you the screw to put it into that bike, to put it into this trunk, I don't know. We're all created to be noticed. So that is where my brand came from. It is everyone. It's not just the basketball players, it's not the entertainers, it's everyone.

Matt Wagner:

And I love where you have simplicity in the message, but how the message has so much meaning, and I think that's really cool with what you've come up with and it has that deep meaning. And it can mean something kind of different to every individual, so you've some ways individualized the brand from a consumer perspective.

Patrice Hull:

That's correct.

Matt Wagner:

That's pretty powerful. Did you know that? That is crazy.

Patrice Hull:

You know what? It became more powerful as I went along because in the land of social media, everyone is following everyone else, but back when I was growing up, you did your own thing. You followed your own self. Well, in my case, I'm the youngest of six, so I followed my siblings, but now you really have to test the waters and look within, because I'm a perfect believer in you have everything you need to become whoever you want to be, but you got to trust in you and trust in yourself. I'm a believer in timing. I really kept trying to work those corporate jobs, but then they kept laying me off and now look, it's called Stuff We Wanna Say and not stuff you want to hear. So I do that in order to resonate with people. You have to be you. You have to just plow through and people are not going to like it. But guess what, you cannot please everyone. Now that I know.

Matt Wagner:

With creating new brands, obviously that's a lot different as we mentioned in terms of selling direct to consumers or what have you. How did you learn the wholesale side or how did you think about going wholesale by creating your brand and not just selling it directly out of the store? What did that process look like for you?

Patrice Hull:

Okay. How did I start with wholesale first?

Matt Wagner:

How did you start to think about going more wholesale? How did you reach out to other businesses and sell them on like, "Hey, I'm a brand new creator of bags," how did you sell them on that?

Patrice Hull:

Okay, first, let's go back a little how I started the point of wanting to do the bags and my creation is I was going to trade shows. When you go to trade shows, they have everything for you. You could find sourcing, you can find different people to meet with, to mingle with, to get to know. Because as a small business, you should know other small businesses. Now, I started branding my product because when I brand my product, that means it's my name, whatever I want to do with it, if I want this zipper and this pull. And that's exactly how I started doing my own thing because when I was looking to brand the Created To Be Noticed, people like, "Here, you want this bag? This is a great bag." It's like, "No, it's not." It took me a year and thousands of dollars to find somebody to make the bag.

Now, fast-forward. When I thought about it and someone says, "Sure, we'll make 200 bags for it." And I was like, "Yeah, this is great." And then I get 200 bags and I sell 2. And I was like, "Oh, wow, that's a lot of bags." And then you have to do 200 of one bag, and then COVID hit and I'm sitting on $40,000 worth of stock, and I thought, "I'm going to be sleeping on these bags because I'm not going to have a home."

Matt Wagner:

Start getting a little nervous about that time.

Patrice Hull:

Start getting a little nervous and wanted my first wholesale client, and actually I should call her a mentor, to be honest, is the shoe store two doors down.

Matt Wagner:

Really?

Patrice Hull:

So funny, I'd like to let people know, I'm in an eclectic area in the heart of Atlanta, Little Five Point, but I sell bags in five stores in this area. The candle store, two doors down. The shoe store, three doors down, the bike store. And you know why? Because even though it's a small area, everyone doesn't go in and out of every shop.

Matt Wagner:

They have different customers, right?

Patrice Hull:

And I took my little roller bag and I was going store to store like, "Hey, you want to..." I show them the demo. They love the demo. When I show them the demo, they go, "Oh, this is great." Also, when I have good reviews. So people are like, "Yeah, I'll do it." And when COVID hit, I really was going door to door or store to store trying to sell bags. And then when I realized that I could sell them wholesale to other companies, for example, I have a young lady who deals directly with Morehouse, and she was like, "These are really good."

Matt Wagner:

Morehouse University, right?

Patrice Hull:

Oh, yes. Morehouse University. There's a Morehouse bag right up there. I sell to Morehouse University. I just got an order from Arthur Blank's Foundation. I sell to a number of celebrities and everything. So back to your question, "What do you do?" I had to realize that I put every dime I had into those bags, and then COVID hit. As a matter of fact, I sold my house to keep the business going, and then COVID hit and I thought, "Oh, well, this bridge looks good because we'll be right here."

Matt Wagner:

Wow. Well, there is some wonderful sides of optimism.

Patrice Hull:

Flashbacks. Stop it. Stop it. Yes.

Matt Wagner:

Oh my goodness. It's the highs and lows of business ownership, for sure.

Patrice Hull:

It is.

Matt Wagner:

Oh, wow. Let's talk about one of the highs though.

Patrice Hull:

Okay.

Matt Wagner:

So you can't see the way we've got the camera set up, and obviously you're listening to the podcast, you can't visualize it, but there's a lot of celebrity photos in Patrice's business. And since I started first talking to Patrice, I quickly would look at Instagram and all, and Coco Gauff is on there from what? Last week. Amy Adams, major film star. How in the heck in a relatively short period of time did you build a brand that has so much following and notoriety? I mean, I think a lot of people are thinking about building their own brand, but a number to get sort of celebrity and endorsements and people coming in that in some ways builds it as almost like a very exclusive brand.

Patrice Hull:

I believe in my product. And that's number one. I also think that if you're going to sell something, you need to sell the same quality to everyone. So instead of trying to have a higher-end brand or a lower-end brand for this person, you sell one product that everyone likes. Think about it, Coco Gauff and Amy Adams, especially Amy Adams, everyone knows her. She can buy up the whole street. Why would she pick my bag? But they bought at least five between her and her husband, and I thought, "Oh my goodness." I also give the same customer service and courtesy to you as I do to them.

And the quiet as it kept, sometimes I don't know they're celebrities, but I know that there's someone, and this is what I do when they come in, if the face looks familiar, I'm thinking, or I'll ask them, "Are you here working on a project?" And they'll go, yes. And I'm thinking, they're probably in the film industry and we'll go from there. And I shouldn't admit this, but sometimes I'll take a picture with them, not know exactly who they are. And I sent it to my cousin. I was like, "Who is this?" And she goes, "You don't know who that is?" I was like, "I do now."

Matt Wagner:

Oh my God. That's funny.

Patrice Hull:

Yeah, so it is funny. But I do give them the same courtesy. I don't go, "Oh my God, you're so wonderful in this movie." Because sometimes I don't know what movie they're in. Now there are a few I was like, now, Terrence Howard, I was like, "Oh, I know you." Catherine Zeta-Jones. I was really low-key with her because she had her kids. Anytime a celebrity comes in with children, I do not ask for a picture. I just, "Here, let's get what you need and go and thank you very much." So I treat them like, I don't know, they might just be thinking that, "Is she not impressed or what?"

Matt Wagner:

That's wonderful. I love it.

Patrice Hull:

But then they leave. I've been like, "Oh my God."

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, you're like jumping around and stuff.

Patrice Hull:

I know. I was like, "Oh, oh." But then when they're there, "Yeah."

Matt Wagner:

We need to capture that moment. You were really cool before. All right.

Patrice Hull:

Cool. And then I leave and just I'm running up and down the street. No, okay. I'm not really doing that, but I do treat them just like regular people. And if they have too much publicity, I will lock the door so that they can shop alone.

Matt Wagner:

Wow. One of the things, and thinking back to the pandemic and some of the struggles that you really had in terms of the inventory, those are points in times where I would suspect you can feel really isolated and kind of alone.

Patrice Hull:

Yes.

Matt Wagner:

And I wonder if you could talk about how you've sort of grounded yourself with either mentors or created a network for yourself. Who's your go-to in those moments when you have big challenges and you're trying to think through difficult decisions?

Patrice Hull:

Well, my biggest go-to and network are people just like me, and even though they say you should surround yourself where people are rung up and a little higher up, but people just like me understand. For example, there's many a times that I have lent funds to a business colleague because I knew that what they were going through it was, I don't know how to explain it other than it was almost torture. Because they thought when you first start out your business, people think, "Oh, you get all this support and help." You really don't. You get people go, "Oh, that's a good idea, stick with it," but as soon as you need something, they're gone. So I create a network of people similar to me. If my friend says, "Look, I can't make rent this month. Can I borrow a thousand dollars?" I will lend them that money because I know how it is.

This is what a lot of people don't know. My go-to was PayPal. I would use the working capital loan to keep me funded and to keep me funded, and then I would pay it down and I would get another one. I'd pay it down and I would get another one. And that's why when people say, "Oh, you should maybe use the Bank of America, maybe you could do less fees." Yeah, but they won't give me any money. Banks don't give you anything when you need it. And I would love to say they do, but they don't. And so your core of friends who understand who you can be absolutely transparent with, those are the people who help you the most.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Patrice Hull:

Those are people who help you the most.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. A lot of times we think it's this sort of sophisticated network of, and you're going to like a CEO round table kind of thing.

Patrice Hull:

And maybe have their round table, but they don't invite us. So until I get to a certain point, I'm here. I'm down here.

Matt Wagner:

That brings up an interesting point that we talk about across main streets is thinking about what's the support system for startups and entrepreneurs that are trying to grow in scale. And I would have to imagine then that in Atlanta, within the city or the region, there's probably lots of resources, but do you get the sense that oftentimes those resources are for a certain group or a certain level of businesses, and it's hard for a main street business to tap into that? What's that journey like?

Patrice Hull:

It's an absolute struggle. As a matter of fact, I think your question might get me in a little trouble here, but it's called Stuff We Wanna Say and not stuff we want to hear. Being in Atlanta, the first thing people see, they come in and they're like, "Oh my God, I've never seen so many small minority businesses. This is great. I'm going to move here and start the business." And usually there's a little support, but not enough support to keep you going. For example, you might get a grant, you may get something to get you started. Let's just say, and this has happened where people may work a regular job and then they thought I always wanted to be my own restaurateur or whatever. Then they stop. Let's say the city or something gives them a little bit of support, and then you're on your own.

So in six months or a year, they're out of business and you're thinking, "Wait, what? I just left this job and now I have no support." But Whomever is funding you, they're like, "Look what I did. I gave them money. I made a good choice. I did this." And then six months later, you're working a job a third of less than what you were making before because you went out on a whim. And just to give you an idea on how I see the support system in Atlanta, I would love to say they're great, but I'm going to have to say they're not as great as people think. And it might be the same in other cities. Let me give you an example. I don't know if you know about, we had a water crisis. It was all on the news, so anybody can Google it.

The water pipes were just popping, and then there was too much pressure here. Too much pressure here. Well, we were shut down. Literally, you could work-

Matt Wagner:

Not good.

Patrice Hull:

It wasn't good. It wasn't good. A lot of the restaurants, of course, it affect the restaurants, it affect a lot of even shows and just everything. Now the city came up with, "Hey, you know what? We're going to do something for our businesses in that area that were affected by the crisis." And we were like, "Yay, that's great." So they put together a program, you applied for the grant, but guess what they said, "You have to make a certain amount per year." So every business pretty much on this street couldn't apply. The good and the bad thing about our area, I'm located in Little Five. We have a lot of small businesses, but we're a sandwich between two affluent neighborhoods. So we got none of the money. We couldn't qualify.

Matt Wagner:

You couldn't qualify.

Patrice Hull:

But had you said, "Look, maybe you don't have to pay taxes this month." I might've said, "Okay, I understand that," but they didn't say that. So the hurtful thing is we still have to get our business license. We still have to pay our taxes, but because we missed it by this much just because the water is down, they're thinking well, you sell-

Matt Wagner:

Close off.

Patrice Hull:

Yeah, maybe you sell bags, you don't need water. If there is no one on the street, then I'm still suffering. So I don't think that our system does a good job of supporting businesses like me, even though I've been in business for 13 years, doing what I have to do. I pay myself. I do everything I have to do, and then as soon as something happens, you know.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, you're on your own.

Patrice Hull:

You're on your own.

Matt Wagner:

You're on your own.

Patrice Hull:

You wanted to be in business. And I was like, "Yeah." I didn't know the pipes were going to burst.

Matt Wagner:

That's right. I mean, I hate to say it that you're not alone in that because I think what happens, and we see this all across the country, is that most support systems are very front-loaded. It's all about the beginning, getting you on your own. You experienced that, but once you're on your own and you're trying to grow and scale, we sort of lack the resources and the support there. And I think that's certainly a missing element. And the other big thing is it's all about scale, right?

Patrice Hull:

Yes.

Matt Wagner:

Depending on where you're at on that growth rise, and we either got stuff for you, we got nothing for you. And I think that's the dynamic that needs to change about how we think about business more holistically and the importance of businesses like yours and other main street businesses here. The overall community and fabric of community is so important. I think we miss that because of either job creation or revenue lines or what have you. So I think it's really important now, and I'm glad that you said it.

Patrice Hull:

Yeah, and really, it's programs like Main Street is the ones that help us the most. Because for example, I love Little Five Points, and here's the reason why. Most of the buildings are owned by individual families, passed down from families, and those families were the one who, they were the ones who built this area. This area was falling down, just nothing. Nobody was lending money to people in the area. These families came in, they bought the area, they fixed it up, and now everyone wants to move right around here. But then when it's time for funding, it's like, "Oh, well, you're sandwiching between rich people. You don't know how to get them in there." Well, no, I don't because they're not coming because they're coming to the other high class or whatever, cookie cutter malls, or not malls, but you know what I mean.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah.

Patrice Hull:

So it is hard. It is hard. But I'm fortunate enough to know my landlord, to know other landlords. I've served on the board of Little Five Points Business Association for six years. And the reason I do that is because I love this place. I love where I am. And the reason I started my business here in the first place was because no matter what I sell or what I do here, they accept me. This is the most welcoming neighborhood I've ever seen in my life. You can have a preppy shirt person walking next to tattoos on the face person. No one looks at anyone differently. We are free to be whoever we want to be here.

Matt Wagner:

I think our neighborhood districts and our main streets are represented the businesses themselves, it's what makes us unique. It's what gives us identity and creates experience from the consumer. And while you all can't see it out there in terms of Little Five Points, make a visit because it is super cool. I'll vouch for that. Let's close a little bit about what comes next for Patrice in the business. Talk a little bit about how you think about your future, how you're thinking about what's the next stages for you or even new challenges that you're going to have to take on.

Patrice Hull:

Okay. What's next for me is even though I started as retail and gradually moved into wholesale, I would like to keep them both because the retail is how I meet a lot of my wholesale clients. For example, people come in during the holiday time and they're thinking, "Oh, this is a great gift." And I say, "Well, you know what? We can do this for your company as well." I would prefer to do more wholesale if I had the opportunity. And that way I can put, as you see some of the bags, you guys probably can't see them, but we can put the company's name on the bag. So even though my name is on the inside, your name can be on the outside. It's a everyday bag.

Matt Wagner:

Makes sense.

Patrice Hull:

So wholesaling is where my heart is because I feel like I can touch more people with one sale if I'm selling 50 bags versus one bag to an end user. And even though the profit is a lot smaller, you can still touch more people.

Matt Wagner:

Exactly.

Patrice Hull:

Now, the biggest challenge is wholesale means you need money. You need money, you can't-

Matt Wagner:

You've got inventory, right?

Patrice Hull:

You've got inventory. You can't do just one bag. You can't really, I was fortunate enough to find someone that'll do just 200, but a lot of people want you to do even more than that. So the challenge is getting my name out, making sure people know that the quality of our bag is good. Getting people to leave us reviews. If you look at our reviews, we've got almost 200 five-star reviews, but we should have a lot more. But I just didn't know to ask. As a small business-

Matt Wagner:

Part of the learning curve, right?

Patrice Hull:

That is part of the learning curve. I didn't know... The thing about my business, I own this business, but I don't own the building. The Google reviews will go with me no matter where I am, but if something happens, then I need to be prepared for the wholesale. So I like the wholesale part. I like going to trade shows. I like when people sell them in their store and they're like, "People love those bags." I really do enjoy that.

Matt Wagner:

Quick aside here, and I didn't think to ask you this, but you sort of alluded to it and just in terms of like, "I didn't know this." Are you taking, you go online and just study things or when you're running into certain challenges like this and understanding about social media or marketing or whatever, how are you learning? What's your experience in that?

Patrice Hull:

Trial and error.

Matt Wagner:

Trial and error.

Patrice Hull:

Trial and error. One of the things that I've done here, I've made this, if you've ever visited my store, it used to look a lot more like retail. Now you can see it looks more like an office slash retail because I spend time in here doing what I have to do. As a matter of fact, I was never comfortable in front of the camera. I always wanted people to do social media, but then I'd hire them for a week and they didn't get enough likes and they were gone. And I thought, "You know what? I am not doing this anymore." So now I just do it myself. So I am literally selling myself.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. Well, and it's your story. Who else can say it better than you?

Patrice Hull:

That's true. That's true.

Matt Wagner:

Let's close the show with what's one piece of advice or something you've learned along the way that you'd like to share with other small business owners out there?

Patrice Hull:

Piece of advice, something to share. Get involved with the community because if you're, especially in a main street type setting, you need to know your neighbors. They watch out for you, you watch out for them. I have somehow become the security liaison in this neighborhood.

Matt Wagner:

It happened on our phone call.

Patrice Hull:

It happened [inaudible 00:41:23] phone call, and I was like, "Sorry, but I had to tend to some business." And you probably is thinking, "I'm not going to interview you," but I was apologizing.

Matt Wagner:

It was a big draw for me, I'll admit it.

Patrice Hull:

Look, I apologize again for that day.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah, it's real.

Patrice Hull:

But you do have to get involved with the community. I also think you need to find a network of people that do similar things to you, because when I was laid off from corporate America and then I started this business, none of my corporate friends understand what I'm going through because they get a check on a regular basis. I get a check when I sell something. So you need to basically love, or at least like what you do a whole lot, and know that there are some days that you will not get paid. You will not sell a product.

If you're doing wholesale, know that it's going to take a lot of your money. And being a business person is just like gambling. I know some people don't like that term, but I sold my house in order to start this business. It was a gamble that most people won't take. I did it. I feel good about it. I can say, "Look at all the celebrities that's coming in. Look at who I've just sold bags to." So if you don't believe in yourself, then nobody else is going to believe in you. And sometimes you have to build your wings on the way down.

Matt Wagner:

Yeah. Well, well said. Patrice, thanks so much for joining the show, for allowing me to come in, bombard your store with everything.

Patrice Hull:

No problem.

Matt Wagner:

Now I need a new bag. I've had the same bag for 15 years. Today we're going to change it. I'm coming out of here with my own bag. So thanks, Patrice. Appreciate it.

Patrice Hull:

Thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

Matt Wagner:

So there you have it. I hope you enjoyed the conversation with Patrice Hull, owner of Stuff We Wanna Say, and brand builder behind Created To Be Noticed clothing and bags, located in Little Five Points neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. So I've had some time to sit back and reflect on our talk and reminded the great risks small business owners accept as part of simply being an entrepreneur, a collective bet in many ways on their ideas and products and services. I think Patrice's story personifies what it's like to, in her case, make a huge inventory purchase. And when the first pathway isn't resolved in success, having the fortitude it takes to quickly pivot to another strategy while still trying to keep the lights on and pay the rent and survive. In a social media driven world where success is often defined by global business icons and influencers, leaving the challenges glossed over to the point where we often take complex long-term building to success efforts and make them look both instantaneous and even easy.

I think Patrice's journey and her insight like so many on this show are important if we want to ensure other small businesses and entrepreneurs don't feel isolated or somehow a failure because they find it isn't easy or it's not a daily Instagram moment, just know that you're part of this network and a family of main street businesses just like yours. That's the whole purpose of the podcast. As always, if you're a business owner, and likewise to my place professional colleagues, I hope this episode has provided plenty of new insights, solutions, and inspiration. And as consumers, please continue to support your local small businesses and of course, tell their stories. They're still important to our local and national economies, and most importantly, they promote and provide quality of living to the places we all call home. And don't forget to show your Main Street pride by checking out our Main Street swag at shopmainstreet.org.

So that's going to do it for this week's episode. Remember to check out our growing library of podcast recordings and other related films on our Main Street America YouTube channel. Thanks for listening. Please rate and review us or add a message or a question. And as always, be sure to subscribe and tell your friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues. You all can catch the next episode when this time I'm going to be chatting with Tee Rowe, president and CEO of the America's Small Business Development Centers. Now as a former SBDC director, I'm totally stoked and excited to chat with Tee and share more about their work, their trend lines that they're seeing, and future evolutions and education training of small businesses and entrepreneurs. So don't miss it. We'll see you then, and of course, thanks for all the support.