Matt Wagner: Welcome to the Main Street Business Insights 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 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 Insights Podcast. This week's story finds me in Norfolk, Virginia, and depending on whether or not I'm officially from Virginia how I would pronounce that.

Kaycee McCoy: Yes.

Matt Wagner: So I'm sort of a newbie, so I may have not gotten that correctly. But I'm sitting down with Kaycee McCoy, co-founder of Pawsnickety Pets and self-proclaimed marketing alchemist. I got that from your bio, and I'm like, "What is that?" We're going to talk about that, right?

Kaycee McCoy: Okay. Okay.

Matt Wagner: About a month ago, I was part of the Virginia Retail Alliance's Retail Matters Summit and shout out to VRA and all the great work they do in supporting small businesses. And while we didn't directly meet while we were there, I wanted to follow up with you and you actually got in touch with me through LinkedIn. And it was just really amazing to kind of look at your bio and the growth story of Pawsnickety and I thought, "Wow, this would be a great story to talk about on the podcast." And so a couple of weeks later, it happened pretty quick.

Kaycee McCoy: Here we are.

Matt Wagner: Here we are, right? So Kaycee, welcome to the show.

Kaycee McCoy: Thank you so much for having me. Very excited to have you here in our store today.

Matt Wagner: Awesome. One of the things that we do with the podcast is we have this goal about presenting these wonderful, amazing stories of Main Street small businesses and entrepreneurs, and we like to get started with the journey. And so I'm going to turn it over to you and just share a little bit about how this all happened.

Kaycee McCoy: Okay. I love this. I love sharing a story. So Pawsnickety Pets was born with... A little bit of backstory first. My entrepreneurship journey, it's been always driven by creativity and community building. So prior to opening Pawsnickety, I started a marketing and graphic design studio, gained a boatload of experience in all things branding, design, and connecting with audiences.

And so there used to be another store here called The Dogbone prior to us opening, and I casually knew the owner through a networking organization I was a part of. And she mentioned to me that she was closing, and I just thought that was the saddest thing I'd heard. But I was sitting at dinner with my best friend who is my co-founder, Shizuka. I was sitting at her house with her and her husband, and I was like, "This is such a bummer. This is exactly what the Ghent community needs. And I have a vision of what I would do with this store if I had it."

So they convinced me to throw that owner a little note and just talk to her and see if she would be interested in subleasing to us selling some product, anything like that to get started. And so she said-

Matt Wagner: Kind of taking over the inventory part.

Kaycee McCoy: Yeah, absolutely. So Shizuka's background is in operations management consulting. So we-

Matt Wagner: It's a great combination I'm seeing.

Kaycee McCoy: When we collide, I always joke and tell people that when we put our brains together, we're a whole functioning human. So we're very yin and yang and very complimentary in our skill sets. And so we decided to partner up together and that's how Pawsnickety was born.

Matt Wagner: That's awesome. I love it. But share a little bit about where did the marketing alchemist sort of language come from? I've not heard that. I've been around a lot of marketers, but not heard that saying, what does that mean to you?

Kaycee McCoy: So to me, I call myself a marketing alchemist because I have such a diverse skillset within marketing. I feel like a lot of marketers really specialize, which can be really great, but I have just always been a yes person of like, "I don't know how to do that, but I'll figure it out." I think with my... Well, I just feel like I have a very comprehensive understanding of all things digital, print, everything in-between. And bringing that all together I am an idea machine.

So I mean designing and coming up with Pawsnickety brand, half a day. Logos, color palettes, fonts, all of them, brand identity and messaging just hammered it out. Because I felt so intensely passionate about my vision for it.

Matt Wagner: Yeah, that is amazing because it's one thing to have a lot of ideas. It's another thing to be able to execute as they say, right?

Kaycee McCoy: That can be hard for my brain sometimes. So I have to bring in other people like Shizuka who can help me execute on all of those ideas.

Matt Wagner: Perfect. Perfect. Let's talk a little bit about any sort of initial challenges you faced in growing the business, especially given when you launched was right during the pandemic.

Kaycee McCoy: Yeah. December 2020, who opens retail store? [inaudible 00:05:58]

Matt Wagner: I swear I talked to so many small businesses that got started. I mean, I know they call it sort of the rise of the COVIDpreneur. I mean, that's such a bad name. That was the media folks not me.

Kaycee McCoy: Maybe I'll rebrand that.

Matt Wagner: That's right. That's right. But it is amazing how many businesses got their start during the pandemic. So what challenges did you face?

Kaycee McCoy: We really weren't so scared because we're both so digitally savvy that we weren't scared about getting the word out and surviving in those terms. But what we were worried about were a couple of just really kind of almost embarrassing things. Number one, neither one of us have any pet industry experience.

Matt Wagner: Oh, that is interesting. Okay.

Kaycee McCoy: Not a single bit.

Matt Wagner: Okay.

Kaycee McCoy: And number two, neither one of us have ever worked in retail in our lives. So we were starting from scratch and learning as we go, and we just had to be super resourceful and work through a lot of those kinds of challenges. And then the last part of the challenges for us that are just unique to us in our situation is that we both own other companies that keep us very busy. So for the first six to eight months before we hired and had other employees, it was Shizuka and our very sweet husbands helping us out. So we were both juggling those other businesses-

Matt Wagner: Wow.

Kaycee McCoy: ... while working here six days a week at that time. So there was a level of grind we both had to be willing to accept for a certain period of time to get past that point and be able to start delegating and bringing in more people to help.

Matt Wagner: That's really intense to think about trying to juggle not only the sort of work-life balance of personal as an entrepreneur, which is always a struggle. But the mere fact that you were running a whole other business, both you and the co-founder were doing so.

Kaycee McCoy: Right. Yeah. So that has always been our biggest challenge. It still rears its head from time to time now where her business, her operations management consulting is very cyclical with the types of businesses she works with. And my marketing studio is still just kind of... it's pretty wildly unpredictable. So with the ebbs and flows, we both have times where we're like, "Okay, we have all these ideas and things we want to implement, but we just got to get through X, Y, Z first, and then we'll approach that."

Matt Wagner: You had some intense cycles of timing here.

Kaycee McCoy: Yeah.

Matt Wagner: Given that you certainly had, both of you have components from operations and marketing that are core to running any small business. So you had that, but I'm sure there were other parts of running a business, whether it was, "What's it like to run a retail, how do I choose a POS system?" Or what have you. Who, what were your go-tos for information or guidance and support during this time?

Kaycee McCoy: Well, luckily we've had really great vendor and distributor reps that have been just an absolute invaluable resource for us. A lot of them have owned their own stores or managed multiple stores before being sales reps. So once we got to talking and building those relationships, we uncovered that they were just a wealth of knowledge for us and they want to help you and support you. And then organizations like Retail Alliance, they've been with us since day one.

They were here at our grand opening with the giant scissors and the ribbon and the news crews, and we had 10 days notice before we opened our doors-

Matt Wagner: Oh my goodness.

Kaycee McCoy: ... from the time we signed our lease. So the fact that they have been there and been so supportive and we reach out to them with all kinds of questions they've been our go-to for a lot.

Matt Wagner: I think you bring out a really interesting point that is not always talked about in terms of where that guidance might come from. I think we think a lot of the traditional organizations that might be involved with small business development, but really the whole vendor network, they're there. I mean, it's sort of like a win-win proposition.

Kaycee McCoy: Right. Yeah, they want to see us succeed. So if we're not reaching out and asking those questions and getting them from them, we're doing everyone a disservice. So over time, we've learned that. We're on a text basis with all of our reps now, very friendly. They are our go-to for everything from, "How do we improve our sales? What else do you think we could add into our store?" Or to, "I have a customer..." Or, "My pet needs something very niche and specific, what do you personally recommend?"

Matt Wagner: Okay. Okay. Yeah. So I mean, good takeaway is don't forget about your vendors or supplier networks as a potential go-to for support. Let's talk about the industry that you selected in terms of the pet business. And it's quite competitive, like most sectors of small business, right? But particularly with the rise of organic and all-natural pet products, which is a great niche. Could you talk a little bit about how you've tried to differentiate Pawsnickety in comparison to not only other stores but really online markets?

Kaycee McCoy: Sure. So from day one, we knew we wanted to be very niche. And so everything in our store is all organic, human-grade, all natural. If it does not fit into those three categories, we don't bring it in. So that's a way that we've really buckled down and gained our customers' trust because they know whenever they walk in here, they are going to be 100% confident in the purchases that they make. So that's one way we've seen four or five competitive stores open up just in the almost four years we've been open.

Matt Wagner: Oh, wow.

Kaycee McCoy: But we're also in the camp of there's more than enough business to go around. The Hampton Roads community loves their pets, and so we've built strong relationships with those other stores and we send customers back and forth when one has something that the other doesn't.

Matt Wagner: Okay. Okay. That's really important. It is much like we talk about in the restaurant business, just because you bring more in doesn't necessarily mean the pie might get sliced smaller.

Kaycee McCoy: Right, right. Yeah, no, absolutely not. I think there's enough love to go around for everyone.

Matt Wagner: That's right. It's great. Let's talk a little bit about your background in marketing design and how that's influenced the branding and customer experience here.

Kaycee McCoy: Yeah, like I said earlier, I had a vision from the moment I knew that the store was not going to last and someone either needed to come in and revitalize it or let it go. And so I've had that clear vision. I always known I wanted it to be bright and playful and fun and approachable, and also just have a really strong sense of community behind it. So those have been our core things that we focused on since day one, and we want that to match in every way possible.

So no matter where someone finds us, whether it's coming into our store, seeing us at a farmer's market, shopping on our website, looking at our social media, through our emails, wherever it might be, we want them to have that same experience that they have walking into our store. So you were here setting up when we had a customer walk in earlier, and that's a long-time customer. She's been around for at least a couple of years with us if not longer, and I know her-

Matt Wagner: I thought they were your best friends.

Kaycee McCoy: I know her kids' names, I know her dog's names. We really try to give a very unique experience. It's not a big-box store where you walk in and you just get what you need and you walk back out.

Matt Wagner: It's very transactional in that sort of case.

Kaycee McCoy: We want every single human and canine or feline that walks in our doors, because we do have cats that come in on a leash and I love it. We want every single one of them to feel like they're our best friend, that we've known them forever and that we really looking out for their pet's best interest.

Matt Wagner: You hit on something, I didn't know we would go down this, but we're going to go down this road just very quickly because I think it's really important to understand. Because one, you talked about sort of a typical transaction versus experience, and I certainly think from a retail perspective that's kind of where we're at in the field.

Kaycee McCoy: That's what people want. They expect an experience, so.

Matt Wagner: And the second thing on top of that I think is an additional value-add layer is you mentioned community, and I think that's something that we're really seeing from a trend perspective is retailers like yourself figuring out, "I don't want them just to have a great experience. I want them to feel like this is sort of an extension of their home, like this is part of their family." I think you use those words or what have you.

Could you talk about the kind of things, whether it's programming or how you just interface and communicate with them? What do you do to try to build community?

Kaycee McCoy: To build community, we try to offer a wide variety of unique events. We also, we research, we'll go so far beyond what anyone thinks we should do to find the right product for someone. So it's not just about what we're doing out in the community and the events we're hosting and things of that nature, but it's also just about the level of customer service that we want to get as well.

Matt Wagner: Yeah. Yeah. I think they can probably pick it up on the video screen, but you have this little welcome home wall.

Kaycee McCoy: Yes.

Matt Wagner: What exactly is that?

Kaycee McCoy: Okay. So we have a program called the Pawdoption Program, and anyone who has adopted a cat or dog can bring in their adoption paperwork within 30 days of that adoption, and we give them a Pawdoption kit with full-size products. It's got a four pound bag of kibble, four pound bag of raw food, supplements, treats a little bit of everything in it. It's over $125 worth of product for free.

Matt Wagner: Unreal.

Kaycee McCoy: And then we take their pictures and we put them on our little wall and celebrate their adoptions. We have a welcome home Wednesday hashtag on Wednesdays on social media where we celebrate it there too. And we knew from day one we wanted... And we did that first month we opened, we dedicated ourselves to giving back to our community and donating money to local shelters and rescues.

And so we do that, we partner up with all the shelters and rescues in the area. And they share our Pawdoption information and then we give their customers a great place to start on the right foot.

Matt Wagner: That is amazing. I love that program and I hope others pick up on it that are like, "Listen..." Because you can do that in many kinds of ways with pets or what have you.

Kaycee McCoy: Right.

Matt Wagner: Just in terms of one more thing on the community front, do you just have this in your staff, just have this amazing memory. Are you technology oriented where you're taking copious notes on your customers and... How do you keep track of who's who and what their interests are?

Kaycee McCoy: So we have a couple of things that we've put into place here. One is we communicate with our team through a Walkie Talkie app. So we have one employee in the store at a time and there's lulls in the shoppers coming in. So we want to hear from people, we want our team's advice and insight. Our rule when we have someone new coming on board is every person that walks in the door, they have to hop on that app and shout out to me and Shizuka and tell us three things they learned about that person and their pet.

Matt Wagner: Oh my goodness.

Kaycee McCoy: So we want to hear every little detail-

Matt Wagner: That's very cool.

Kaycee McCoy: ... and really know our people. And since we we're both manning the store and we both still spend a few hours a week here now, we really try and come out and socialize and make sure that we're in touch with our customers.

Matt Wagner: So clever. So clever. All right, everyone that's a new app to get in your store. Let's pivot a little bit and let's talk about the digital bricks and clicks space. And I'm wondering, one, have you seen any sort of transition in your thinking since the pandemic relative to now, but just sort of your approach to online shopping versus in-store and the balance there?

Kaycee McCoy: So we knew at first since we were opening so quickly, we weren't going to have time to really build up the hype online and get that business really strong. So we focused on really honing in the in-store experience and then slowly built out that online experience. And I redesigned our website earlier this year to make it more user-friendly and just looking for those opportunities to just level up a little bit at the time.

So we try to balance that now between in-store and online and treat them as complimentary rather than competitive with each other. The online store obviously brings us a national audience where our in-store experience is all about connecting with local pet owners. And we try to blend that in a way digitally so that it makes sense to everyone who's reading or considering concept.

Matt Wagner: So in many ways, you're not creating two distinct profiles and pathways.

Kaycee McCoy: No. Mm-mm.

Matt Wagner: You're really blending the two together.

Kaycee McCoy: Mm-hmm.

Matt Wagner: It's very, very smart. I have to ask because I just know it seems like you're pretty technology savvy, but do you foresee a role with AI in the future or now with your store?

Kaycee McCoy: Oh, we've been using AI probably since we opened, honestly. I'm always an early adopter.

Matt Wagner: An early adopter. There we go.

Kaycee McCoy: I always get put in beta mode on every app I'm on because I'm one of the first 500 people to download it. So I love any opportunity to automate and make things a little easier on our end and more efficient. So we use AI in a lot of different ways here. We have automation and workflows built into the back end of our system that we use. We use generative AI for coming up with event ideas, all kinds of-

Matt Wagner: Excellent.

Kaycee McCoy: ... ways to use that.

Matt Wagner: Excellent. Okay. That's good to know. Is there particular apps or software in particular that you would recommend that you think are really good?

Kaycee McCoy: I mean, there's a ton of them out there. I am a hardcore ChatGPT lover of course, and I love exploring all the different GPTs in there and seeing which ones really work really well for us. But we use tools like Canva that have the magic, the bulk create option.

Matt Wagner: Yeah. Where they'll build in an AI function.

Kaycee McCoy: Yeah, absolutely.

Matt Wagner: Okay. Wonderful, wonderful. Let's talk a little bit about some of the more macro trends, especially in terms of sustainability and pet wellness overall. Could you talk a little bit about how you leverage or you explore more macro trends to define either products or services that you're providing?

Kaycee McCoy: So we want everything in our story to align with our values, our core values. So we definitely took into consideration from day one that sustainability and eco-friendly products were a part of that equation for us, something that we knew the audience we wanted to target would really appreciate. So we have toys that have been made from recyclable materials, we have dog food that's in recyclable packaging.

Matt Wagner: Oh my goodness.

Kaycee McCoy: We have biodegradable waste bags. There are so many different products in our store that we are very proud to say are sustainably sourced or eco-friendly.

Matt Wagner: And how do you stay on top and sort of tracking where that overarching value-based market is going that then you can pivot here in the store?

Kaycee McCoy: I love nerding out on numbers. I'm not a Shizuka with my wild spreadsheets. She has an econ degree, so her realm is numbers and working those. I love reading research. So I go to the events like the Virginia retail event that you spoke at a couple weeks ago. And I try to dive into different resources, listen to different podcasts, read different books about what those trends are. Every year we go to a big... It's called Global. It's the largest pet industry convention in the world.

Matt Wagner: Oh my goodness.

Kaycee McCoy: And it's so much fun. It's so much fun. But we go to... Nielsen always does a presentation there with all of their information and data, and so I try to attend events and webinars and just soak up as much knowledge as I can.

Matt Wagner: Yeah, I think that's really an important call-out because so many small businesses don't either have direct access or maybe they're not sure where to find the data and the numbers or it can be costly. How have you tried to approach, is it just creating a budget and trying to stick with it and, "These are the things that we're going to really plow our time into." Or?

Kaycee McCoy: Yeah, so Shizuka is a numbers' genius, a money genius. I don't touch any of that. We would be so broke if I was in charge of it. I'm very spendy. So she does a really excellent job, we've bootstrapped this place from the beginning. We both made a very small initial investment and we've never had to put more money into it. So we just take what we earn and we've had significant growth year-over-year. And we just look for and have meetings between the two of us regularly where we sit down and I present my SEO analysis, "So these are the things we're missing. This is how I'm going to move forward with my creative lead role over the next few months."

And she makes her decisions about what products to bring in and manages that side. And we just try to talk about it. I mean, we have a 12-year friendship that we're based off of. So we talk constantly. Communication has been really key. So just staying in tune with that. And if one of us feels like one thing is more important than the other, we're always just make sure we go into those conversations where we're not going to be offended or upset by, "Okay, this might get put on the back burner for now." But we're 99% of the time on the same page.

Matt Wagner: That is a good call out though when you think about, there are a number of small business partnerships often started by friends, and it seems like the two of you've carved out your roles.

Kaycee McCoy: It it so funny because to this day we get questions all the time of, "Are you guys still friends?" I think a lot of people have heard so many horror stories about family or friends building businesses together and the friction that can cause in those relationships. But we both just... I mean, there are times where we might get a little frustrated. I'm not going to lie about that. We're human.

Matt Wagner: That's in any relationship.

Kaycee McCoy: But yeah, exactly. We've always just had such a level of respect for each other and honestly owning this store together, I have more than respect for her than ever before. I'm like, "You are such a powerhouse." I'm always gassing her up and complimenting her.

Matt Wagner: Because you're seeing a different side, you don't always see people's work and what they do when you're friends necessarily, but when you're working with them directly and they have specific roles to play, I think-

Kaycee McCoy: Yeah, and we pretty well stay in our lanes of what we're really good at. But we still open the floor for discussion and education with each other on different aspects with each other.

Matt Wagner: That's great. Let's talk a little bit about the future, maybe some of your goals and how you envision the store both in store and online. What's the pathway?

Kaycee McCoy: We have some big audacious goals that I'm really excited about. So obviously we have a very small store and we... I should show you before you leave, I want to show you pictures of what it looked like when we first started.

Matt Wagner: Maybe we can post those as well on show notes.

Kaycee McCoy: It was a totally different, totally different store. But we've really maximized the space about as much as we can in here. So we are looking for a bigger space in the same community. That's I think move number one, because we have expansion plans of maybe some services we'd like to bring into the mix that would be very complimentary to what we do.

Matt Wagner: One of our predictions for 2024 and in 2025, a blend of more retailed services.

Kaycee McCoy: Yes, yes. We're going to take that advice and run with it and we've had since day one, we know when we get to a certain point what other neighborhood we want our second store in. So I don't want to spoil it.

Matt Wagner: No, that's okay. That's okay. But certainly it's a physical plan.

Kaycee McCoy: Yes. Yes.

Matt Wagner: And that's not always what you hear. Sometimes it's like, "We're really going to blow out the online and keep our main store kind of thing."

Kaycee McCoy: Yeah. We're trying to grow that online as well at the same time. And doing things like redesigning our website earlier this year led to a 200% increase in our online sales.

Matt Wagner: Wow. That's great. Fantastic.

Kaycee McCoy: So doing things like that, always looking for those opportunities, some of those projects, I mean that took me quite some time to hammer out myself. But looking for those opportunities at every corner.

Matt Wagner: Could you share a little bit about, without giving anything away from an actual place, but I'd be really interested, because there's a lot of folks that may listen to the podcast that are interested in expanding to another location. Are there certain criteria, things that you're looking for that you've sort of build out and, "Needs to have this, this, and this"?

Kaycee McCoy: We have been looking to expand the store for over a year now. I think it's been two years actually, that we've been actively looking. And we keep saying no to a lot of options. We know how much larger of a space we want first of all, and we're not willing to overextend ourselves. But we also, we've got to have free, easy parking, we've got to have more visibility and foot traffic than where we're currently at.

We do great in this store in this spot, which really honestly surprised us in some ways because not in the heart of Ghent. The heart of Ghent up further on 21st Street down Colley Avenue. We would love to be somewhere down there. Very walkable, every evening, just hordes of people out walking their dogs and enjoying the nice neighborhood.

Matt Wagner: Exactly. So certainly in size, the location allows for walkability, parking. So you've really examined that. That's good. Let's take a little bit of look back in terms of maybe some key lessons, things that you've learned over the years. We open the show the same and we sort of close it the same. In terms of what's the advice, what you've learned today, if you were setting amongst your peers, what would you share with them?

Kaycee McCoy: I think the biggest thing for me is to use your resources. Shizuka and I rely on each other for resources, we rely on our team and give them additional responsibilities and rely on them to be a resource for our customers, and us going and actively taking the time. I know it's really hard for a lot of small business owners to actually get out away from their desk, away from their store and go to the Retail Matters event or something of that nature. But it is a thousand percent worth it. If you put the right team in place, then you can have a little freedom to do those kinds of things.

Matt Wagner: So wise in many ways is to take the time, dedicate it, be thoughtful about where you're trying to find your resources, but you've got to be able to make the time, so...

Kaycee McCoy: Yeah, that's a huge part for people. Thankfully we have had great employees who we can trust. I remember the first year we went to that Global Pet Expo and we were so excited that we were like, "We both get to leave town at the same time."

Matt Wagner: It's right up there with, "Oh my gosh-"

Kaycee McCoy: That's a milestone.

Matt Wagner: "... we can take a vacation day."

Kaycee McCoy: Right.

Matt Wagner: Yes, we are talking about Main Street small businesses, that's for sure. Well, Kaycee, it's been so good to have you on the show.

Kaycee McCoy: Thank you so much.

Matt Wagner: I appreciate when people reach out and want to share their story and we certainly were glad that we were able to cover this today. So thanks for being on the show.

Kaycee McCoy: Thank you so much for having me. I'm so grateful for this opportunity and yeah, thank you for communicating with me back on LinkedIn, the, "Hey, I didn't talk to you, but-"

Matt Wagner: That's okay.

Kaycee McCoy: "... I really liked what you said and I love what your organization does."

Matt Wagner: I appreciate it. I appreciate it. All right, thank you.

Kaycee McCoy: All right. Thank you.

Matt Wagner: So there you have it. I hope you enjoyed this episode with our guest, Kaycee McCoy, co-founder of Pawsnickety Pets in Norfolk, Virginia. There were a number of really insightful tips on the operating side of small businesses that are so good I really wanted to list them out again. And the first one was around creating a system of knowing your customers personally. In this case Kaycee used the Walkie communication app is a way to stay in contact with her staff, much like thinking of it as a CRM system, which is really expensive. So this is a great sort of hack. Where there was knowledge being gathered not individually by each one of her staff and staying contained within those individuals, but more comprehensively across the staff. So they were cross-learning from one another about customers and sharing. I thought that was really smart.

Secondly is stretching your comfort zone and the use of technology by trying things like AI. This is really some low-hanging fruit in many cases, like just using ChatGPT for creating event ideas or social media posts or now using regular programs like Canva, which I know a lot of small businesses use for marketing purposes and graphic design that have built-in AI features that do a lot of the work for you, saving what most small businesses don't have, which is a lot of money to spend on it and the resource of time.

And finally, leveraging your vendors and suppliers for market intelligence. What's happening in the market can be very expensive, and so leveraging those suppliers or vendors for all their knowledge in terms of what are the consumer trends, what are people buying of course, and what's new on the horizon over the next year. I thought that was really brilliant on her part and a great call-out. But before we go, I also want to highlight in a separate matter, the immense devastation caused by Hurricane Helene.

Thousands of small businesses have been greatly impacted. Many numerous places in Western North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee for example, having no access to walk-in traffic from locals and visitors to their stores. And digital infrastructure issues also making it very difficult to run their e-commerce efforts or even communicate with customers. And that's of course if they had a e-commerce channel.

Just really a special shout-out to the efforts of our main street coordinating programs and local directors for all their leadership and coordinating resources and communicating how to support these small businesses. We're going to have some more to come there, which I'll allude to at the end of our program today. As always, if you're a small business owner and likewise to my place professional colleagues, I hope this episode has provided plenty of new insights, solutions, and inspirations. And thank you so much to Kaycee for joining the show.

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 provide and promote quality of living to the places we all call home. And don't forget to show your Main Street pride. I've seen it out there on many LinkedIn posts, so awesome to see, by checking out our Main Street swag at shopmainstreet.org.

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 of the podcast on our Main Street America YouTube channel. Thanks for listening. Please rate and review us. Also leave a comment if you can, that's so important and really helps to drive traffic. And as always, be sure to subscribe and tell your friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues so you all can watch the next episode in which tentatively we're trying to have a small business owner that is actually experiencing in real time managing their way through a natural disaster.

So, important learnings for all small business owners and those that are in position to assist. More to come on that. And thanks as always for your support.