



## Episode 7 “Grow Your Brand”

Welcome to the seventh episode of the NJFPA Stradley Ronon Food Forum. In this episode, [Todd Von Deak](#), Assistant Executive Director of [NJFPA](#), speaks with [Jon Cofsky](#), co-founder and creative director at [Whitepenny](#). Todd and Jon talk about how your brand is more than your logo and the importance of personalization and storytelling for your business.

### Guest Bio:



Whitepenny is a full-service brand and web development firm. With a focus on helping their clients gain competitive advantage and generate long-term value, Whitepenny presents a seamlessness in both message and brand, in turn building a stronger and more unified voice for each of our clients. Their expertise in identifying a company's core message and delivering that message through a consistent aesthetic language has produced results for clients ranging from non-profits to food processing companies.

Jon is the co-founder and Creative Director of Whitepenny. Jon sets the strategic direction of Whitepenny and aids companies all over the world in strategy and design. Additionally, Jon leads the project management team. Jon's firm has a strong presence in the food processing industry, working with a client roster that includes Severino Pasta Company, Steve's PaleoGoods, and J&J Snack Foods.

### Listeners will hear:

- How the pandemic has accelerated trends and development.
- The importance of personalization and storytelling for your business.

- How food processors who hadn't had a digital presence before can bring the things that made them stand out in person to a larger digital audience.
- Branding is much more than just your logo.
- How branding in the food industry is different from other spaces.
- How a brand can evolve with the environment.
- How getting your ideas, your story out into the digital world can help make smaller businesses competitive with larger brands.
- How to position yourself at every stage - startup, early stage, mid stage, mature.
- Why networking is the number one piece of advice Jon would give his younger self.

### ***Edited Interview Transcript***

Todd Von Deak [0:00]

Hi, I'm Todd Von Deak, Executive Director of the New Jersey Food Processors Association. And I'm thoroughly thrilled to take this chance to host an episode of our brand new podcast series that we affectionately call the Food Forum. And we are thrilled to be bringing it to you in collaboration with Bill Mandia and the good folks at Stradley Ronon. It's been a fun ride so far. I think as we're taping this in early May, we're on about episode five or six with the likes of Nolan Lewin from the Rutgers Food Innovation Centers, Roma McCaig from Campbell Soup, and today we take it up even another notch with a good friend of the New Jersey Food Processors Association, Jon Cofsky.

Jon is co founder and creative director at Whitepenny. They are a true part of our community, not only as active participants, but also in sharing their knowledge. And they even worked with us here at the home office on a number of initiatives. For those of you who are not familiar with Whitepenny, and I do think you should be, they're a full service brand and web development firm. They have their focus on helping clients gain competitive advantage and generating long term value. I love their seamlessness and how they bring message and brand together to create a stronger and more unified voice as they go about their business and their expertise in identifying core message and delivering it through a consistent presentation. I think we also call that in the technical speak 'aesthetic language' has done wonders and we've seen it here too.

Jon's firm has a strong presence in the food processing industry. We'll talk a little beyond the food processing, but he is core in our industry with us. Working with a client roster including Severino Pasta, Steve's Paleo Goods, and favorite J&J Snack Foods. Jon, this interview has been a bit coming, and I've been looking forward to it and had this date circled on my calendar. So it's a treat to be with you, good sir.

**Jon Cofsky [2:04]**

**Todd, it is a pleasure to talk with you. I really appreciate your having me on. I always look forward to the chance to have a conversation with you.**

Todd Von Deak [2:11]

Well, let's dive right in. Interviews on podcasts these days, you can't avoid this pandemic thing. So I'm going to just lead there, and maybe we can talk about it briefly then move on to what's ahead. You've had a front row seat to helping companies tell their stories, both before COVID and now during the pandemic. I'm curious how in your eyes, how communication has changed and if there are trends that are here to stay?

**Jon Cofsky [2:40]**

**Todd, I think there are a bunch of things we've been discussing over the past year. I think that the baseline part of this is, this notion that the pandemic was really an accelerant, especially as we think about the digital world. It sped everything up. So trends that we saw emerging in the past few years have really just been embraced with lightning speed. There are a couple things that really come out of that as we think about it. So one is, digital was always a part of everything we were doing. But I think there were a lot of companies and a lot of organizations that almost saw it as an afterthought, it was something they could ignore if they wanted to. And what happened in the past year was, if you had four legs in your stool, and two of them were about in person, high-touch and you took that away, all you had left was the digital world. I think you saw a lot of companies and organizations say to themselves, I have to take this more seriously. I have to think about this as my primary mode of communicating and interacting with a prospect, with a current audience, I need to do it better. It can't now be well, that's part of the overall story. This is the whole thing. So I think that the first part of it is really saying, reframing what these channels are in people's eyes. How to use them differently, how to use them better, if they are the primary touch point.**

**The other part of it is we think about just the speed of things in this accelerating idea. Everything is happening so fast that the barriers have been removed. So for companies that were saying, wow, that's an interesting initiative, I want to think about moving in that space. When I think about doing that, digitally that might have an 18 month runway, a two year runway. Suddenly that's been collapsed and in a pretty exciting way. Organizations and companies have been able to say, wow, I thought that was a two year runway, I can do it in six months. We've been solving clients that we had where they moved a full in person process into the digital space in a matter of months because they had to. That was their only option. So I think that when you look at that and you say, wow. It's really painted a very different picture of what a digital environment is and how we think about the time that we have to innovate and to change.**

Todd Von Deak [4:56]

So in that regard, barriers. You talked about how runways are shortened, two years is now six months. Are the barriers that are left in our minds? Are there practical barriers? How has that changed? Where have the guard rails come down?

**Jon Cofsky [5:14]**

**I think it's probably on removing the idea that it has to be perfect. I think what being pushed up against the wall did for people was to say, I don't have a choice, my business is on the line now. So I have to change, I have to bring something new to market. I need a new approach and I'm going to figure it out and I will iterate on it later. Especially speaking personally, that was never how we thought. I think our business was always, No, you do it right the first time. You are better off spending the time. This is sort of like Apple's approach in the market, Apple versus Microsoft, right? Apple was, what rolled out was perfect at launch. And Microsoft was we're going to bring it to market and then we're going to iterate on top of it, just keep changing, keep changing, keep changing.**

**I think what we have seen in this past year was, you have to solve the immediate problem. Address what's happening, stop the bleeding, and then you can evolve from there. So I think it just changed how people think about that to say, Wow, look at that we were able to keep moving. We didn't have to get it perfect the first time. We have to get it out there and then we can continue to evolve to make sure that it is perfect.**

**Todd Von Deak [6:22]**

**So I would think then a companion to this is not only has the mindset changed in the minds of folks going out over the digital, but then the consumer also. It's safe to say that the consumers' willingness to iterate along with companies and go for a ride has changed?**

**Jon Cofsky [6:38]**

**I think so. If we're looking at what other trends have emerged in this past year, I think everything was humanized. Think about work from home. How many meetings did everyone have, where you suddenly saw someone's home, you saw their kids. I think we were okay with that to say, we get it, everyone is trying, everyone is changing. So I think there's a little more tolerance for that. As we think about where this is all headed in the future, I think you're going to see a big swing back toward that personalization. That the thing that happened in the past year, when the pendulum swung to all digital, it's very easy for that to feel anonymous and disconnected. So as we fast forward, it was okay, we've all moved fully into this space. We've all heard the phrase digital transformation more times than we could count. So what's the next version of it? And I think we're going to see the reemergence of personalization, of that storytelling, trying to put some of these things back into what can be kind of a cold, anonymous world, digitally.**

**Todd Von Deak [7:49]**

**When you're talking about personalization, is that as simple as getting the subject lines right? What does personalization mean, for the unindoctrinated?**

**Jon Cofsky [8:01]**

**That's a good question. I think that's part of it, is trying to connect with you directly in a more high touch way. Think back to the beginning of the pandemic, when you just watched your inbox explode. Because suddenly, all of these new companies and**

organizations that had never thought about email marketing were saying, Oh, my gosh, I have to do this. So it was overwhelming. It was just constant and that's a lot of noise. So I do think there's an opportunity to say, How do I cut through that? How do I do that in a more personalized way?

But when I talk about it, I'm thinking more about companies and kind of humanizing and personalizing who they are, getting the story and the people back into these brands. So whether you're on the product side, and you have a thing, or you're on the service side, and you provide services, how do you get past that initial layer. A product can be easily commoditized, how do you de-commoditize it? That is to say, why are you buying this product over another one? How do you put story and narrative back into it? Service businesses are well suited for this because oftentimes, what you're buying are the people's [particular experiences]. Let's assume a baseline of competency and what you do, then the next step is to say, Okay, why this company over this one, two consulting companies? Well, it's about the people. So how do you make sure that what makes those people unique comes through in how you're positioning a brand and how you're telling that story?

Todd Von Deak [9:31]

That makes sense. I think one of the words you and I have talked about a heck of a lot is authenticity, right? So why does this all matter?

You've got online delivery, e-commerce, which has commoditized so much of what we purchase and where we go. It's three click comparisons, and there I go. Why does "real" count?

**Jon Cofsky [9:59]**

I think it's good to separate those pieces. The efficiency part of all of this is great. But those are just tools. They're tools to connect you with something in the end. I think what you're trying to do, let's use examples in this space. We're talking about the food space. I always think about, there was a granola company called Bear Naked. Did you ever hear of Bear Naked?

Todd Von Deak [10:21]

Sure, sure.

**Jon Cofsky [10:23]**

For some reason, Bear Naked, always stuck with me years ago, because I grabbed onto the story and I know their names, which is totally crazy. It was Brendan and Kelly, who were the founders of Bear Naked, I don't know who they are, but...

Todd Von Deak [10:35]

Their marketing people worked on you!

**Jon Cofsky [10:37]**

**But they built this story and I'd like to believe it was true. It took you through the evolution of making this recipe in the kitchen at home, connecting with a friend saying I think I have something interesting here. Getting to the commercial kitchen, moving all the way up and up until the end of that story is a purchase by Kellogg's. But this is just granola, right? There's nothing simpler than granola, a couple ingredients make this what it is. But it spoke to, why did I gravitate towards that? Was it that I really liked their granola more? Maybe, you always have to have a good product. But there was something there where I felt like I was buying into that story, helping. I believed in that. I believed in the entrepreneurial vision of that. I believed in the growth of that. So I wanted to support that kind of company, that kind of brand.**

**So I think what you see when you have a product, and Todd we've talked a lot about Severino Pasta Company, a client of ours. They were on that webinar last week. Their story is built on their family. That whole brand hinges on a photo of the parents from 1971 when they were in their first shop with their first pasta machine. You're not just buying pasta. You're not just buying egg, flour, water. You're buying a part of that story. You're trying to draw a line between that authenticity, and then what it says about the product that you get in the end. I think there are ways to really harness that to say, (in the end, sure it is flour, water, and egg). But there's a whole lot more that went into getting to this product that you're consuming.**

**Todd Von Deak [12:14]**

**If two things are equal, then you gravitate to the story that resonates with you.**

**Jon Cofsky [12:19]**

**That's right. And that's where looking back then on this past year and into the future, sure, we can buy faster, everything's efficient. There are all these new channels and direct to consumer. All of that is great, but at the end of the day, you're still trying to get to connect with something, with some product or some service. So you still have that same decision. I do think what the conversation will become about is, how are you getting that story through in digital ways, through digital channels? Can you do it as effectively as you were able to before, when it was in person high touch relationship based? How do you put that level of engagement back in?**

**Todd Von Deak [13:01]**

**Makes a lot of sense. So here we are throwing out this crazy idea of be authentic, be yourself, gosh forbid, or tell your true story. How do you get started doing that? A lot of folks who are listening to this will be early in their business venture or at the point now where they've gotten over the hurdles to keep the lights on. Now it's time to start telling the story a little bit differently.**

**Jon Cofsky [13:25]**

**It's funny, there's not magic to this. It is really about articulating internally why you exist. What makes you unique? How are you differentiated and saying to yourself what would I**

want someone else to say back about my company, about my brand. What we're often amazed by when we have early conversations with clients is when we go through that process, the things that they say. It's never a challenge to get someone to give you those messages to say, here's what we are about, this is our reason for being. Then if you look at all of their touchpoints, their digital footprint, their collateral, anything that they have. Look at their website, look at their social feeds, that messaging isn't there. So all that's happened is there's just a gap between what they know to be true, and what they're saying, what they're putting out there.

The whole goal is to clearly articulate those messages, put them out into the market, and then have someone repeat them back to you. You want to say this is why we're here, this is what we're about and then the audience will hear those things. If you don't say them, you're leaving it up to them to determine what that message is.

Todd Von Deak [14:32]

And that's not a winning proposition, for sure.

**Jon Cofsky [14:34]**

**It is not. So that's why I say it's not hard, you just have to do it. You have to name it and then put it into the market. So that process, we found to be really effective. It's just getting people to tell that part of the story. Why did you start this? What are you trying to do? What is your unique position in the market?**

Todd Von Deak [14:54]

As you know I teach some business courses over at Drexel University and when we talk about branding, I try to simplify it down to what is your customer, your prospective customer? What would they say about you in a room that does not include you slamming marketing messages at them when they're all by their devices. When they are all by their lonesome? Do they remember why you exist and tell the same story you're trying to tell them?

**Jon Cofsky [15:17]**

**Exactly right. Even the word branding, I think there's a lot of ambiguity around what does that mean? So when we talk to people, they think branding, and they think aesthetics, they think logo, they think, what is it? What does it look like? What you want to say is think about any brand that you know, let's go big, big brands, right? Think about Starbucks, think about Apple. What do you think of when you think of them? So Starbucks is not about that green logo, it's about how they know how to move a line. They are precise and efficient and that's what that brand becomes about. Apple is innovative. I remember the first time when going back to the Apple Store, we did it a lot. In our world, we are longtime Apple users.**

Todd Von Deak [16:03]

I'm in the cult too.

**Jon Cofsky [16:04]**

**I remember the first time I went in, and there was no place to check out. And I was like, What happened? Where's the counter? But before you know it, as you stand there and start to spin around once, someone shows up next to you with a little device and check you out, and you leave. And that's in their DNA.**

Todd Von Deak [16:25]

It's a line to the person.

**Jon Cofsky [16:27]**

**Someone said at some point, why do we need counters like that? That's probably a bunch of dead space here. So I think it's getting people to think about brands that way. What is the, and I think you said it right Todd, we know that core? What would they say about you, when you're not in the room? What is that core ideal upon which your company is built?**

Todd Von Deak [16:46]

I love that you brought up Starbucks. One of the books that I use when I teach branding is one by Scott Bedbury, who was the Chief Marketing Officer of Starbucks for a long time. One of the underlines of his book is, when you know 'the why' the authentic self and you grasp this concept of brand, it quickly becomes beyond the decision of logos and whatnot, which is only one so small subset of it. It becomes how do you operate your business. In the Starbucks, their toilet paper is three ply, because it's meant to be on brand with a high quality. The chairs are thick and comfortable. It's meant to be a coffee house, they know what they're trying to do. And then you can execute it from the chair in the front to the bathroom in the back.

**Jon Cofsky [17:33]**

**That's right. It's all connected. And you have to understand that it is that comprehensive view. It's also so connected to business organizational strategy and goals like where are you headed? I think that there's also often times a lack of understanding of making that connection. So our earliest conversations with clients are about that. We need to understand. Where are you heading? What's the goal here? Are you trying to: is it growth? Is it to dominate this market segment? Is it new product expansion? Is it exit? Whatever that is, your brand strategy is going to align with that. I think that those two things really have to go hand in hand.**

Todd Von Deak [18:19]

So you've been playing in the food industry for a while now, if I do remember correctly,

**Jon Cofsky [18:24]**

**We have been, for quite some time.**

Todd Von Deak [18:26]

I'm curious if you can remember back when, your initial thoughts as you got into food, working with clients in food processing? What surprised you, or how has that changed? And yes, for our listeners, this is where I get fun. I'm throwing a few questions that come in mind that Jon didn't know were coming.

**Jon Cofsky [18:45]**

**A couple things come to mind. One is, within any product line, so let's go back to granola or something. So many people are doing the exact same thing. There's a lot of chasing each other that you see in that space. Even some of our earliest projects, I remember seeing that. Wow, everyone seems to be positioned exactly the same way. What does differentiation really look like? The counter to that, though, that I saw is there were many, many times when I would say oh my gosh, not another food bar, right? How many more ways are there to make a, which was originally the Clif Bar. How many more versions of this can we really do?**

**But what has surprised me is that even when you think a space is at its most saturated, and I would say the food bar space is one that I thought was just totally done. You see RXBAR, come up. So RXBAR emerges. They are playing this kind of clean approach you see on the front of the packaging where it'll say five ingredients. It's eggs, nuts, something and then it ends with no BS, that's their bit on there. So they come out into the market at a point in which there were more food bars, then they know what to do with and then sell the company for \$600 million to Kellogg's. So I think that was the surprise for me, it's not saturated until somebody can figure out how to do it right. To say there is still room to innovate, even in a space when you say, there's no more ways to make a food bar and energy bar.**

Todd Von Deak [20:28]

I think that's hope for all of us in many different ways. Is there something you've seen over your time playing in the sandbox that you're like, God, I wish people would just see this or the one thing you just wish, could you please just do this one thing differently.

**Jon Cofsky [20:44]**

**I think the food space is unique in the trend based nature of it. And I think that there's an opportunity to pick your head up a little bit earlier and say, where's it going? So every however many years, it changes. It was paleo, then it turns into, then it's no longer paleo. Now we're talking about 'clean' or different language to talk about the same idea, then it's plant based. I think you have to be really in tune with those trends. How to take what you are, not chase a trend, but make sure that you're still relevant based on where the trend is. I think that that's part of the magic of that. Paleo is probably the best example.**

**We've seen this over the years. Just as something can emerge and be huge and you see it everywhere, and it's on everything. Then suddenly, as the language changes, you have to say, Okay, how do I handle that? I don't want to look like I'm an old trend, but this is**

**still a really big market segment. So how do you start to almost reorganize and reposition some of those attributes of these products? Because so many of these products have the same thing? They are paleo, they are gluten free, they are plant based. It becomes a hierarchy of messaging. What do you lead with based on what people are looking for at a given time? So I think seeing the landscape is really important and understanding where are we right now. I think you can start to see it move well before it has fully shifted, and how to align with that.**

Todd Von Deak [22:17]

So a little bit of seeing and trying to get a bit of first mover, if you can pick up on the wave?

**Jon Cofsky [22:23]**

**I think so, just move with it. You don't have to blow up what you're doing. But you have to say, Okay, this is where people are, this is what people are interested in. I have to position, (we'll use that word a lot positioning) to position this product to then appeal to that market segment. It might be the same product, but it becomes about what are we talking about? What are we elevating within this product?**

Todd Von Deak [22:45]

So I think you hit on a big concept there. That in all of this evolution and whatnot is not dropping a bomb in something, it's incremental changes, almost like you're driving down a road and not throwing the car into a donut all of a sudden, because of what you see.

**Jon Cofsky [23:05]**

**That's probably such a core tenet of brands in general. I think that there's also this idea that you do it, you build it once and then you can turn away and say, Oh, I got it, I did my brand. It has to constantly evolve. 'It' being how your positions, messaging, visual approach and now certainly in the digital space, constant reinvention of where you are because everything keeps changing. If we go back to the beginning of this conversation, the speed of change is so increased that I think you have to constantly be reassessing where you are.**

Todd Von Deak [23:41]

Are there other trends out there that are capturing your thoughts, the time when you're noodling on where things are headed?

**Jon Cofsky [23:50]**

**The thing that everyone talks about, and again, these are not new ideas, but I think it's calibrating what to do with them. So you hear everyone talk about thought leadership. That's another phrase that along with digital transformation, we can't escape the idea of. I think companies and organizations in all sectors are trying to figure out what do I do with this? How do I contribute in a way into this content space? So what's emerged, and it's a real challenge for all companies and organizations is, you essentially have to operate like you're a publication.**

**Now in addition to doing what you do, there's this pressure that you have to be producing content alongside that. And that's very hard to do. It takes a ton of time. The real challenge is saying, what do I have to say in this world that hasn't been said, that is unique. So I think there's open space there for companies and I think certainly in the food processing space, because I don't think it's something that has been as adopted as it has been in the B2B service industry is to say, Okay, how do I assert my role in this space?**

**Again, I'm going to use the conversation on the webinar that we [NJFPA] had recently where you hear people talk about things that are really innovative and really fascinating. I don't think they're putting those ideas out into the digital world the same way that a service business, a consulting business would be. So it's how do you say to that food manufacturer or food processor, hey, you have really valuable information here that could help people both in your space and outside of that. We need to pull it out of you and we need to put it out into the digital world.**

Todd Von Deak [25:31]

I would guess, going back to one of our initial themes that then in this space, half the game is just to get out there and start taking some steps in that direction and not let perfect be the enemy of pursuing 5 million likes or whatever.

**Jon Cofsky [25:45]**

**I think that's right. I think it's also interesting, because that's sort of the beauty of the internet is if you are consistent, and if you just are putting that out there, if you're the loudest, you win. You can do that really well. What I like about it is, it can level the playing field for people. It gives even smaller companies an opportunity to really exist. When you think about content generation, which can be the backbone of a search strategy, like an SEO strategy. If you're really prolific and producing content that aligns with what people are looking for, you can be relevant online, even if you are the smaller company in that space.**

Todd Von Deak [26:28]

For sure, and an interesting thing for folks in this space to think about and how to get your message out. Let's take a shift for a second. Personally, and maybe you agree, maybe you don't, that wouldn't be the first time on both sides of the ledger for our conversations. I think one of the biggest mistakes that folks make is thinking that the only lessons to learn are from your industry and what's right in front of you. Sometimes innovation and new thinking comes by saying, hey, I see how they do this over in this industry and I can bring it in and make a difference here. Whitepenny and you all work with a lot of different spaces and whatnot. Are there things outside of food processing that get your attention, that you think we should be noodling on and maybe capitalizing on in other industries?

**Jon Cofsky [27:19]**

**I think there are. So I guess the thought leadership is probably one piece of it. I think the bringing the people to the forefront, is something you see in service businesses, because it is the backbone of a service business. I think, in this space, that could happen more. To say, let's really shine a light on the innovators who are behind these products, behind these companies that we know. Again, in an effort to de-commoditize the thing, put that story into it. Tell me about where this came from. In a lot of the food company space, a lot of the medium to larger size entities, a lot of them are family owned, a lot of them are multi generation family businesses. How do you bring some of that in there? How do you say, what is this company about? Tell me that origin story and make that part of the brand. I do think there's untapped potential there in that space.**

Todd Von Deak [28:22]

All right, a bit of a lightning fire here, maybe not lightning fire, but some series of questions that build on each other if you don't mind.

**Jon Cofsky [28:32]**

**Great.**

Todd Von Deak [28:32]

I'm going to throw out some different company lifecycle stages. And I'm curious, and would love for you to share your thoughts on the biggest thing you'd suggest a company in that stage, think about and maybe the biggest thing to guard against, if you will. Startups.

**Jon Cofsky [28:51]**

**I would say do one thing and do it really, really well. Figure out what that flagship product is, and be known for that. Resist the urge to do a bunch of different things, nail that one thing, and make sure that there's proof of concept behind it, that it's something that people actually want. We've seen this a lot where you build the thing that you think people want, and suddenly you realize there's not a market for it. That's probably why I gravitate to that Bare Naked story. I like the story of, I was making this thing and I was selling at farmer's markets and then there was this groundswell, and then this company comes out of it. Versus investing tons of money in building this perfect brand, that there isn't a market fit for.**

Todd Von Deak [29:42]

And the side corollary if you're in the startup and you're building your first website, that rule applies there, too. Don't create a navigation just because you think that's how people think and are going to go through your site because I'll guarantee you from experience, you're generally going to be wrong on that equation.

**Jon Cofsky [29:58]**

**That's right.**

Todd Von Deak [29:59]

Early Stage: So not quite startup, but still getting going and getting some momentum on that bike.

**Jon Cofsky [30:06]**

**So this one I would probably say now is when you start to refine that brand story and take the brand seriously. So you have proof of concept, you understand your audience, now you start to put the pieces together and match this brand with who that end consumer is, and start to invest. In the startup stage, what I didn't say is also, I would keep the investments, unless you're in a situation where you're funded, I would keep the investments tight, and really focus on the product. Then in this stage, it would say, now we've done that, in the early stage. Let's now invest in the brand, we have to take the brand seriously now.**

Todd Von Deak [30:43]

How about mid stage?

**Jon Cofsky [30:46]**

**Think about now that you have a foundation, think about the future and how to diversify what you have. So if you've built on this singular idea, now you're going to start to go wider. Look at, does the business model make sense for growth? Where are those trends? Where are those opportunities? How do I take what I've done that was effective, and start to scale it. Say, if I did that here, I can also move into these other 2, 3, 4 different venues?**

Todd Von Deak [31:13]

How about mature?

**Jon Cofsky [31:15]**

**Boy, beware of the startup. I think now, the very thing that you were, it's gone. You're not that thing anymore. So I would always talk to clients and we've always said this to our clients, essentially understand your biggest threat. A lot of times when you get to a certain size, it is that lean, nimble, innovative company, that new idea, that lightning in a bottle startup. So figure out what can you learn from them. This is the previous version of yourself. How can you build that back in to what is now a much more robust company. So whether that means spinning out a separate division, that is just looking at those new singular ideas, whether it's purchasing a company like that. I would start to understand where those threats are, and that they're going to bear threats based on being the exact opposite of what you now are, which is stable and big and probably slow and figure out how to pull some of that stuff back in.**

Todd Von Deak [32:16]

If you could go back a number of years and talk to your younger self, what would you tell them?

**Jon Cofsky [32:21]**

**I think the importance of network building, relationship building early on, is huge and not taught. When I talk to younger people in our industry, and really in general who are whether coming out of school or starting a business, you can be really smart about how to do that. I think you'd be amazed at what doors that will open later. Whether that's from like minded companies and support just to say I need to help to think about how to take my business from here to here. Whether it's about the business development side, new opportunities for new clients, or new growth, new strategic partnerships, all of that comes from increasing that network and that relationship, the circles that you can build.**

**Todd Von Deak [33:09]**

**What are you reading these days with a special emphasis on what folks interested in this topic and applying these ideas to their business might like to read.**

**Jon Cofsky [33:20]**

**It's a well known one, but probably a long time Whitepenny go-to is Seth Godin. His blog, it does a lot of things. But what it does so well is there are these Quick Hits, quick little insights, and you feel like you could take something and rewire how you think or be actionable about it. It's not this long, the old school white paper approach. It's not that. It's sort of saying, think about this. Just think about this idea and how it's relevant to your business. I think that it goes back to that earlier part of our conversation that branding is such an extension of the underlying business strategy. So if you just think about the business and think about new ways of thinking about the business, then the tactics of branding will come out of that. From email and communications to web and social, all of that is really born out of how the business is positioned and how you think about the underlying culture of your business.**

**Todd Von Deak [34:17]**

**For the folks who aren't familiar, and perhaps hearing about us for the first time. What do you think they ought to know about the New Jersey Food Processors Association?**

**Jon Cofsky [34:27]**

**It probably ties right back to the thing I wish I knew younger in business is that you're trying to put yourself with people that understand what you're going through, and can provide support so that you don't have to invent it, reinvent it on your own. If you were at any stage. I like your question about advice for startup, early stage, mid stage, mature. (Thanks.) That's a good one at any stage in your growth. Why not talk to someone who's been at that stage and say, oh, here's what you have to know at that point. Here's what you have to think about. So I like organizations that are built around that idea. The idea of saying, hey, we're here, you have people who've done this before, learn from them. Don't make those mistakes, don't run into the wall on your own. Have them tell you, when you're scaling from being a \$10 million to \$20 million business, here's what you're going to see. And here's what I wish I knew then. I think that that's really, really valuable.**

Todd Von Deak [35:26]

So perfect segue, talking to folks who have walked the road, Whitepenny.com is a good way for folks to get a hold of you. If this is resonating, and they want to chat more.

**Jon Cofsky [35:36]**

**It is for sure. I thoroughly enjoy talking about this. Always happy to talk to anybody, weigh in, take a look at what they're doing, for sure. More more than happy to, and I really enjoyed it, Todd, this is again, always a pleasure talking to you. Time goes fast. So it was a nice conversation for sure.**

Todd Von Deak [35:54]

All right, Jon Cofsky, from Whitepenny thrilled, grateful, truly appreciative not only for you being here today, but for you being part of the Food Processors Association and for all the conversations we've had at Starbucks and for those when we can finally get back and go visit again in person at that that Starbucks by your office.

**Jon Cofsky [36:12]**

**That sounds great, Todd, many thanks. Really, really appreciate the time.**

Todd Von Deak [36:15]

All right. This has been another edition of the Food Forum Podcast brought to you by the New Jersey Food Processors Association, in collaboration with Bill Mandia, and the folks at Stradley Ronon. You can learn more about the series and everything else you ought to know about our organization online at [NJFoodProcessors.org](http://NJFoodProcessors.org). If you have an idea for a future episode, you have feedback on this episode. Maybe you liked what Jon had to say and you wondered why I kept talking throughout it. You can always get us on the feedback line at [help@njfoodprocessors.org](mailto:help@njfoodprocessors.org). I'm Todd Von Deak, the Executive Director of NJFPA. Thanks for tuning in.