**JOHNNY EARL: My name is Johnny Earl, and I started a brand called Johnny Cupcakes. And I make clothes with cupcakes on them. It sounds strange, but it's what I've been doing for the past 10 years. It's been strong and growing. I started this when I was 19 years old while working at a record shop.

I had a bunch of different random nicknames. People would call me Johnny Appleseed, Johnny Pancakes, Johnny Coffee Cakes, Johnny Cupcakes. And when I was late for work, they'd call me Johnny Come Lately. While getting t-shirts made for the hardcore metal band and I was in at the time, I thought it would be funny to make a completely random t-shirt that said Johnny Cupcakes on it.

Not even to sell, just to wear to work. So enough people asked me that I had to keep making more of these shirts, and I began to poke fun at pop culture. I'd replace popular icons with cupcakes, whether it be a Statue of Liberty holding a cupcake instead of a torch, a plane dropping cupcakes instead of bombs, or the cupcake and cross-bones.

There are all these tough guys that used to wear skull and crossbones shirts that came in my work. And enough people asked about this shirt that I was selling them left and right. I'd have to pretend to go to the bathroom to sneak out and sell them out of the trunk of my rusty car.

And it was happening so much that I was able to quit my job and take a risk and try this out. If you don't take a risk, then you never know. And I feel like that's one of the key things that separates entrepreneurs from everyday people is that risk taking factor.

I have 32 employees right now within the Johnny Cupcakes brand. That includes the offices slash warehouse. It includes my three retail stores right now. We've got one in Hull, Massachusetts. We've got one in Boston, Massachusetts on Newbury Street. And we've got one in Los Angeles on Melrose Ave. And we're about to open our fourth location in London in the UK.

All the stores are set up like fake bakeries. I do this because it fits with the brand and the name, Johnny Cupcakes. I could go out and save a tremendous amount of money by purchasing displays at Ikea. But saving money and worrying about the bottom line isn't what I do.

LORRAINE EARL: My name's Lorraine Earl. I'm John Earl's mom, and the CFO of Johnny Cupcakes, Inc. I've been working with John since he was born. When he was about 18 years old, he decided to get into the t-shirt line. I think it's harder for family-run businesses because you've got that element of such a personal relationship, being the mom.

So I'm always going to get the flak. If he wakes up one morning and he has invented something in his sleep, he wants that product the next day, and it will push other things to the side. I always want him to be able to have a free flowing mind and not worry about the money, not worry about where this is coming from, or when this is going to be delivered, or is this going to be on time.

That's why he has 30 of us to back him up. Whatever he comes up with, we've managed to take it and run with it and make it into a success. It's been quite a ride. JOHNNY EARL: I've taken some pretty big risks. I had a $65,000 budget for my Los Angeles shop, and I ended up spending I think $775,000 on the shop.

LORRAINE EARL: When we first opened LA, I thought he was just going to buy some display cases, throw in some antique ovens and a mixer, and that would be it. But he found a company that designs these humongous projects for Universal Studios, Disney World. I felt like we were opening a Disney World attraction when we opened the LA store because we spent $363,000 on these ovens that don't even cook anything.

JOHNNY EARL: Everyone was scared. I took the company's operating money and put it into ovens that shoot out steam. And I had to do something to make that store stand out. But I'll tell you, I've made all of my money back and more from doing that. We opened. We had hundreds of people in line.

And the store's been growing, despite the economy. And it's turned into a destination spot. We've had actors. We've had sports players go inside. We've been written about in some of the biggest magazines, newspapers, blogs. We haven't had to spend any money on advertising because we created an experience. LORRAINE EARL: LA on its own it's made about $569,000 this year.

JOHNNY EARL: When you have a brand, when you have any company, it's all about reinventing. Everything in the world has been done before. So that means you have a very good chance of failing. So you need to think about what you can do to make your brand or company something completely different.

So we're doing things as random as coming out with our own candy. We're coming out with our own toys. I just hired an animator. We're going to start doing Johnny Cupcakes cartoons. We're going to take those cartoons, develop characters from those cartoons, give them personalities, turn those into toys, turn those into shirts.

It's fun to just keep things so random and different. It's true, everything has been done before. You've just got to reinvent it in strange, unique ways, and give people something to talk about. Or else you're going to get lost with the rest of the people that are doing the same thing.**