

## Talk CNY S1X7

Kate Hammer 0:07

CenterState CEO is Central New York's leading business leadership and economic development organization committed to creating a region where businesses thrive and all people prosper. Welcome to a special expert miniseries for CenterState CEO's podcast Talk CNY on Click, presented by NBT Bank, where we share the latest news and information on topics ranging from community and workforce development to policy and innovation. Take a moment right now to subscribe in your listening app for new episode reminders.

Kate Hammer 0:45

Today we have a national expert in digital commerce joining us. Christina Scalera is the founder of The Contract Shop, as well as the D Commerce trademark. Christina built an award winning, record breaking, seven figure Shopify empire with The Contract Shop by turning her legal services into digitally downloadable contract templates. Based out of the northwest corner of the states, she now teaches service based business owners of all types- think photographers, calligraphers, wedding planners and more- to turn their services into best selling passive digital download products sold through an online storefront. Christina has been featured as an industry expert in Entrepreneur, Gold Digger, Being Boss, Don't Keep Your Day Job and Creative Live. I'm your host, Kate Hammer, business coach and member at CenterState CEO. Christina Scalera, so wonderful to have you. Thanks for joining us today.

Christina Scalera 1:39

Yeah, thanks, Kate.

Kate Hammer 1:41

Awesome. So you're here to talk about digital commerce, which actually D commerce is a term that you invented and trademarked, right?

Christina Scalera 1:51

It is.

Kate Hammer 1:52

Yes. So can you tell us a little bit about what it is? What is digital commerce?

Christina Scalera 1:58

Yeah, so you've probably come across this in the form of PDFs, guides, digital planners, any kind of digital product that's delivered via some kind of digital delivery method, whether that's through an email, or after you make a purchase, it's a download of some sort, a zip

file, a PDF, or Word document. These are all products, just like you would go through a Shopify site and buy. And then on the other end of it, instead of getting something shipped to you, it's delivered immediately, digitally. And that's your product to use, however you'd like on your iPad, on your computer or on your phone. So there's this whole emerging industry of products that are available now, that are all digital products to help usually in a business to business type of context, to help people further along in their own business journeys.

Kate Hammer 2:48

Yes, I love that. And it's interesting, you say emerging, and yet you were there at the very beginning, several years ago, one of the people who really made this come front and center and become such a great pivot for so many service based businesses. Why is digital commerce important to add into the way a service based business does business?

Christina Scalera 3:11

Yeah, I think we saw the importance of this with the pandemic. And when that started, a lot of people had panic about what they were going to do for a living when they couldn't have people come in to see them in person, when they couldn't visit with their clients or host events or open a restaurant or whatever it was that they needed to do that relied on some sort of in person physical component. So you know, there's a famous saying that millionaires have at least seven streams of income. And I think for any service based business to diversify into some sort of digital income, especially with digital products, it's a really smart move, even though it's not not always the easiest move. But if you are able to do that and prioritize that on your plate as far as what you offer through your business, then it can really help you in any kind of crisis that comes up, which we know that's going to happen at some point. Like we know, there's going to be some kind of recession, whether it's now or in 10 years or whatever, we know, there's probably going to be something else hopefully not as bad as COVID or anything like that, but we know stuff like that is on the horizon. And so if you can just diversify what you have to offer so that when something happens, that forces people back online and out of your restaurant or out of your service based in person, place of business, then you're better protected against those events. And you're even really well suited to scale up the digital side of things if that were to ever happen again.

Kate Hammer 4:37

Yeah, absolutely. It makes sense. I think people have an awareness that this exists. But as a business owner, trying to figure out how to get a footing there and how to get started and what sort of digital products will make sense for your business, can be really difficult and can be why some people don't get started as soon as maybe they should. So, what are your recommendations for first steps and finding a way forward?

Christina Scalera 5:06

Yeah, you're absolutely right. So getting started is definitely the hardest part, it's kind of like losing weight, where it feels really, it feels like a lot of work at the beginning, and you're not really seeing much payoff, right. But if you were to keep going to the gym, every single day for a year, you're going to start to see those results, 3, 6, 10 months in. With digital products, it takes a little bit of time to find what that product is going to be for you. But the easiest way to do that, I mean, I have a lot of YouTube videos and things like that. So if you want like inspiration, or brainstorming, definitely check those out. However, what I will say in you know, just like, the smallest piece of advice I can give on this, that's really powerful is you need to look at what kind of result people are coming to you for and be able to deliver some sort of that result, it can be a small portion of that result, it could be the whole thing, but it has to be delivered digitally. So for example, if you're a therapist, maybe you maybe you have some kind of practice area that you are better known for, than other therapists in your area. Like if you're known for childhood trauma, or you know, kids going through divorce or something, and you want to have some sort of online digital products offering, you could create some kind of workbook or guide or planner that parents can print out and give to their children to help them through these difficult periods where, you know, they maybe are going through a divorce with that parent or, you know, they just are going through some kind of transition that's really traumatic for kids. So having that guide or that digital product that's available to just kind of help them work through some of those feelings, when you know, as a therapist, you can't be there for that child 24/7. Like, that's a good example of like, turning your service into a product. You know, same thing with like restaurants, if you wanted to serve your customers 24/7 maybe there's some sort of app or guide or meal planning or something like that, even taking the idea of a cookbook that you know, some restaurants have gotten really famous through their cookbooks and things like that. And the reasons because they can spread further than the delivery of that food, right? Like if you're in Toronto, you have to be in Toronto to eat at that restaurant. But if you're in, I'm in Washington state, if I'm in Washington State, and I buy a cookbook from that restaurant, I can have a little piece of it at home. So taking that idea and turning it into a digital product instead of a physical cookbook and giving people you know, emailing them one meal idea every single day so that they know what they're going to eat for dinner that night. These are all examples of things that people are coming to businesses for that result, right? And turning that into some sort of digital offering that someone is paying you money for hopefully on a subscription basis, if not on like maybe a higher cost one time offer fee basis.

Kate Hammer 7:49

Yeah, well, yes, hopefully on a subscription basis. So that's really interesting. I mean, obviously, there are a lot of ways that it can be approached. And I know, you know, seeing

what you've sold, there are one time products there you have courses you I mean, there's just so many offerings there that are possible. But keeping that in mind that you know anything that's going to be renewable. Hey, that's where it's brainstorming, right? So you have this incredible story of doing exactly this taking a service based business or what would have been one, traditionally, you are an attorney, you have that educational background, and turning that into a shop with digital products. And then becoming extremely successful with that and deciding that, man, everyone seems to want to know how to do this, too. I'm gonna teach it. And you've helped so many business owners become incredibly successful in their own right doing so. So can you just share a little bit about that story and what that has been like for you? And then how it's kind of turned around to this point where you're sharing that information?

Christina Scalera 8:53

Yeah, for sure. So in 2015, I was really trying to make ends meet. And I was trying to do anything online because I wanted to work remotely so that I could travel and see the world and you know, do the whole millennial thing. And what I ended up doing was working. I was trying to be a private yoga teacher at the time. And so it was blogging and learning a lot about graphic design and Pinterest and social media and things like that trying to make this thing work because I had realized I'd gotten my dream job right out of law school, and it was health. So I had to pivot because what I thought was going to be amazing, and that I could work out for the next 50 years of my life or whatever, was not the case at all. And so I pivoted did this quarterlife crisis thing into yoga. Everybody thought it was crazy because they were like, "Why are you doing this? You you're throwing your degree away," whatever. But I ended up coming full circle and using everything I learned during that year to where I was learning about blogging and being online and creating, you know, a logo for our business and why a website that's functional matters and things like that. So I learned all of that in this process. And in the meantime, because You know, private yoga, shocking, doesn't play, it didn't pay the bills for me. I was working on some legal projects for a couple of clients here and there, you know, people would find out, I'm a lawyer, and they'd be like, "Hey, can I hire you for this?" And be like, "sure", you know, great. I can pay rent this month. Wonderful. So I was doing a couple of projects like that. And I just had a friend who approached me and she was like, "Hey, I know that you're working off of like, these templates that you're, you're doing, you know, basically, like client great service agreements, can I just buy the template from you, like, I don't have the cash on hand to have it all customized and you know, go through revisions and stuff with you as a lawyer. But like, can I just buy the template part?" And I was like, "that sounds like a great idea". And she was like, "you know, this could be a good business for you. Because there's a lot of people" she was a photographer, that she's like, "there's a lot of photographers that are like me that need these these strong legal documents, but we don't necessarily have the money to invest or, you know, we don't want to allocate that money to a \$5,000 plus lawyer bill".

Kate Hammer 11:00

Yeah.

Christina Scalera 11:00

That's interesting. So I kept getting found out as a lawyer at all these like different networking events and stuff that I would go to trying to make this yoga business work still, and I just ended up talking about very basic legal things, you know, how to have good relationships with clients what to do, if there's a client problem, how to get an LLC, what a business checking account is just kind of the basics that you need to know for business. And I realized, this is an area where people really need a lot of help, because there's a lot of very high level even for myself, going through law school, I learned all the high level, like M&A type stuff. But no one ever talked to me about what an LLC is beyond what those letters stand for. So I started creating programs and products that would teach people about these things, and also templates that they could just fill out and have the end desired result like I was talking about earlier.

Kate Hammer 11:51

Yeah.

Christina Scalera 11:51

So we could just download, print that and move on.

Kate Hammer 11:55

Awesome. And there was this demand, you were alerted to it. And then The Contract Shop was born.

Christina Scalera 12:03

It was Yeah. So that was that was in 2015.

Kate Hammer 12:07

Wow. So it's been a minute, almost a decade now.

Christina Scalera 12:10

But no, not quite well, I guess. Like-

Kate Hammer 12:13

Yeah!

Christina Scalera 12:13

About seven years.

Kate Hammer 12:15

Isn't that funny? Time flies.

Christina Scalera 12:16

Yeah.

Kate Hammer 12:17

Okay. So as this, as people learned about this business, obviously, they were interested in it for the product, because they needed those products, they needed access to, essentially what an attorney is offering is minus that high cost. But also, people became interested in understanding how it was that you created such a thing. So tell us a little bit about how successful it has become and how you have been able to pivot and also be teaching.

Christina Scalera 12:47

Yeah, so it I mean, in terms of meeting my goals, it far exceeded those because I again, remember, I wanted to work remotely and be able to support that lifestyle. And, you know, we're not talking about private jets and flying first class everywhere, like I was, I was living pretty frugally and renting for the most part. And then I ended up meeting my husband and we bought a house last year up in Washington State. So you know that that has like morphed and changed over time. But all along the way, I have been able to work from wherever I can, you know, wherever I want with internet, which was always the goal. So in terms of like meeting the goals that I had, when I started my business that's definitely was exceeded. And then financially, the cool thing was, after I met the working remote goals, my next goal, obviously, was to start to increase those top line revenues and make everything more profitable from there. And I was able to do that as well. So that was where I really was able to shift and move. And then the third thing I was able to do as a result of increased top line is hire more. So I was able to hire people to support the mission of the business and just get in there and do the work that I had been doing. And now that you know that business, it was able to run completely without me. And that was the really cool thing, because you have something that is traditionally a highly technical area, you know, legal stuff, and it's running without me, you know, other than like maybe me overseeing one or two, maybe tiny things editing a couple of things here and there every year, it was completely outsourced. And so that actually led to the opportunity to sell it, which I took advantage of in the past few months because I didn't really know what this this process would look like. But I should also back up and just remind everyone listening that in 2020 I started a second business and again, it's because I was able to work remotely. I had the revenue to support the first business and keep it profitable. And then I also had the ability to make sure everything was outsourced. So that business was really running all by itself

and by 2020, that was when I started to look at different opportunities to create another business because anybody who's an entrepreneur out there knows you get itchy and you want to do something else. So I had to fight that urge for a really long time. And then it just seemed like the right time to jump in and start the second business. So that's what I did. I had no idea how it would go. And it's actually gone really, really well, to the point that two years after I started it, that's when I said, I really have to pick between these two businesses, because even though the contract shop is running completely on its own, I need just more mental headspace to be able to be creative. And you know, work on the second business, which now has a really, you know, it's getting to be a bigger and bigger YouTube channel. And just lots of things about it that require a lot of creative energy.

Kate Hammer 12:48

Yeah.

Christina Scalera 13:14

And I felt like I was always getting sucked back into The Contract Shop just for like little tiny things like pay this contractor, renew this email subscription.

Kate Hammer 15:54

Totally.

Christina Scalera 15:55

And it was just like, distracting me. It's hard to describe-

Kate Hammer 15:59

Well I think it's important that you point it out because-

Christina Scalera 16:02

Yeah

Kate Hammer 16:03

That issue of thinking, your time spent in thought process about a thing actually matters quite a lot. So it's not just those work hours that where you're actually doing some specific work activity. But you know, when you're showering and thinking about your business, or whatever. So I think it's important.

Kate Hammer 17:28

Amazing. Congratulations.

Christina Scalera 17:30



Thank you. Yeah.

Kate Hammer 17:32

What a story. I love that. I love it, and how everything sort of comes around in full. And then as you mentioned this business that you started up in 2020, that has helped so many people do this too, whether they end up keeping their business forever or selling it, that it's just made a huge impact on the way that they do business. So can you just give a couple of examples on the types of service-based businesses that you have helped to create digital products?

Christina Scalera 18:00

Oh my gosh, I mean, literally, every industry, the only one that ever had me stumped was some guy approached me and he's like, "I'm a medieval history document restorer" or something like that. And I was like, "Yeah, I don't know that I can help you". with everybody else. I think I've had a little taste of everything from you know, stylists like hair stylists, to designers of all kinds interior, graphic web designers, people that have restaurants, people that have hiking services, like they take you or your dogs out on hikes, therapists, lots of different therapists-

Kate Hammer 18:35

Wait. Slow down. Dog hiking?

Christina Scalera 18:38

Yeah, like, if you live in an area and you can't, you know, you don't want to drop your dog off at doggy daycare, they come and like hike with your dog. Like they pick your dog up and they take it hiking.

Kate Hammer 18:48

I'm like jaw to floor. This is amazing. I want to be one of those dogs that gets picked up for a hike.

Christina Scalera 18:55

Yeah, and you know, they make a pretty decent living with their service, too. I mean, it's like \$50 a day to take your dog for a hike. But you know, the dog comes back tired and the person's happy. So it's a win win for everybody.

Kate Hammer 19:06

Seriously. Hey, Central New York, if someone isn't already doing this, you're listening to this episode and you're like, man, I have the entrepreneurial bug, but I don't have my big idea yet. Someone needs to be offering this out here.



Christina Scalera 19:18

Right?

Kate Hammer 19:18

Okay, so point being, if you have a service based business, there's a way and if you're not seeing it, there, there are people, there's a person who can coach you and help you figure it out. And Christina, you offer that right. So you have what some course offerings or membership offerings. Tell me a little bit about like how could somebody get helped by you to develop digital commerce.

Christina Scalera 19:43

Yeah, if someone wanted to start with with digital products we have I have a completely free guide. It's The Ultimate Guide to Creating Digital Download Products. And you can get that for free at my website at [christinascalera.com](http://christinascalera.com). And then if you want to take it to the next step, I actually have a whole shop that supports all your digital download products that you're creating so that you have a place to sell them. I have the Launch Your Shop Academy, so that is a paid offer.

Kate Hammer 20:05

Awesome. Okay, we're gonna link up to all of this good stuff your YouTube channel, this freebie, which you must get if you're listening. Oh my goodness, get it. I've actually done quite a bit of training myself and coaching with Christina. She's amazing, just bursting with ideas so delightful to work with. I'm sure once you see this guide, you're gonna be like, oh, man, I have to. And this is not just some weird salesy thing, like, Christina is awesome. I've worked with her myself, you know. And so I just so strongly recommend her. I remember some of the first few questions I asked you in a group coaching context, I was just absolutely blown away by how you're so creative and quick on your feet. And, and it's just so exciting also to just be in that environment of a group, to just hear what other people are doing and inspire each other. And sometimes we just need that little change up in our environment to you know, kind of dust off the shelves. We get in our routines, and we get used to doing what we're doing. But it's a great way to kind of refresh and reset. And also, you know, Hey, it's 2023, start of the year like, hey, maybe this is the year that digital commerce becomes part of your offering. So, Christina, thank you so much for coming on and describing what digital commerce is and why it should be important to every service based business owner and how they can actually get started.

Christina Scalera 21:30

Of course, thanks for having me.

Kate Hammer 21:32

Yeah, absolutely. CenterState CEO's podcast Talk CNY, is presented by NBT Bank, and is available on [CenterStateCEO.force.com/click](https://CenterStateCEO.force.com/click) and all major podcast platforms. After each episode, you can join us on Click where we'll continue to chat about this topic, and provide additional resources and links and click you can also listen or watch every episode in this series of Talk CNY. Click is CenterState CEO's interactive digital chamber platform where our members connect, learn and receive support from our staff. For a new episode reminders, be sure to subscribe in your favorite podcast listening app. If you're enjoying Talk CNY, consider leaving a quick review or a five star rating.