

02 | Why Georgia is Great for Starting New Businesses - TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:00] **Erin Riney:** From the New Media Institute at the University of Georgia, hello and welcome to the Georgia On Your Mind Podcast, a series that explores the relationship between the state of Georgia and the university that lives within the heart of it. Each week, a new episode will dive into an area that the state excels in and how the University of Georgia acts as a major contributor to that success.

[00:00:20] **SFX:** The FinTech and payments industry, it's continued to explode. Goodbye Silicon Valley and hello Atlanta. Some of the biggest names in the tech sector are opening offices in headquarters in Atlanta, including Apple, Airbnb, Google, Microsoft, and so many more.

[00:00:37] **Erin Riney:** Hey, I'm your host, Erin Riney, and welcome back to the Georgia On Your Mind Podcast.

[00:00:41] Today we're gonna be exploring an area of expertise that is lesser known within the state of Georgia, but is still just as impactful, and that's entrepreneurship. You all met Bailey last week during the sports tourism episode, but please welcome my co-host for this episode, Berkeley.

[00:00:55] **Berkeley Chandler:** Hey guys. I'm Berkeley Chandler.

[00:00:56] I'm also a grad student at UGA studying emerging media alongside Erin and Bailey, and I had the opportunity to interview our three guests for this episode. During these interviews, we discussed why Georgia is such a great place to do business and how UGA equips its students with the resources and confidence to start their own.

[00:01:13] **Erin Riney:** Yeah. So just to set the scene a little bit before we introduce our three guests, whether people realize or not, the state of Georgia is actually a really great place to do business. I mean, the cost of business is fairly low compared to some other states, but we also have a cooperative and responsive state government that can assist with setting up the business.

[00:01:30] And then we also have a competitive labor environment and available real estate. In fact, after talking with one of our guests, we got a, a really great stats concerning entrepreneurship in the state of Georgia. Georgia's actually the number one top state for business climate, black entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurs.

[00:01:47] And as of last year, there were 1.1 million small businesses in Georgia and 1.7 million small business employees within the state of Georgia. And not only that, but 99.6% of Georgia businesses were classified as small businesses. 87.6% of all Georgia exporters are small businesses and 39.6% of Georgia businesses are owned by minorities.

[00:02:09] So definitely a great place if you're looking to start your own business, definitely look into Georgia and moving here to, to do that.

[00:02:16] **Berkeley Chandler:** Mm-hmm. And so out of the three people that we got to interview, two of them are actually business owners within the state. And so we were able to get their perspective on what entrepreneurship has been like for them as they've grown their business within the state.

[00:02:27] The first person we interviewed, his name is Kevin Planovsky. He graduated from UGA back in 2005, and he is the co-founder of Vert Digital, which is a full service, digital marketing and advertising agency hosted in Atlanta. The second person we interviewed is Shep Ogden, who graduated from UGA back in 2018, and he is the co-founder and CEO of Offbeat Media Group, which is a digital influence and media agency that's also based in Atlanta.

[00:02:52] We're gonna hear from Kevin Planovsky first on his journey to becoming an entrepreneur and how he got his.

[00:02:57] Thank you so much for joining us. Kevin, can you just start by introducing yourself to us and telling us a little bit about who you are and what you do?

[00:03:04] **Kevin Planovsky:** Yeah, sure. My name is Kevin Planovsky. I'm a 2005 Grady grad and New Media Institute grad.

[00:03:12] And, um, I've, I've spent most of my career since then in the digital media and marketing space, and I am. The co-founder of a couple businesses, but the, the main one that I, that I, that I've spent the most time and continue to spend the most time on, is a digital marketing agency called Vert Digital in Atlanta.

[00:03:28] **Berkeley Chandler:** And as one of the co-founders of Vert, what are your main priorities? Um, and kind of how has that shifted over the years?

[00:03:36] **Kevin Planovsky:** So much! Right. What started as like, V uh, you know, sort of a pipe dream of how can we just build something and then make it work and, and, and, and wouldn't it be cool if it used to be, used to be the phrase mm-hmm.

[00:03:49] Um, turn has turned into a, a very legitimate business. And so the, while the first half of the last 14 or so years was really spent deep in the latest technologies, in the latest changes, uh, from Mark Zuckerberg over at Facebook or now Meta. And so on and so forth has, has shifted to really be how do we, how would, how do we build a really scalable business?

[00:04:15] Um, how do we recruit the best talent? How do we build the best partnerships with our clients? How do we focus on building business and revenue, not just doing cool things with technology.

[00:04:27] **Berkeley Chandler:** We're also gonna hear from Shep Ogden on how he knew entrepreneurship was the path that he wanted to take post-grad.

[00:04:32] **Shep Ogden:** Yeah. My name is Shep Ogden. I'm the co-founder and CEO of a company called Offbeat Media Group. We go by offbeat, um, offbeats really built across of two platforms. One is a content studio where we create really awesome content. All around the internet mm-hmm. Has only, we have about 12 million followers and we do it for brands too.

[00:04:50] Um, we manage our social medias, we help them partner with influencers. Um, we really, we really scale and focus on that. That's that side of things. On the other side, we create, we create virtual influencers and avatars, and that's one of the things that we've really become known for. Because of our background in content creation and because of our background and working with influencers, we got this crazy idea of, could you bring to life a virtual influencer, which is really just an avatar with a personality and that's, that's really like how we look at Offbeat is or Offbeat Media Group. We've got the two sides. One is, one is all focused on virtual influencers, and then one is really focused around just internet native social content.

[00:05:26] **Erin Riney:** In addition to all the reasons we listed earlier, Kevin and Shep had some reasons of their own for why Georgia is a great place to start your own business.

[00:05:32] Something they both agreed on that we didn't mention earlier was that Hartsfield Jackson Airport is in Atlanta, and it's actually the busiest airport in the world, but Georgia's largest employer as well. But let's hear it from Kevin himself, why having the airport here is such a big deal for entrepreneurship.

[00:05:46] **Berkeley Chandler:** In your opinion, why do you think Georgia is a good place to do business? Oh my

[00:05:49] **Kevin Planovsky:** gosh. Where do you start where do you start and where do you stop? There's so many reasons why Georgia is, has been and continues to be. And obviously if we're not careful, might run that, run that course cuz it's, it's getting hairy out there folks.

[00:06:02] Like, there's a lot of human beings walking around Georgia these days. No, we're not here a few years ago. So, um, I think Georgia has an exceptional, um, geographic benefit. Uh, the, all four seasons here, um, access to the airport. You're, you're in the south, but, but, but you're not far from the north. You're, you're, you're, you're not on the coastline, but you're not far from it.

[00:06:26] Um, and obviously the way that it's grown, the way that it Atlanta specifically, um, as an economic hub for Georgia has grown. Some might argue it is not been ideal, but it's afforded a lot of, um, mm-hmm. 360 degree growth around the city that has afforded a really great. I would say sort of obviously cost of living, um, and the benefits that come with that.

[00:06:50] Um, and I think lately just an immense amount of immense amount of talent and population.

[00:06:54] **Erin Riney:** When asked for his reasons as to why Georgia is an ideal place to do business. Shep focused more on Georgia, bringing in more people to work for offbeat, especially because they are such a specialized company.

[00:07:04] **Shep Ogden:** Yeah, Georgia has a few advantages in, in like a few different ways.

[00:07:07] So one is if you can do something like what we do mm-hmm. We're one of the few companies that do anything close to what we do and it's really easy to stand out if we're in New York or if we're in LA, um, it's a little bit different. There's some that do somewhat competitive stuff to us, and so you're not as, you know, quote unquote special out there.

[00:07:23] Mm-hmm. For Georgia, for us, we've been able to really become. You know, a proud Georgia company. And so I think that's one, one big thing for us, and it makes a lot of people wanna work for us. It helps us find clients around here. Mm-hmm. Um, and so I think that's, that's one big thing. Another thing is, I think cost of living too.

[00:07:39] So it's like you're able to convince people to move here. Mm-hmm. More easily. Like, we've had a lot of people move LA and move New York to actually come down here to work for us. Mm-hmm. Because cost of living, I mean, it's something that. They can get paid, still a competitive rate, but also have a, you know, a lower, lower cost of living for a growing company.

[00:07:56] Mm-hmm. That's, that's been a win-win. Yeah. And then depending on the industry, there's really good like tax credits. Yeah. Tax incentives here in, in Georgia. And so if it makes sense, definitely something to, something to tap into.

[00:08:07] **Berkeley Chandler:** So as we now know, Georgia excels in entrepreneurship for a number of reasons, but there wouldn't be nearly as many thriving businesses and entrepreneurs within Georgia if it wasn't for UGA.

[00:08:18] According to Kevin and Shep, UGA was a key component for them because of its ability to instill passion in its students and provide them with all the resources necessary to start their own businesses. For Kevin, it's all about the people.

[00:08:30] When you were a student at uga, how did your experiences here equip you to learn how to do that and be a good business owner?

[00:08:36] **Kevin Planovsky:** It's about the people. It really is. Um, you know, I hate to compare UGA to other, other university institutions around Georgia. But it's hard not to. I would say that I think people who go to the, to to, to Georgia Tech, for example, because it's in Atlanta, because it's so technology forward and things like, you know, VCs and investment and entrepreneurship are so tied to that type of practice. I feel like those folks get a lot more exposure by default to that type of thinking. People may even go to Georgia Tech because of the alignments of those types of things. And I know that through the entrepreneurship program, through the innovation district here at uga, um, there's a lot of work in that direction.

[00:09:19] But still by and large, I think that there's a lack of that connection here. So, um, so that's one, that's one area to improve. But the thing that UGA

did equip me with was just. I would say Dr. Shamp in his vision, um, he was a bit of a maverick and a bit of a rogue, and I know that probably caused, so, made some waves at Grady.

[00:09:40] Mm-hmm. Um, and he's not here anymore, but he was a big entrepreneurly-minded, you know, faculty member and that really stood out and it felt like that was the place I was supposed to be.

[00:09:50] **Berkeley Chandler:** And for Shep, it's all about the actionable skills that he learned while he was an undergrad student here.

[00:09:55] **Shep Ogden:** Yeah, so UGA, I think, I mean a few different ways.

[00:09:59] So one was, and we've talked a lot about the new media program. Mm-hmm. And that was one of the big ones, because I was studying finance, I was studying computer science, like I mentioned. Mm-hmm. And both of those were very like technical and. Yeah. Very technical, but then mm-hmm. New media helped me really blend those two together mm-hmm.

[00:10:17] To get a skillset set that I thought people needed today and people did need today. Mm-hmm. And it, it helped give me actionable skills, not just theory, not just like spreadsheets or not just like deep code. Like it was something that I could easily go out there and I could sell, and it helped give me skillsets that I could build off.

[00:10:33] **Erin Riney:** Aside from that, U G A is a driving force of entrepreneurship in the state of Georgia for another reason, and that is the Small Business Development Center. We're going to take a short break, but when we come back, we'll discuss the unique impact that the SBDC has on entrepreneurship in Georgia and talk with Michael Myers, who works as a senior business consultant there.

[00:11:03] **Berkeley Chandler:** Aside from the resources that UGA provides to future entrepreneurs mentioned by Shep and Kevin, the Small Business Development Center, our S B D C defends, UGA is a major contributor to entrepreneurship across the state because of their wide range of educational services that it offers to small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs.

[00:11:21] As one of Georgia's top providers of small business assistance, the SBDC has helped start over 1,900 businesses, which has created over 13,000 jobs and a little over 9 billion in total sales. It also has 18 locations across the

state, so no matter where you live within Georgia, you have access to the resources provided by the SBDC.

[00:11:42] We got to interview Michael Myers, who's worked as a senior business consultant there for nearly a decade, and we got to learn about his experience helping these small businesses.

[00:11:51] Uh, well, let's get started. Can you start us off by introducing yourself and telling us who you are and what you do for the Small Business Development Center?

[00:11:58] **Michael Myers:** All right. Uh, my name is Michael Myers. I'm, yeah, it really is Michael Myers. It's not my mom's fault. I was born 20 years. You know, before John Carpenter came up with the idea, so it's not unfortunately her naming me after a killer. Um, I've been with the Small Business Development Center for eight years.

[00:12:19] Um, my title is Senior Business Consultant and what I do is I work with small business that are either established or entrepreneurs, budding entrepreneurs that wanna start a business. Um, in my new role as a senior consultant, I work statewide. Uh, have some expertise, some past history in the medical practice field, franchising.

[00:12:45] Um, and I've done, um, a lot of capital raises, uh, for private equity money. That's, um, not as easy as going to a bank and, and getting, uh, money. In a traditional, uh, debt financing. Um, not saying that that's easy either, but, um mm-hmm. Cap raising capital that way is a little different. So yeah, I work with all kinds of people, uh, today.

[00:13:10] Um, right when you guys were walking in and the group was walking out, it was a UGA student who sells artwork online, uh, earlier today, was a guy that specializes in. Uh, a fitness gym for police officers, firemen, and, um, uh, you know, first responder type. Mm-hmm. You know, that, that have to, from that, yeah.

[00:13:34] Uh, yesterday I worked with a professor over on campus that's come up with a new cell therapy, um, to treat different, uh, diseases. So yeah, every day is a little bit.

[00:13:48] **Erin Riney:** As Michael mentions, the SBDC serves a wide range of entrepreneurs from those just starting out to those already established as well as a wide variety of businesses.

[00:13:56] In this role as senior business consultant, he has a lot of responsibility. He has extensive knowledge and franchising from both sides with his experience owning his own contract consulting firm, which he can then use to help these entrepreneurs to grow their own small business. We will turn it back to him to explain a little bit more about the SBDC and its overall mission.

[00:14:14] **Berkeley Chandler:** So we kind of already started getting into this, but can you just give us an overview of what the Small Business Development Center does and its primary goals?

[00:14:23] **Michael Myers:** Right. So we are a no-cost consulting for Georgians or people that are gonna already have a business or start a business in Georgia. So, Um, if somebody from South Carolina wanted me to work with them about starting a business in South Carolina, they would have to go to the South Carolina S B D C.

[00:14:45] **Berkeley Chandler:** Gotcha.

[00:14:46] **Michael Myers:** So we provide consulting services. Um, there's about 55, 60 people like myself, statewide and all these different offices. Mm-hmm. And we all have different backgrounds and expertise. And we work. Um, you know, if, if we come across something that we're not familiar with, We send out a group email to the state consultants and say, Hey, can somebody help me with this?

[00:15:13] It's either marketing or sales tax, or something along those lines. And, um, so we're able to help everybody and they don't have to be just starting. They couldn't be in business for a long time. I worked with. Group down in Madison, Georgia that the company started in 1870. Oh wow. It's still been in business.

[00:15:34] So the services we're able to offer people, um, one of my expertise is QuickBooks, so I help people with QuickBooks. Um, Worked with somebody today. Gonna sign somebody up, uh, later tomorrow morning. The lady has kind of a catastrophic, um, situation with her accounting. She's gonna come in and we've just about got it all taken care of, get her done before the end of the year.

[00:16:00] Um, get the, the books back on on target. Uh, we can offer marketing plans, we can put financial projections together. Uh, we have a lot of tools to help somebody if they need to go borrow money to buy a building or equipment or do something for their business. Um, I have a background in sales tax, so I do a, a lot of.

[00:16:25] Consulting with people on sales tax. Um, you know, there's a lot to know about that when you have to pay it, when you don't, how you can utilize sales tax exemption forms to, uh, save your business. Um, the money of paying sales tax for goods and services you buy. So, um, those are just kind of a, a tipping point.

[00:16:46] I don't think anybody's come to us with something that we haven't been able to. You know, contact our fellow consultants and come up with somebody that's done that at one time or another. We do a lot of business plans. Mm-hmm. Um, we do have business plan classes that we, um, teach, uh, one each year called, um, here in Athens called Start Smart.

[00:17:10] And it's a great, um, program. Doesn't cost very much money. You get done, you have a, um, business plan that you could submit if you're gonna try to raise money and start a new.

[00:17:22] **Berkeley Chandler:** So regardless of what an entrepreneur needs help with, the SBDC always seems to be able to figure it out. With locations across the state and experienced consultants working at each one, those who work with the SBDC know that they're in good hands.

[00:17:36] When we asked how the SBDC allows Georgia to thrive in the space, Michael had his own reasons.

[00:17:41] **Michael Myers:** Well, I think number one, um, tooting our own horn is, um, you know, we're a land grant school, so they give back, uh, a lot to S B D C as part of the public service and outreach college on campus. And, um, our, uh, vice president, the person in charge, Jennifer Fromm, she champions giving back to Georgians. It's, it, it's all about that. Um, I think the new innovation district to try to help, um, entrepreneurs as they're going through college and realize their dream, if they wanna own a business, help our faculty members, if they have a great idea, turn that into something that's business worthy.

[00:18:23] And then just the different, uh, outreach back to the, the communities, the different programs and classes and those type of things that we give back to the community. And then just having consultants statewide, that's no cost to meet with those folks and, uh, get some help with your business.

[00:18:40] **Berkeley Chandler:** Yeah. That's awesome. Um, and how would you say U G A equips people to take advantage of those unique opportunities you just touched on?

[00:18:48] **Michael Myers:** I, I, I think, um, it gets better every year. Um, that they just champion, um, ownership and entrepreneurship and, you know, putting this innovation district together. Five years ago it didn't exist.

[00:19:06] Now it's a major part of the campus, so we're here at the innovation district. The commercialization, licensing, and all that's at Terrell. Um, just right down the street is the entrepreneurship, uh, at Studio 225 and they continue. Um, To plan to grow this like, um, innovation district and ecosystem to be able to help as many people as possible.

[00:19:36] Um, I've heard, I don't know what the exact dates are, but they're gonna have an agricultural building that's gonna be built down real close to us now. One of these parking lots behind us. And it's gonna be all about agricultural entrepreneurship and innovation in the ag business, which, you know, just keeps bringing in every part of it.

[00:19:58] Um, every every discipline on campus. Yeah. From that standpoint.

[00:20:03] **Erin Riney:** So after hearing from all three of our guests and learning more about entrepreneurship within the state of Georgia, I think it's safe to say that it's a force within the state that not only creates jobs and generates. But instills confidence in its citizens that wanna take that next step of starting their own business.

[00:20:17] And like Berkeley mentioned earlier in the episode, entrepreneurship within the state would not be to the level that it is without UGA and the resources that it provides. I mean, programs like the NMI that teach a specialized skills. That was Shep experience. We also, um, learned more about meeting potential business partners at uga.

[00:20:34] That's something that Kevin learned in his undergrad. And then of course the small business development center, which Michael taught you guys all about in his experience working there for so many years.

[00:20:45] **Berkeley Chandler:** I still can't believe that you and Bailey had to go jump Shep's car before our interview with her. That was crazy.

[00:20:51] It was so weird cuz I was just like back in the room sitting there holding down the fort so I could let y'all back in. Yeah. And I just was like, when are they gonna get here? I don't know. And then just, I was like 30 minutes from just like, I hope they're okay. Yeah, it was, it was thought. No one was like kind of raining a little and I was like, oh no.

[00:21:06] **Erin Riney:** It was definitely an experience cuz. Remember if we told you this part? Mm-hmm. But the way that the GPS had us going is you needed to get like back on. Mm-hmm. Um, back the interstate, whatever we were. 85. Yeah. Back on 85. And then like. Come all the way back around. Oh. And then take the exit. So it could have been like a two minute drive, but there was just no way to get to him.

[00:21:32] Yeah. You know, cuz he was coming from the opposite direction.

[00:21:34] **Berkeley Chandler:** Because he was on an exit ramp right when it happened?

[00:21:36] **Erin Riney:** No, literally he was getting off of the exit. Yeah. That he was supposed to get out like five minutes from the building that we were conducting the interview in and he broke down. Yeah. In the exit lane, like he wasn't even still on 85.

[00:21:48] Yeah, it was definitely. Yeah. Okay.

[00:21:50] **Berkeley Chandler:** I glad everyone made it in one piece. Yes. Eventually

[00:21:53] **Erin Riney:** I feel like it hook like client, client relations to a whole new level, you know?

[00:21:58] **Berkeley Chandler:** Oh yeah. Y'all walked in and you guys were like already best friends with him. Him and I was like, oh my God, I have to interview him now.

[00:22:03] And I was the one person that wasn't there.

[00:22:05] **Erin Riney:** It definitely broke the ice. Yeah. But you know. Yeah. Since Shep is a graduate of uga mm-hmm. And a graduate of the nmi, we really wanted to conduct this interview with him, especially cuz Chris recommended him to us. Yeah. So, you know, we did everything we could to make it work and we did.

[00:22:22] Yeah. We conducted the interview and it was great and we learned so much. And now story to talk an extra hour. Only an extra hour. Good thing. None of us had anything that's place though. None of us had anything to be home for. Yeah. At least not right away, which was good.

[00:22:35] **Berkeley Chandler:** Yeah. It worked out. But yeah, I just thought it was really interesting getting to hear so many different perspectives about it between our three guests.

[00:22:43] Like I think kind of more what Shep was saying was kind of what I expected about being like, oh, the U, the resources that UGA offers. Mm-hmm. Like, you know, very factual kind of stuff. And obviously Michael over at the SBDC just had like all these numbers, all these facts and figures ready to pull out.

[00:22:58] But I really loved what Kevin said, especially about just like the community component. Exactly. And how. One of UGA's greatest strengths is how social it is. Mm-hmm. And the kind of personality that the people who go here have. Mm-hmm. Where it's just like very collaborative. Everyone's ready to jump in and do something.

[00:23:15] And it's all about like, what can I contribute to the bigger picture? Mm-hmm. And so there's not any like fighting over each other to be like the one person that stands out. It's like, what can we do together? Exactly. And I think that's really, really cool.

[00:23:27] **Erin Riney:** Yeah. No, I agree. When we decided that entrepreneurship was gonna be one of our topics, I had heard a little bit about the SBDC, so I definitely knew that was gonna be something we touched on heavily in that episode. Um, and obviously it, I mean, reflects very well on U G A, that we have something like that here mm-hmm. That we're able to extend all around the state of Georgia, not even within Athens, because they have so many offices. But like you said, it was really cool hearing some different perspectives and things that I've definitely recognized being a student at uga.

[00:23:57] Like how you said, it's extremely collaborative and I mean, yeah, everyone has come to UGA for a reason and everyone has a passion for something and wants to mm-hmm. Like, contribute. Um, but it's just something that I hadn't thought about, you know? Yeah. When we decided on this topic, I mean, incredibly important and it's served both Shep and Kevin extremely well in their careers.

[00:24:18] Having that, mm-hmm. The skills and the business partners, or even just the network to go back to and

[00:24:24] **Berkeley Chandler:** Exactly. And just like the camaraderie of being able to say that you are a UGA alum. Like I think Kevin and Shep actually both have touched on it at least once during their interviews. Just like even if you didn't know someone when you were at UGA together. Like meeting someone in your mid to late twenties and being like, oh, you went to uga. Mm-hmm. I went to uga. Yeah. And like instantly just have that bond and that friendship with each other and like that inherent trust and camaraderie. Yeah. Which I think is just so cool cuz especially like being about to graduate and feeling like, oh my gosh, where am I gonna end up?

[00:24:57] Yeah. Am I gonna even know anyone where I'm moving? And then realizing like, oh, well yeah, because there's an entire alumni network that's all throughout the nation. And just being able to say like, go dogs. Exactly. Someone immediately is gonna pick that up and be like, oh, you just gotta give you your friend.

[00:25:11] I,

[00:25:11] **Erin Riney:** I'll show you around. Yeah. Yeah. I feel like every time I wear a Georgia shirt, even if I'm not an Athens people Yeah. There's always someone. Yeah, yeah. Definitely. Yeah. Brings people together. Mm-hmm. Um, but yeah. Special thank you to Shep, Kevin, and Michael for being our guests for this episode.

[00:25:26] We really enjoyed all of your perspectives on entrepreneurship within the state of Georgia. Mm-hmm. And we have two more really cool guests lined up for next week's episode, which is gonna be all about music business, um, specifically in Atlanta, how the music industry became so big there mm-hmm. And how it's trickled into Athens and how uga, specifically the music business certificate, is able to contribute in a really big way to that industry.

[00:25:52] Yeah. So we'll see you guys next week. Woo.

[00:25:56] From the New Media Institute at the University of Georgia, thank you for listening to the Georgia On Your Mind Podcast, a series that explores the relationship between the state of Georgia and the university that lives within the heart of it. Tune in next week as we explore another area of expertise in Georgia.