

LET'S BE BLUNT:

A Straight Shooting Guide to Cannabis Marketing

UpHouse®

Don't try to be “the best” craft cannabis brand on the shelf – be the one that's different

Branding advice for standing out from the competition

By Kiirsten May



Kiirsten is the co-owner of UpHouse. She specializes in branding and helping organizations make their brands incomparable in their product category.

There's a lot of craft cannabis companies coming to market. Over the past year, we've had the opportunity to brand a dozen of them.

Branding is especially important in the cannabis industry, with many cultivators growing the same strains and many dispensaries selling the same brands.

In a crowded marketplace, you'll get more bang for your marketing buck when you strive to show customers how you're different from competitors, rather than trying to convince customers that your bud is the best of the best.

Curious about how to do this? Here's how to differentiate your cannabis brand from the others on the shelf.

Leverage your origin story

Whether it's the book you read to your kids at night or the plot of your favorite movie, humans love stories! We connect through stories and use them to understand each other. So what story led you to create your cannabis company?

We've met micro-cultivators who started a cannabis company to give their children a way to continue operating the family's century-old farm. Another cultivator started growing cannabis to create economic prosperity on their Indigenous reserve on the West coast. Another felt that there was a stigma around women consuming cannabis, and she wanted to overcome that stigma.

These stories will give customers a reason to believe in your company. Your story will reveal your brand values, and if customers share those values, they'll be more likely to choose your cannabis brand over others.

Wait, there's more →

Keep it simple

Nearly every craft cannabis company we met is growing high-THC strains, driving quality into every step of their growing methodology, and delivering a top-notch sensory experience that will delight cannaseurs. While these features may be true for your cannabis brand, you cannot differentiate yourself on quality alone. You'll get lost in the fray.

Instead, pick one or two features that are unique to your company.

It might be your family's century of farming experience. It might be your geographic location. It might be the fact that you place crystals in the growing rooms to imbue the plants with positive energy. These features will hook the customer's attention and help you stand out from the crowd.

Consistency is key

People don't like surprises when it comes to their purchase decisions. Many people conduct online research, read reviews or talk to friends before deciding to buy. Your branding plays a big role in setting that expectation, so when a customer chooses to buy your cannabis, the experience needs to fulfill their expectation. Once you've established your brand, you must walk it out consistently at every customer interaction.

A personal story, a few key selling features and a consistent experience are the building blocks of a strong brand. If you're struggling to carve out your share of the dispensary shelf, use your marketing channels to celebrate the features that make your cannabis brand different from every other. It's a reliable way to cut through the clutter.



CANNABIS CASE STUDY

Branding Western Canada's newest craft cultivators

Our client, Delta 9, reached out to see if we could find a way to help their micro-cultivator clients with visual branding. Each would need a unique logo, stationery and product packaging that told their story and differentiated them from competitors.

We worked with 10 micro-cultivators across Western Canada to brand their new companies. The feedback from the micros and Delta 9 was overwhelmingly positive (some even cried with joy when they received their brand package). The micros have embraced their new identities and are bringing them to life on store shelves, in social media and with cool merchandise.

DRY ISLAND
CRAFT CANNABIS

**Because
You Cann**
— CANNABIS CO.



PARADISE

PRAIRIE
CRAFT CANOPY



**DIRTY
HIPPIE**

CANNABIS CASE STUDY

Bringing a Nation's story to life

Ahahswinis Green Investments Ltd. is an economic development initiative of Hupačasath First Nation on Vancouver Island and a Delta 9 micro-cultivator. We worked with the group to develop a new name for their company: Longhouse Cannabis. The new name draws on the history of the Hupačasath Peoples and is easier for your average Canadian to pronounce.

We developed a new logo, visual identity, stationery and product packaging for Longhouse Cannabis. The board and council are thrilled with the end product and have returned to UpHouse for help building their website.



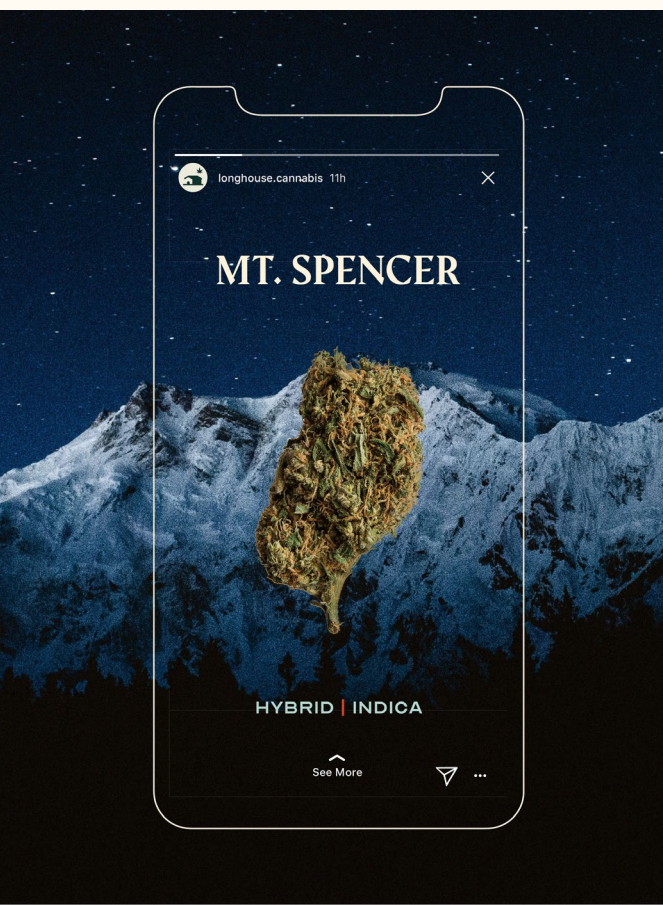
HAND
CRAFTED



BRITISH
COLUMBIA



FIRST
NATION
OWNED



Activate your neighborhood
to create advocates

7 marketing ideas for dispensaries

By Sheena Case



Sheena is the Art Director at UpHouse. She helps organizations bring their brand values to life through their customer touch points.

We've seen many neat dispensaries pop up in the last few years – both in the US and Canada.

There's plenty of creative opportunities to bring your brand to life in a retail setting. And in crowded markets where consumers have dozens of local dispensaries to choose from, the need to differentiate your brand is greater than ever.

Here are a few ideas to help your dispensary stand out and enrich the cannabis-buying experience. **Doing so will turn one-time patrons into loyal customers and advocates.**

Make your patio a community hub

Have a patio or outdoor space at your dispensary? Use it to draw in both first-time and current cannabis users. Look at offering it up to shelter pet meet-and-greets, musical performances, open mics, gardening demonstrations, perennial swaps and other events.

Encourage attendees and collaborators to share and tag social media content from the event.

Embrace “exploration”

There's lots to learn about cannabis, and that lack of knowledge can make some consumers hesitant to walk into a dispensary. Luckily, the intersection of community and exploration is fertile ground for customer engagement tactics. **Host scavenger hunts with prizes or offer a pedicab to encourage people to explore the neighborhood.** Your brand will make it safe for customers to explore uncharted territory – both in the area and in cannabis use.

Create explainer content

Often, dispensaries employ knowledgeable staff who can help customers select the right cannabis product for their goals. Bring this same experience online with Instagram Stories, YouTube videos and website content. Many consumers conduct research online before visiting a store or making a purchase. **By offering educational resources on your digital channels, you can help first-time visitors feel more at ease walking into your dispensary.**

Own the 8-minute trek

In crowded marketplaces, people won't travel further than 6-8 minutes to get to a cannabis store. Reward that 8-minute trek by creating and distributing 8-minute playlists, pep talks, comedy sets, meditations and nature sounds for customers.

Print a monthly community newspaper

Develop and print a simple community newsletter and give it away in stores. It will strengthen your dispensary's brand reputation as a friendly neighbor while getting your message into the hands of store visitors.

Poster your neighborhood

Use the physical spaces around your neighborhood to drive business to your dispensary. Run a poster campaign that features helpful community info (directions to parks, neighborhood facts, etc.) along with tear-away tabs that people can bring into the store for an incentive.

Unveil signature pieces by local artists

Is there a recognizable shape in your logo? Turn it into a work of art. Partner with a local artist to create a signature piece for each of your locations, and then invite customers to attend an unveiling. Installations such as this can encourage social media tagging, allowing your stores to leverage location-based Instagram searches.

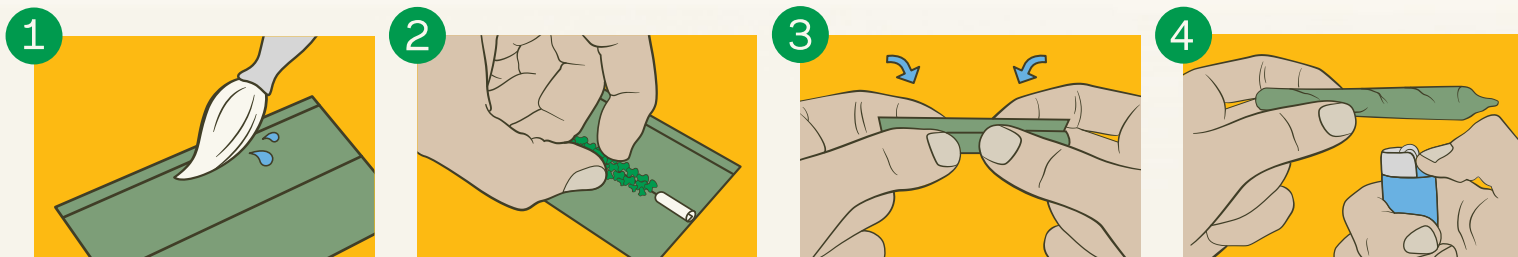
Want to take this idea one step further? Change up the artwork seasonally to draw people back to the store.

The brands we love most are the ones that go beyond a transaction to enrich our lives in some way. Bring this philosophy to your dispensary.

How can you enrich customers' lives and create a memorable store experience?

Doing so will help you differentiate your brand from competitors and turn your visitors into loyal customers and advocates.





CANNABIS CASE STUDY

Engaging a community for 4-20-2020

To celebrate 4/20, 2020, Delta 9 came to us with an interesting design task: create a joint-rolling handbook based on a vintage one they had come across. We created unique, retro illustrations with step-by-step rolling instructions. We illustrated 10 joints in total, from the beginner-friendly pinner to a signature $\Delta 9$ -shaped joint.

The printed handbook was a welcomed addition to Delta 9's curbside pick-up and delivery orders. Customers engaged by sharing their joint-rolling experiences and tagging Delta 9 on social media in photos of their own creations.



Become your B2B customer's favorite partner

Boost awareness of your B2B brand among end-users

By Alex Varricchio



Alex is a co-owner of UpHouse. He's an expert in building effective marketing strategies for organizations with complex sales networks.

The cannabis industry has been expanding rapidly with legalization, and there are new players entering every stage of the value chain.

If you're a B2B brand looking to grow, you've likely looked at ways you can generate pull-through demand (or grassroots demand) from the end customer.

An example would be a grow light manufacturer selling through a facility designer, wanting head growers to ask for your lights by name. Another would be a cultivator, selling through a dispensary, wanting shoppers to ask the sales staff for your strains.

There are several marketing challenges you need to overcome to drive awareness and demand for your brand among the end-user.

1. Incomplete brand experience design: the reseller or distributor is likely adapting your marketing materials for their purposes.
2. Minimal real estate for marketing messages: end-user touchpoints may be regulated by licensing authorities (such as cannabis product packaging).
3. Inventory overload and an ever-shrinking share-of-shelf: with more companies entering the industry, it's harder to gain brand recognition and awareness.
4. No control over end customer-facing sales team: at the end of the day, someone else is responsible for selling your product or service to the end-user.

Instead of blasting your B2B customers with more promotions, more incentives, louder signs and more information on each of your products, shift the way you look at the relationship. First, identify the ways they bring value to their customer, and then help them do this more effectively. Make their mission your own.

Their mission probably includes the following objectives:

1. Differentiating themselves from their competition
2. Staying relevant & up-to-date digitally
3. Staying on top of their marketing (they probably have lean teams too)
4. Adding lasting value to their customer
5. Staying profitable

These are the value centers on which you should focus your marketing and sales efforts. If you can help your B2B customers address these opportunities, you'll become their partner of choice, and they'll become your brand ambassadors to the end customer.

↓ **Here are some tactics to consider for your B2B marketing strategy.**

Build a strong brand and articulate your unique position

You need an extra-strength brand position when you are marketing and selling through someone else. Your brand will be diluted when it is sold by someone outside your team, so make sure you have a memorable name, high-impact visuals and a clear value proposition. You'll increase your B2B customer's likelihood of doing your brand justice when communicating with the end-user.

Develop your end-customer engagement strategy

Use your marketing channels, such as social media, to engage the end-user directly. Embrace the existence of the "middle man" (your B2B customer)

and the value they bring to your distribution channel. You'll make your B2B customer look good while encouraging the end-user to ask their sales rep about your brand.

Provide relevant business training

No matter the industry, the best partners are the ones who make your business stronger. Have you noticed any knowledge gaps among your B2B customers?

Facilitate training sessions on customer service, lean manufacturing, marketing, leadership, business resilience or any other helpful topic. Offering this training will show you're invested in your customer's success.

Provide tools for the end consumer

Are there sales tools you can develop and give to your B2B customer to use with the end-user? Look for ways to help your customers' sales team do their job more efficiently. Consider co-branding these tools, which will make your B2B customer more likely to adopt them.

White label content and offer digital marketing support

Your B2B customer likely needs a steady supply of fresh web and social media content just as much as you do. Consider white-labelling your content and providing it to them (neatly packaged up) to distribute on their own channels.

If you're a B2B brand looking to get close to the end-user, invest in a few marketing tactics to strengthen the distributor or reseller relationship. These companies are a center of influence for the end-user and can become advocates for your brand.

More and more organizations are reducing their agency spend and taking their marketing in-house.

The move comes with a lot of advantages – it's cost-effective, gives you greater control and leverages your product and industry knowledge.

But it also comes with some disadvantages. That's where UpHouse comes in – we'll collaborate where it counts and help you make the most out of in-house. We've designed our services to solve three challenges of modern marketing teams.

1 Too close to your own brand

No one knows your business better than you, but that proximity may limit your ability to see new opportunities. Plus, the stakes are high for your team. That pressure can stop marketers from pushing their brands to where they might go.

UpHouse brings the outsider's perspective needed for ideation and innovation. We also have the processes and expertise to support you in bringing those ideas to life, so they're not just a wish on a whiteboard.

2 Can't hire for every single skill

You've invested in building your in-house team, but it's nearly impossible to hire for every single skill needed to execute every single thing required of modern brands. You need a partner to fill in the skill gaps, not to duplicate your team.

UpHouse builds specific work plans around your team and then only offers what you're missing. If you've got designers, we won't design. If you've got traditional covered, we'll do digital (you get the idea).

3 Putting out fires, not building strategies

You're accountable to a lot of other departments, and as a result, your marketing plan may turn into a laundry list as you try to please everyone. In-house marketing teams may need help getting ahead of fires, focusing on strategy, making a smart plan and following through.

UpHouse creates strategic marketing work plans that you can implement with or without us. It's not a proposal for us to do more work later – it's everything you need for a successful year in one document.

Our cannabis marketing expertise by the numbers

Since Canada legalized cannabis in 2018, we've worked with dispensaries, cultivators and grow facility designers to help them differentiate their brands and engage customers.

11 micro-cultivator brands designed

4 cultivation systems modeled in 3D

10 joint-rolling tutorials illustrated

5 B2B sales and support brochures developed

3 years' worth of investor relations materials designed

100s of dispensary social media posts created
of POS, signage, swag and promotional pieces developed

The case for a Canadian marketing agency

American businesses can save 30% to 40% on agency fees by switching to a Canadian marketing agency.

Right now, \$1 US represents \$1.30 Canadian (CAD). That means you can save a portion of every dollar you spend with a Canadian agency.

We only charge you our regular Canadian agency fees (that we convert into USD before billing), so your invoice will come in roughly 30% below what you're used to paying with a US agency.

In a time of budget reviews, marketing cuts and closer scrutiny of your spending, in-house marketers need to find savings that won't sacrifice results. There's a solution that shaves down outside agency fees without compromising your creative output, and it's rather simple: switch to a Canadian ad agency.



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