

WEED OUT THE COMPETITION:

How to Stand Out in a Saturated Market

CANNABIS
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INTRODUCTION

Gone are the hush-hush days of sneaking cannabis into your jacket pocket or consuming behind dumpsters. The cannabis industry is booming in the United States. According to Bloomberg, the legal cannabis market in the US is expected to grow several times its current size to be worth a cool \$50 billion by 2026¹.

As legalization expands, state by state, the market continues to advance and innovate in ways we never thought possible in the Prohibition era. From California growers to New York delivery operators, entrepreneurs have been taking advantage of every opportunity to enter this rapidly growing industry.

The downside, however, is that these regional cannabis markets are becoming increasingly saturated. As quickly as dispensaries announce they've opened doors, they shut down because of the tremendous competition they're facing. Cannabis professionals know the biggest concern with opening a new cannabis business in a well-established legal state is how to stand out amongst the crowd.

The good thing about a saturated market is that there is guaranteed demand for the product. According to FlowHub, the percentage of U.S. adults who say they have tried cannabis is sitting at 52%, the highest measurement to date². Despite rising inflationary pressure and cost-saving behaviors, demand for cannabis remains resilient.

¹ Bloomberg, *Cannabis Industry Expected to Be Worth*.

² Flowhub, *Cannabis Industry Statistics for 2023 \$50 Billion by 2026*.



Of course, it would be naive to call the industry saturated as a whole.

While the cannabis market has seen significant growth in recent years, it is still in its early stages and there is a lot of potential for continued growth. However, some segments (such as flower or pre-rolls) may already be saturated in certain legal states.

Until recently, the legality and therefore, the legitimacy, of the cannabis industry has been widely questioned. As more states legalize or move to vote on the matter, federal legalization is looking more viable. Though it may remain some years away, it's important to look ahead in this fast-paced industry.

With consumers being inundated with option overwhelm and market players clamoring for attention, there is only one way to weed out the competition: branding.

As a marketing agency, we see hundreds of brands excited for the opportunity the cannabis market holds, but few are willing to get into the weeds and figure out how to differentiate themselves.

We get it. Having a business idea is exciting, but we want you to take that initial adrenaline of creativity and channel it into your brand strategy. Your branding draws people in.



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With an intentional strategy, it is easier than you think to set yourself apart from the crowd. A strong brand can help you stand out from the competition and establish your business as a trusted and reliable choice for customers.

In this e-book, we're taking decades of combined industry experience and sharing the step-by-step process to building a successful cannabis brand that will weed out the competition.

We'll be going over:

- Defining your overall brand and target audience
- Developing a clear brand message
- Creating a professional and cohesive visual identity
- Executing your brand cohesively across channels
- Delivering on your brand promise consistently (and compliantly)

Whether you're thinking about entering the saturated cannabis market or are already knee-deep in it, here's how to build a brand that will weed out your competitors and help you stand out from the crowd.



BRANDING EXPLAINED

From self-proclaimed experts to writers and content creators to various business publications, there are hundreds of different definitions and opinions as to what branding is. We could easily pick a fight with every single one of them and break down the arguments, but we'll spare you the drama.

Let's start with a simple overview of what branding is NOT.

Branding is not a name, logo, tagline, or product/service. These are elements of a brand, but they do not adequately represent what a "brand" really is.

Branding is not a website, social media account, or ad campaign. These are ways branding is executed online.

A brand is not an "aesthetic" or a "vibe." In fact, it goes well beyond that.

What is branding?

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines branding as, "the promoting of a product or service by identifying it with a particular brand."³ Helpful, right?

Industry-leading marketing resource Hubspot says, "Branding has two different meanings. First, branding is the process of creating a brand for a company. Second, branding is the materials that support a brand, like a logo, tagline, visual design, or tone of voice."⁴ Getting warmer...

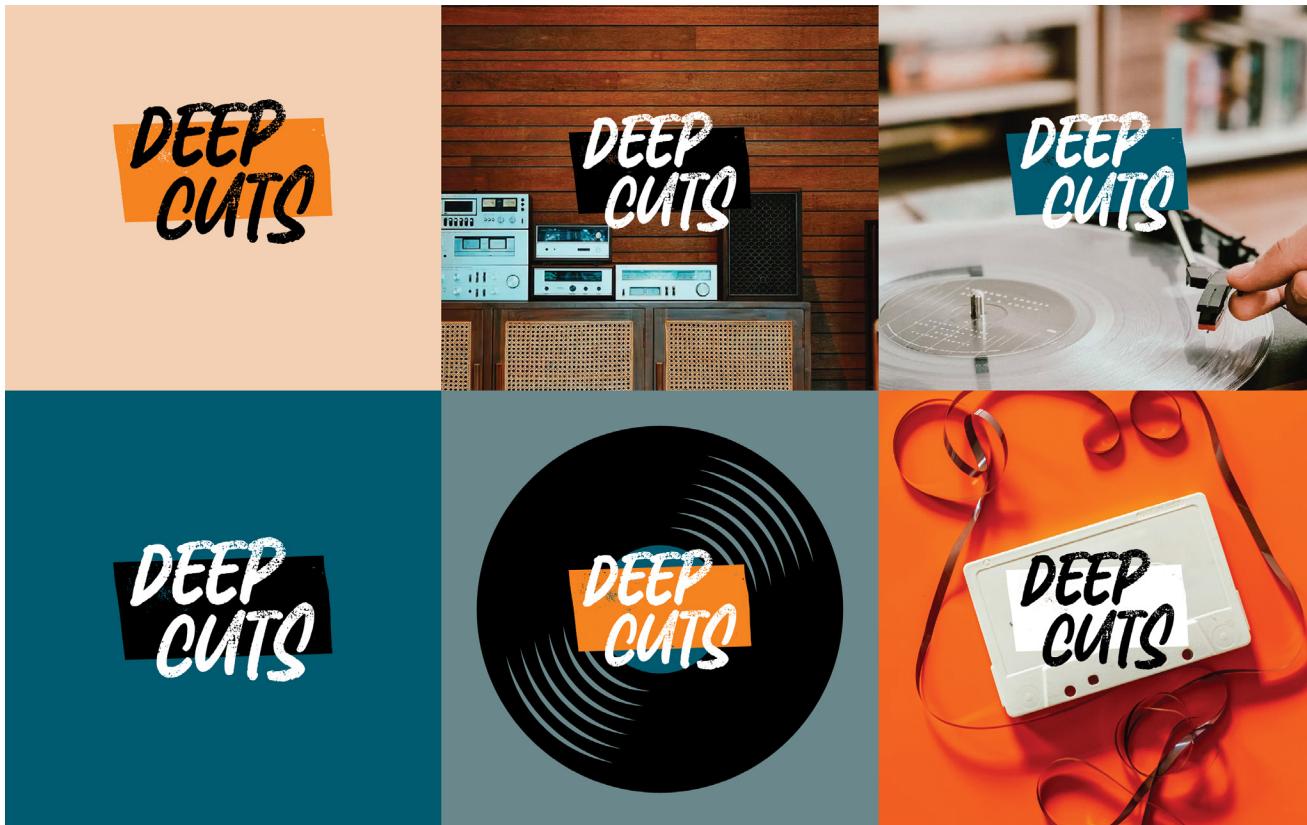
Cannabis marketer David A. Paleschuck says in *Branding Bud*, "I see a brand as being a subtle blend between how a company represents itself and how the public perceives that representation."⁵ Now *that*, we can get behind.

³ Merriam-Webster, *Branding Definition & Meaning*.

⁴ Hubspot, *The Ultimate Guide to Branding in 2023*.

⁵ Paleschuck, *Branding Bud*, Page IX.





The long and the short of it is that branding is a blend of several different elements. It is an artful and intentional process that is rooted in a human-first approach.

Branding involves identifying your target audience, selecting a niche for your business, aligning with core values and a mission statement, crafting a brand purpose and story, developing messaging and a distinct voice, and designing a visual identity.

Building a strong brand is an essential aspect of any business, as it can help you stand out in a saturated market and establish trust and credibility with your customers. We'll dive deeper into each step of the branding process throughout this e-book



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THE POWER OF BRANDING

so you can start to refine your business ideas into a stand-out brand. If you took two pairs of the exact same shoe and put an Adidas logo on one and a Nike logo on the other, do you think it would influence which pair the customer selected?

What if you took the same scarf and priced it one way because it was “hand-stitched” but priced it differently (read: hundreds of more dollars) after slapping a Burberry logo on it? Would one scarf be more popular than the other?

This is the power of branding. You could take the exact same two products, change nothing but the logo attached – and the entire shopping experience changes. In other words, the way consumers make their purchase decisions changes based on your branding.

Done correctly, you’ll have a magnetic and influential brand on your hands; one that you can rally a community around, one that extends well beyond cannabis or your products.

Here are some of the benefits of a well-thought-out brand:

Cross-channel brand awareness

When you build a brand diligently, you will have a clear blueprint for all your marketing channels. Having a consistent message and image across these touchpoints will not only increase the visibility of your brand across channels but also make it more recognizable to consumers.

Credibility

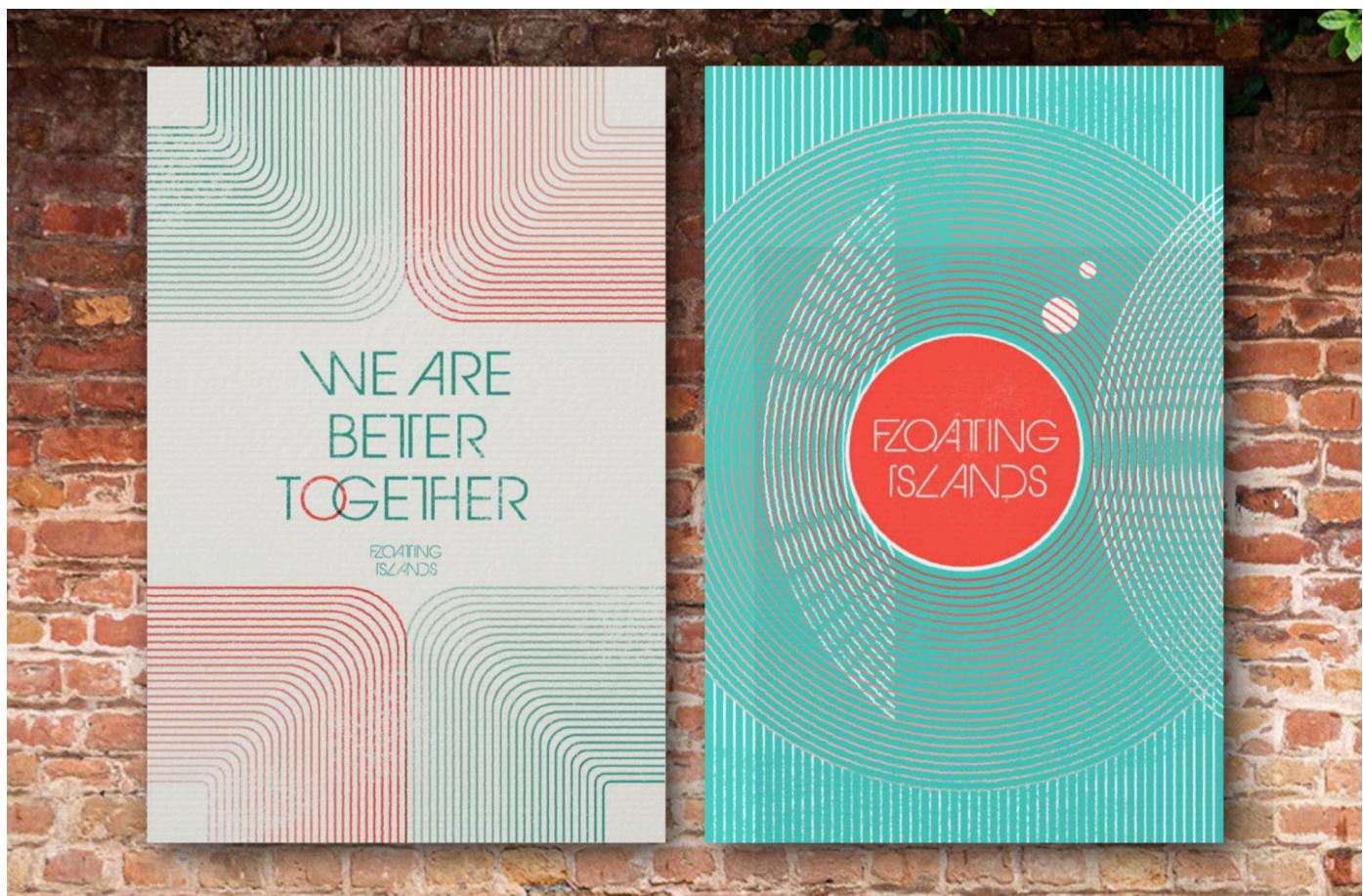
There is a reason people often reach for the name brand versus the generic one in pharmacies and drug stores – some want the perceived quality of the item, even if all the ingredients are the same.



A well-established brand can help your company establish trust and credibility with consumers based on what you stand for and how it's communicated.

Customer Loyalty

A brand focuses on creating an emotional connection with its customers. Doing so can lead to long-term loyalty which ultimately results in repeat business and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.



When you build a brand that others stand by, they become walking advertisements for your business, making it easier to acquire new customers and retain existing ones. More importantly, you'll have a community built around your brand, which will allow you the opportunity to create exciting campaigns and interactive experiences down the line.



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Pricing Power

From luxury fashion houses to big pharma, strong branding can allow a company to charge higher prices for its products or services.

Whether they are paying for your commitment to your core values and non-sales related practices or they are paying for the reputation of the brand itself, having a well-thought-out brand gives you increased pricing power. Plus, it doesn't hurt that customers are willing to pay a premium for a recognizable and reputable brand.

And of course, differentiation

Certain industries have an established status quo, a way of doing business that is rarely challenged. However, when that one competitor comes along making waves and disrupting everything as it has been known – they stand out. More than that, customers can appreciate the new option, even if it is as simple as the packaging or visual branding of a product.

A strong brand can help a company differentiate itself from its competitors and stand out in the marketplace, while still remaining true to its values and its relationship with consumers.



STEP ONE

DEFINING YOUR BRAND

There are two major components of branding: the tangible and the intangible. The tangible brand is what most people jump ahead to. Think, color palettes, logos, typography, etc. These are the elements of a brand that you see, touch, and feel; it's on the packaging, in the store, and splashed across digital marketing channels. They can be likened to the petals and leaves on a plant.

However, the intangible is the foundation of a strong, stand-out brand. This part of the brand is what allows the tangible brand to be a cohesive experience and includes elements such as the mission statement, brand story, core values, and so on. They can be likened to seeds, roots, and soil.

These abstract pieces are what make the difference between you growing in a field full of weeds shouting at cannabis consumers passing by and being the beautiful flower that they stop to pick for the keep.

Although the intangible brand may not be the most glamorous part of the branding process, it is the most essential. The power of branding goes beyond an “aesthetic” or a “vibe.” In fact, professional designers will tell you that these elements are critical to helping inform the right visual components to actually speak and resonate with your target audience.

Defining your brand starts with identifying what your business stands for and what makes it unique. This process involves workshopping your brand and team values, mission statement, and understanding your target audience – and they all work in tandem.

WHO IS CASTLE LEAF?

Castle Leaf is a Boston-based cannabis dispensary that specializes in the artistic experience around cannabis where everyone finds a place to belong.

As a pillar of the Boston Landing community, Castle Leaf has outreach, service, and inclusivity embedded into its brand.

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Target Audience + “Niching Down”

Surely, you’ve heard that selling to everyone is selling to no one. Whether it’s hyper-specific buyer personas or understanding the general demographics of your customers, it’s important to know what type of consumer you want to sell to.

This is also known as “niching down”. Identifying a niche is a fancy way of saying that you know exactly what market segment you want to be a part of. Doing so can involve processes like developing buyer personas or doing market research.

The idea is to determine who you are creating your brand for and what larger vision they need to be in alignment with. For instance, a THC seltzer meant to replace alcohol and make social settings more inclusive (think: Cann) is different from a THC seltzer that is intended to be a healthier alternative to alcohol (think: Wunder)



Product-wise, both of these brands are THC seltzers, and yet their niches are different. Therefore, their messaging, content, and overall branding will be different according to the values, needs, and desires of their specific target audiences.



Think back to that big-picture mission and who you enjoy serving most. Who can you help make the biggest impact? Maybe it's moms that want to ditch wine, athletes that want to recover in more effective ways, people who don't want to smoke but want to enjoy cannabis, etc.

Once you have this established, you can not only effectively design and develop a kick-ass product, but also market that product so much better than anyone else in the market.

Ask Yourself

What are you and your team passionate about? Maybe it's sustainability, being outdoors, enjoying music, or something else. Write it down.

Use these answers to inspire your unique purpose and mission. For instance, one of our clients, Lucky Green Ladies, is passionate about sustainability and is on a mission to mentor and support those who have been harmed by the War on Drugs.

The founder herself has a history with cannabis charges and wanted a more accessi-



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ble, discreet, and sustainable way for consumers to purchase cannabis. Thus was born a delivery-only retail model with intentional and strategic partnerships that allow for products and packaging that exceed industry standards when it comes to sustainability.

This brand is only targeting a specific group of consumers (those who are not interested in dispensaries) and combining it with a niche (sustainability) to build a fascinating brand story.



"It was so important to incorporate my personal story as part of my brand because I want my customers to feel connected to me and feel like they know Lucky Green Ladies personally. I think creating personal relationships with customers is extremely important, especially for a small business owner."

-Alissa Novak, Founder & CEO

Lucky Green Ladies may turn away people who are not interested in their environmental impact or those who enjoy the experience of visiting a dispensary. However, that's a good thing.

One of the biggest mistakes we see many clients make is that they are trying to please everyone. If the answer to "Who is your target audience?" is 'everyone,' there's a good chance you won't stand out from the crowd.

If your brand isn't turning some people away, then you're not doing it right.



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Mission Statement + Core Values

Once you know who you're serving and what your why is, you can go through the steps to define your purpose or mission statement, and core values.

Also known as your brand promise, these core values are the guiding principles for your company. These values shape company culture, influence decisions, and ultimately guide your customers in their interactions with your brand.

Think of these as the drivers of your entire brand. What will always remain important to you no matter how your business evolves?

Maybe it's sustainability, maybe it's exceeding industry standards, maybe it's diversity and inclusion, maybe it's destigmatizing cannabis – and so on. Get down to 3 core values that are the most important and write those down.

CORE VALUES

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Mission-Driven + Human-Centered

While you're thinking about core values, it's also important to consider exactly how mission-forward you want to be as a company. Today's consumer landscape looks drastically different than what it did pre-pandemic.

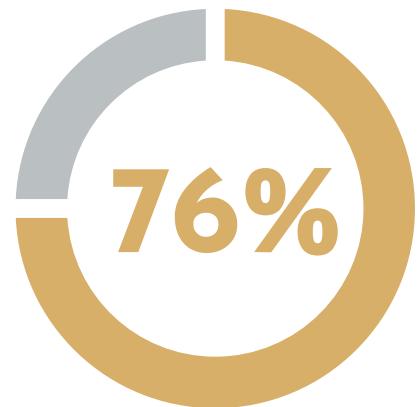


As younger, more digitally connected consumers enter the market, conscious or mindful consumerism is on the rise.

It's been well documented and observed that today's consumers (especially Gen Z) demand high-quality, sustainable, and ethically-sourced products and solutions. They have strong moral principles and do more than their due diligence on a company's values and practices before making a purchase decision.

More and more, we are seeing consumers use their purchasing power to drive up the value of ethical businesses and actively 'cancel' those that don't share and respect their values.

According to a 2021 Consumer Intelligence survey done by PwC, 76% of consumers say they will stop buying from companies that treat the environment, employees, or the community in which they operate poorly.⁶ In other words, people buy from businesses that share their values.



Charitable causes, community enrichment, sustainability, diversity and inclusion, and more are all possible ways to strengthen your brand and connect with your target audience. As an added bonus, it builds phenomenal company culture and usually makes your business much more fulfilling to run and/or be a part of.

Ask yourself, is it enough to comply with state-mandated "positive impact plans" or is it an opportunity to exceed those requirements and create meaningful, long-lasting change in the industry or beyond?

Assess how impactful potential ESG investments can be for your business and your team. Think beyond the bottom line: company ambition, stakeholder trust, brand, reputation, etc.

⁶ PwC, 2021 Consumer Intelligence Series Survey on ESG.



Decide whether or not there is a larger cause that you truly want to make an impact on through the platform you're building as a brand.

Should you choose to incorporate a pillar or core value in your brand around a social cause you care about, be sure to embed that message in everything you do as an organization.

Speak up for the things you believe in, make noise, and hold people and organizations accountable. Times have changed since businesses were viewed solely as corporate identities that benefited the economy. Society expects brands to have a voice – and to use it.

Brand Purpose + Story

As you can probably tell by now, there is a key difference between a brand and a business. The former prioritizes people, the latter prioritizes the bottom line.

A brand tells a story to help connect with an audience and maintain an influence. A business, on the other hand, only focuses on the product and how to increase margins or get people to spend money.

To stand out in a saturated market for the right reasons, you want to focus your attention on becoming a really powerful, impactful brand. Doing so means you have to tell a story that people care about.

This is often where we see brands scratch their heads. When asked “What is the overarching mission you are looking to achieve in your business?”, many of our branding clients will answer by saying, “increase sales.”

Of course, even a brand has to turn a profit to survive the market, but a stand-out brand is one that has a distinct purpose and storyline. If making money is all you’re out for, you may end up with a short tenure in the industry. (And trust us – we’ve seen it happen.)



Consumers nowadays want to connect with brands on things they also care about. Even if you come up with something generic, your customers will see right through it. Eric Layland, Founder of The Matters Group says, “Brands more likely to realize success will utilize brand strategies that respect and educate the consumer.”⁷

In other words, authenticity is key. Sit down with your team and figure out what it is that is driving you to work day and night on this brand. That will serve as the story that customers can connect to and resonate with – and help you stand out from the crowd.

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What do you stand for as a brand? What are your beliefs and principles?

- What overarching mission are you trying to accomplish in your business?

- Rather than “increase sales,” think of answers like “bring representation and diversity to the industry,” “advocate for veterans,” “destigmatize cannabis,” etc.

- How do you want to be perceived by your customers and stakeholders?

⁷ Paleschuck, *Branding Bud*, Page 46





STEP TWO

DEVELOPING YOUR BRAND PERSONALITY

Think of your favorite TV characters. From Chandler Bing to Walter White, they have distinct voices and personalities. You could quote them and people would likely know exactly what type of person they are in the show – and maybe even how they dress.

This is exactly what your brand personality does as well. They externally communicate the most important aspects of your brand: target audience, niche, brand story, mission statement, and core values.

In other words, if your brand was a person, everything we have discussed so far could be considered the motivations or drivers of your character. Next, you need to develop the personality and how those drivers and values are communicated to your audience, similar to how the voice, tone, clothing choices, and outward “vibe” of someone you meet on the streets may communicate the type of person they are.

Messaging + Voice

Brand messaging is the overall message you want to communicate with your brand. It is a culmination of all that you defined before. In other words, it's how you nurture the seeds you put down earlier to grow stems, leaves, and petals that are an extension of your niche, purpose, and values.

Brand voice, on the other hand, is a part of brand messaging. It is the tone of voice or the style in which you communicate your message. Apple and Dell may have similar messages, but their style is completely different.

At Cannabis Creative, we do extensive brand messaging guidelines to set you on the right path to success with your marketing strategy. It incorporates everything from your mission



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statement to a practical, custom voice chart to help maintain a consistent voice across channels.

In the same way, you may have similar – if not identical – messaging to another cannabis business. After all, it's a saturated industry. In order to stand out with your message, you have to get creative with your tone.

For instance, you could take a fun, witty approach to make cannabis more beginner-friendly while your competitor takes a buttoned-up, science-based approach. Both can stand out with distinctly different audiences.

Think about brands in the cannabis industry, as well as other industries, and see what personalities and voices resonate with you. Don't be afraid to round out a distinct voice and tone, even if it feels quirky or you're not seeing your competitors do the same.



As the market gets increasingly saturated with bland voices and predictable aesthetics, your brand is sure to stand out simply by going against the grain.

Developing a strong brand voice is important as it helps to differentiate a brand from competitors, reinforce messaging and values, and create a strong emotional connection with customers.



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Given that crafting a distinct brand voice is a deeply creative process, there is no tried and true formula, but here are some questions that can help:

- Who is your ideal customer, and what are their preferences, values, and needs? If they want a luxury experience but value hand-holding during the purchase experience, you can play around with a peaceful or empathetic voice.

- How would you describe your brand's personality? Friendly, professional, humorous, authoritative, etc. Make sure those qualities come out in the voice.

- If your brand was a human and it was talking to your customers, how would you want the customers to feel during the conversation?



Of course, your messaging and voice need to align with your visuals as well. If you’re taking the fun, witty approach, your website should not be black and white and super corporate-looking. And if you’re taking the professional, buttoned-up approach, there’s no sense in having a quirky, kitschy-looking website.

This is where your visual identity comes in.

Visual Identity

The visual identity of your brand is what the majority of people focus most heavily on when they’re first starting a business: logos, fonts, color palettes, and photography. These elements are used consistently across all touchpoints of the brand, such as websites, advertising, packaging, and products, to create a strong and recognizable visual representation for your customers.

The goal of visual identity is to communicate your brand’s values, personality, and messaging to consumers and distinguish it from those of your competitors. Therefore, it’s important that your visual identity is not informed by your personal preference or purely by the “vibe” and “aesthetic” of your brand, but rather by the foundation you’ve now crafted from step one of this e-book.

Logos

A logo is the design that represents your business at the top level. It functions as the centerpiece of your visual identity as it will appear across both online and offline touchpoints, such as your website, product packaging, and more,

A good logo should convey the values, personality, and messaging of the brand it represents. In other words, it needs to communicate the overall feeling that you aim to evoke as a brand.



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There are five principles of a good cannabis logo design:

1 Simple

Your logo should be distinct without being overdrawn. Consider the different use cases – storefront, packaging, merchandise, etc. Avoid a busy logo and stick to something that feels representative of your core values and overall personality.

2 Memorable

Logos are meant to evoke feelings through the design, stylistic treatment, colors, etc. When you see the Yves Saint Laurent logo, you get a feeling of sleek, timeless luxury. In the same way, your logo should be memorable by evoking a feeling that aligns with your brand foundation.

3 Timeless

A practical logo should endure changes in the industry. As cannabis becomes more advanced, we may see brands move away from on-the-nose imagery around the plant. Ask yourself, will the logo still be adequate in 10, 20, or 50 years without having to make drastic changes?

4 Versatile

As the centerpiece of your visual identity, you want your logo to stand out across a variety of applications. For instance, it should work at the size of a business card as well as a billboard. Ensure that the design of your logo can be utilized with flexibility.

5 Compliant

There are varying rules and regulations around your logo design based on your state. It should not be appealing to children and, in some states, you cannot feature a cannabis leaf! For the most part, you'll want to avoid cartoon-style visuals or animals. It is also a good idea to avoid cannabis leaves or even the word “cannabis” itself. Look into your state policies and guide your creative direction accordingly.



Fonts + Type Suite

A type suite is a system of typographical choices for a brand, including specific typefaces, font weights, sizes, and styles that are used consistently across different marketing channels, such as headers, body copy, and so on.

The type suite is a key part of a brand's visual identity, as it helps to convey the brand's personality and tone. For instance, you could use bold and editorial-like fonts for a brand that wants to be an advocate and make some noise or you could use smooth, flowing, modern fonts for a more peaceful, luxurious feel.

A well-designed type suite can make a brand appear modern, classic, sophisticated, playful, and so on, depending on the typographical choices made. There are three principles of a good cannabis font selection:

Legibility

Choose a font that is easy to read. The space between different letters and numbers should be enough to skim. There are tons of fonts out there that can add some interesting personality to your brand without forcing your customers to squint to make out the content of your message. It also makes your brand accessible to those using screen readers or dealing with visual impairments.

Tone

The font you choose should reflect the tone and personality of your brand. Each font and font style brings different

TYPOGRAPHY

CARLSON SCRIPT

Carlson Script is our logo typeface. We also use it sparingly to help punctuate brand statements.



KNOCKOUT

KNOCKOUT HTF34 JUNIOR SUMO IS USED FOR KEY INFORMATION, HEADLINES, AND CALLS TO ACTION.



characteristics to the table, so choose wisely. For instance, serif fonts are considered to be stable, responsible, and dependable.

You will find some serifs are blocky while others are rounded and subtle. On the other hand, sans-serif fonts are considered to be modern, relatable, and easygoing. With this in mind, a formal or traditional brand might choose a serif font, while a younger, more playful brand might choose a sans-serif font.

In combination, all these elements give off different messages: elegance and sophistication versus brightness and altruism. These differences in typeface personalities will not only affect your designs but also the tone of your messaging and ultimately, the way your customers interpret the subtleties.

Functionality

Font is one of the more practical aspects of your visual branding. Consider the functionality of your selected font in different contexts. Will it work well on a website, on your packaging, and social media?



Color Palettes

Color is a deeply psychological choice when it comes to your visual brand. In fact, color psychology is a whole different can of worms that would require an e-book of its own! The long and the short of it is that color, like the other visual elements, is chosen to reflect tone, personality, and emotions.

It is part of why so many brands in the cannabis industry lean into the whole “green” color scheme. However, it’s not just cannabis. Take a stroll down your local Target and you’ll see that so many product segments look almost identical.



Sunscreen bottles are often blue and yellow or yellow and white. Lip products are always some shade of pink or red. Even if you open your phone, you'll see a lot of search engines and social media apps are blue (Facebook, Safari, Internet Explorer, Twitter, etc.).

Regardless of the industry, it seems that everyone is trying to do the same thing – and there are two sides to the story that are worth acknowledging.

First, it's not always a bad thing to go for the “expected” colors. It's often the obvious choice, making it easy for consumers to understand the message. If you use green as a dispensary, they can easily understand that you're likely selling cannabis products and an overall more plant-touching business than, say, a B2B service like a cannabis marketing firm.

Second is that deviating from those colors will absolutely make an impression. For instance, many cosmetics, skincare, or hair care products will use a mix of color and product packaging to make a statement on the shelves. If you're a cannabis brand using red and gold instead of green when all your competitors are using green, it will draw the eyes of your customers.

With that being said, there is never a correct way when it comes to selecting your colors. Think of it simply as a dial (and only one of many) that you can adjust to infuse personality into your brand.



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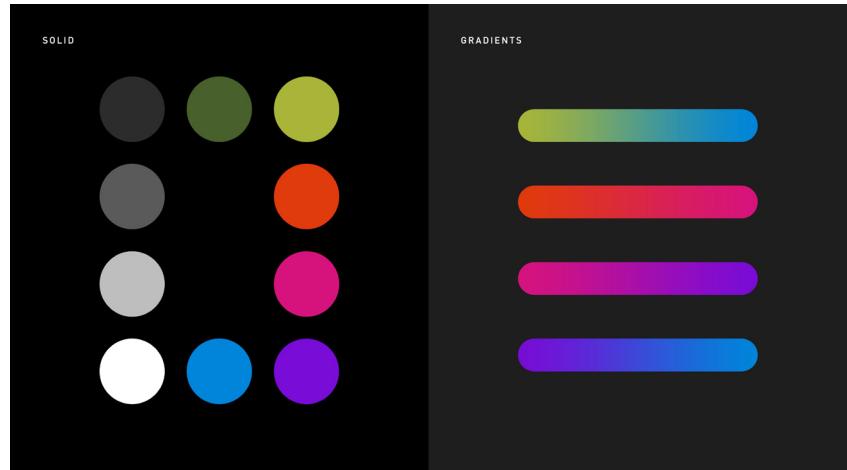
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Still, there are three general principles you can keep in mind for a good cannabis brand color palette selection:

Tone + Personality

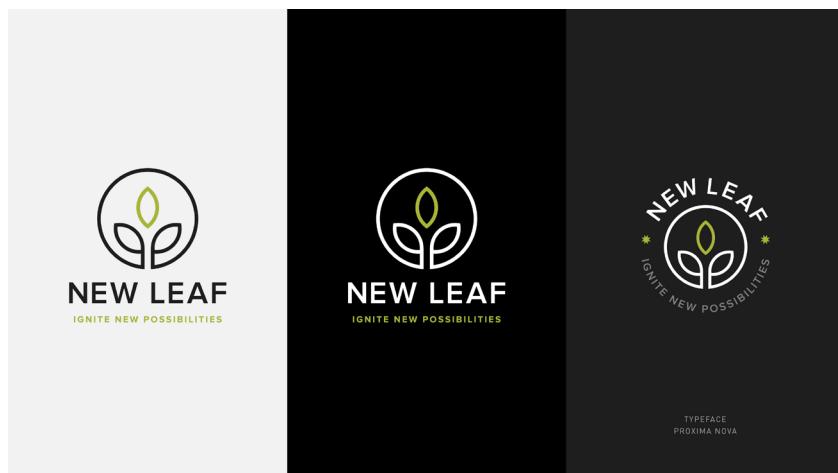
Choose colors that reflect the tone and personality of your brand. For example, bright, bold colors might be appropriate for a youthful, energetic brand, while more muted or neutral colors might be better for a more traditional or upscale brand.



Whatever emotion it is that you want to evoke in your customers, think of the colors and shades that align with that emotion.

Audience Alignment

It's important to decenter yourself during this process. Consider the preferences and associations of your target audience when choosing colors. Different colors can evoke different emotions and meanings, so it's important to choose colors that resonate with your audience.



Compatibility

Consider the compatibility of the colors with your overall design aesthetic and the other elements of your branding, such as fonts



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and graphics. You should also be sure to observe the way each of the colors in your palette works together.

Photography

Typically, people think the visual brand ends with logos, fonts, and color palettes. However, photography can play a significant role in brand strategy by helping to visually communicate the values, personality, and message of a brand more realistically – especially for cannabis brands.



Imagery can be used in a variety of marketing materials, such as website design, social media posts, and print advertisements, particularly to communicate the lifestyle elements of a brand: the type of people you are targeting, the look and feel of your products in a day-to-day setting, and so on.

This is powerful for cannabis brands that often have to be careful about how they showcase products or whether the plant or product is shown at all. Some compliance teams will guide brands away from depicting the act of smoking in an image while others are willing to be more flexible.

There is a lot to consider as it relates to cannabis marketing compliance. However, brand photography can help supplement the gaps that are left behind by telling the story of your brand or product experience.

Imagery creates a cohesive feel across channels and communicates your overall style in another way. In many cases, photography can help drive the visual identity home.

For instance, if you're running a summer campaign around how cannabis and sum-



mer activities pair well, you'll want to incorporate imagery that goes well beyond stock photos.

Once you establish the design basics above, photography is a critical piece of the puzzle. Particularly with how restricted cannabis is as an industry, you'll often find that brands are using the exact same handful of stock photography.

In other words, professional on-brand photography is essential if you want your brand to stand out in the saturated market. Take a look at brands like CANN or Cookies – they are creating recognizable, memorable campaigns through the seamless blend of their visual identity elements: colors, logos, fonts, and images.

It's important to carefully consider the types of photography used in your brand's marketing materials, as they can have a big impact on the image and perception of the brand. Similar to fonts, there are so many working elements of photography that come into play to achieve a certain "mood," such as:

- Lighting and shadows
- Background
- Colors and textures
- Props and models
- And more!



If you are not familiar with how each of these elements works together, we highly recommend working with an agency like ours with professional photographers to help you take your brand that extra mile to help it stand out.



Brand Archetypes

With all the information you've gathered so far – target audience, purpose, core values, brand message, voice, and visual identity – you have elements of a brand. Put together, these elements create a specific “personality.”

As previously discussed, brand personality refers to the set of characteristics associated with a brand. It is the way a brand speaks, behaves, and presents itself; it also has a set of values and emotions that are associated with it. All these elements together help to create an emotional connection with the target audience.

Again, you want to imagine your brand as its own character.

Brand archetypes categorize patterns across different personalities. First introduced by esteemed psychologist Carl Jung, archetypes help in understanding what influences human behavior. You can find archetypes throughout our societal culture, across films, books – and brands.

In other words, they're like an MBTI type for a brand.

Jung introduced 12 archetypes that can be used as representations of 12 brand personalities. Of course, your brand may live between two of these archetypes, but they can be helpful to study to identify patterns and see what foundational personality traits align with your team and your target audience.

Let's dive into them:



INNOCENT

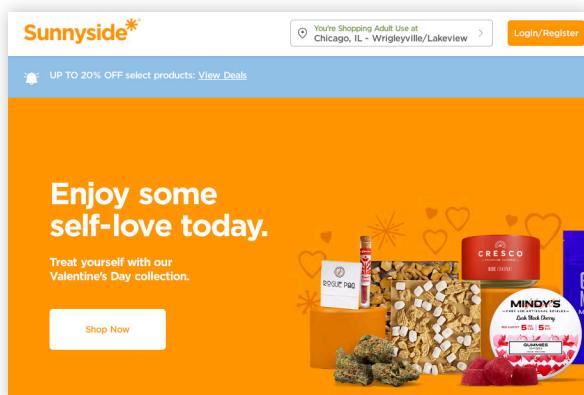
The “Innocent” is a light, bright brand with a positive outlook. They tend to evoke feelings of comfort and relief. You’ll often see the archetype used in spa brands, fresh or organic food brands, cosmetics, and more. When it comes to cannabis, you can see this in the CBD space or more relaxed cannabis brands, especially those based in the West Coast.

Characteristics:

- Optimistic
- Naive
- Utopian outlook
- Dreamer
- Prioritizes morality

Examples:

- [Papa & Barkley](#)
- [Sunnyside* Dispensary](#)



SAGE

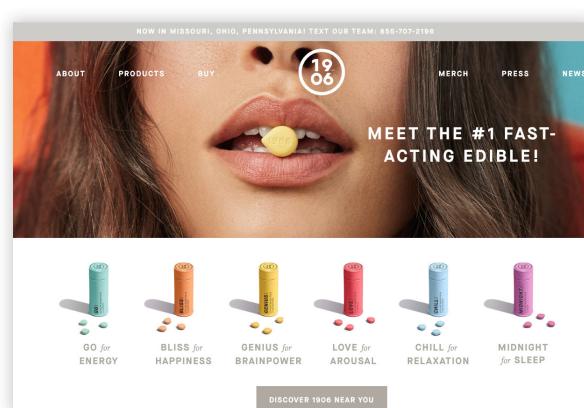
The “Sage” is a serious but wise brand seeking to highlight truth or science. These brands tend to evoke a feeling of security and value showcasing thought leadership and transparency. Many B2B brands take on this archetype, such as consultants. You may see this in certain publication brands, and even in more science-driven cannabis businesses.

Characteristics:

- Seeking truth, knowledge, wisdom
- Scholar
- Researcher
- Mentor/teacher
- Prioritizes truthfulness + transparency

Examples:

- [MG Mag](#)
- [NCIA](#)
- [1906](#)



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EXPLORER

The “Explorer” is an adventurous brand that tends to go against the grain. They value going down the road less traveled and are almost always an outdoorsy brand. This is a great archetype for cannabis brands to take on given the obvious relationship with nature. You often see this played out in outdoorsy brands, such as REI or Patagonia.

Characteristics:

- Discovery
- Connection with nature
- Adventurer
- Rebel
- Rugged
- Prioritizes exploration and hates the idea of not growing or being trapped

Examples:

- [East Coast Cannabis](#)
- [WYLD](#)
- [Highway Cannabis](#)



OUTLAW

The “Outlaw” is a rough and tough type of brand. These brands evoke a feeling of strength or edginess and tend to focus on challenging authority or the status quo. You may see these often in tattoos and body piercings shops. This archetype is also heavily seen in the cannabis industry due to the stigmatization of cannabis and the mission of brands to break that down.

Characteristics:

- Rule breaker
- Breaking stigmas
- Revolting
- Risk taker
- Brave

Examples:

- [Last Prisoner Project](#)
- [Willie's Reserve](#)



MAGICIAN

The “Magician” is a mystical brand that values healing and medicine. These brands often evoke a feeling of safety and inspire hope in their customers. This is another brand archetype you see a lot in the cannabis industry, particularly on the medical dispensary side.

Characteristics:

- Visionary
- Big dreamer
- Healer
- Mysterious

Examples:

- [Recess](#)
- [Barbari](#)



HERO

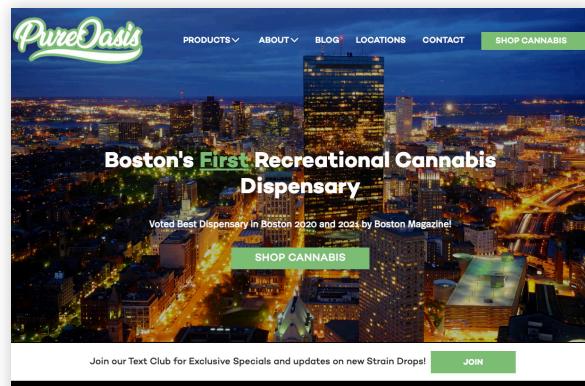
“Hero” brands are known for their candor and honesty. They are often associated with high-quality products that help the everyday person. It is common to see this archetype used in sports brands, such as Nike and Adidas. When it comes to the cannabis industry, you may see this in mission-driven brands and dispensaries.

Characteristics:

- Good over evil
- Courageous
- Bold
- Invested in the underdog

Examples:

- [Pure Oasis](#)
- [Beam](#)



LOVER

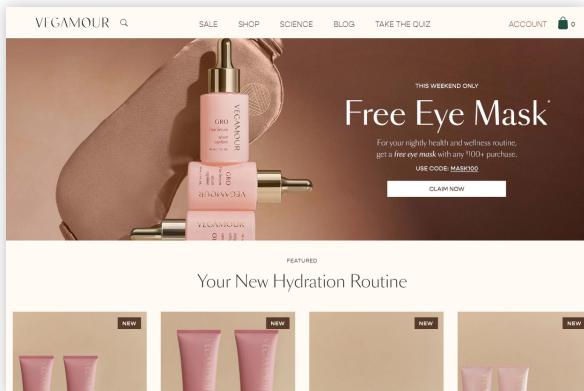
“Lover” brands are known to value relationships above all. They prioritize making customers feel taken care of as friends and often go out of their way to show gratitude to their audience. Many luxury brands will take on this archetype, as well as those that cater to women as primary customers, such as Victoria’s Secret or Chanel. In the cannabis industry, we often see this in CBD brands, particularly those that cater to women or couples.

Characteristics:

- People-driven
- Intimate/sensual
- Enthusiastic
- Poetic
- Focus on routines + rituals

Examples:

- [FORIA](#)
- [Vegamour](#)
- [Phasey](#)



JESTER

The “Jester” brand puts entertainment first. Think, Old Spice or Geico. These brands value originality and tend to take a “life is a playground” approach to their marketing and brand strategy. This archetype tends to be found in cannabis brands that look to position cannabis as a way to try something new or replace a norm in society.

Characteristics:

- Fun
- Energetic / “Live it up” approach
- Entertainer
- Comedian
- Wild
- Original or One-of-a-Kind

Examples:

- [TeeHC Open](#)
- [CANN](#)



EVERYMAN

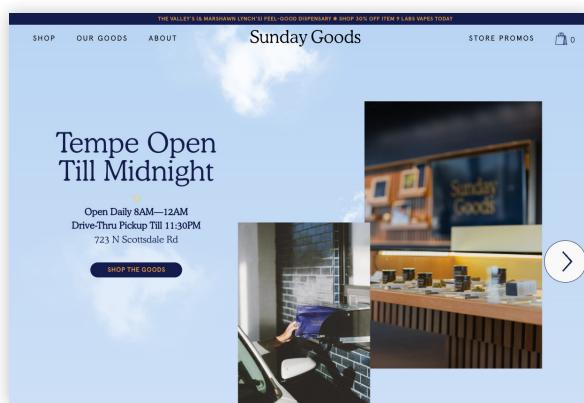
The “Everyman” tends to be seen as a value-driven brand. These brands are known for their practicality and evoke a strong feeling of empathy. You often see this in home goods or family-targeted items, such as Target or Ikea.

Characteristics:

- Equality
- Relatable
- For the average person
- Everyday routine
- No-nonsense
- Value-driven

Examples:

- [Grow Generation](#)
- [Sunday Goods](#)



CAREGIVER

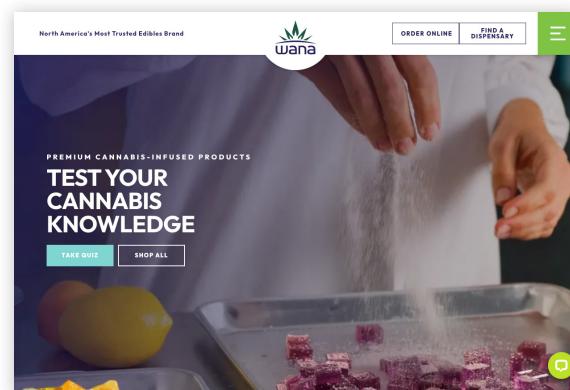
“Caregiver” brands are protective, highly competent brands. These tend to be highly respected brands that evoke a sense of reassurance and confidence in their customers, such as UNICEF or Toms. In cannabis, we often see this with doctor-led brands and dispensaries, as well as more medical-leaning brands.

Characteristics:

- Altruist
- Protective
- Supporter
- Compassionate
- Reassuring

Examples:

- [Potli](#)
- [EO](#)
- [Wana](#)



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RULER

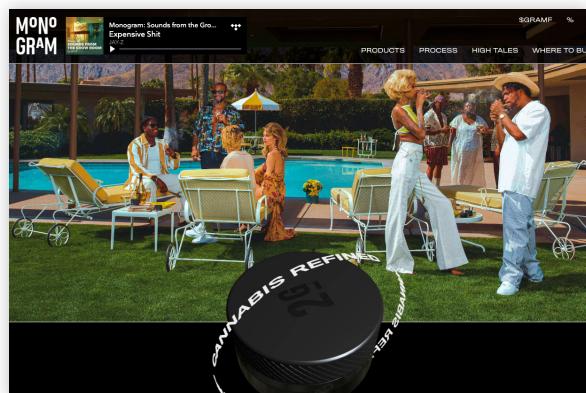
“Rulers” are authoritative, buttoned-up brands. They tend to have an air of luxury around them and pride themselves on being savvy and well-connected. Many luxury brands tend to take on this archetype, such as Rolex or Mercedes. Within the cannabis industry, you can see this archetype being played out in luxury, celebrity brands.

Characteristics:

- Polished
- Authoritative
- Doesn't like chaos
- Prioritizes order and rules
- Commanding
- Dominant
- Buttoned-up

Examples:

- [Monogram](#)
- [Burb](#)



CREATOR

“Creator” brands are, as the name suggests, lead by creativity. They are both a dreamer and a doer and work tirelessly to bring their ideas to life. You can often see this in innovative tech brands or children's creativity brands, such as Lego, Apple, or Adobe. In the cannabis industry, you'll find this archetype with creative, artistic brands.

Characteristics:

- Innovative
- Inventor
- New/original
- Enduring
- Expression-oriented

Examples:

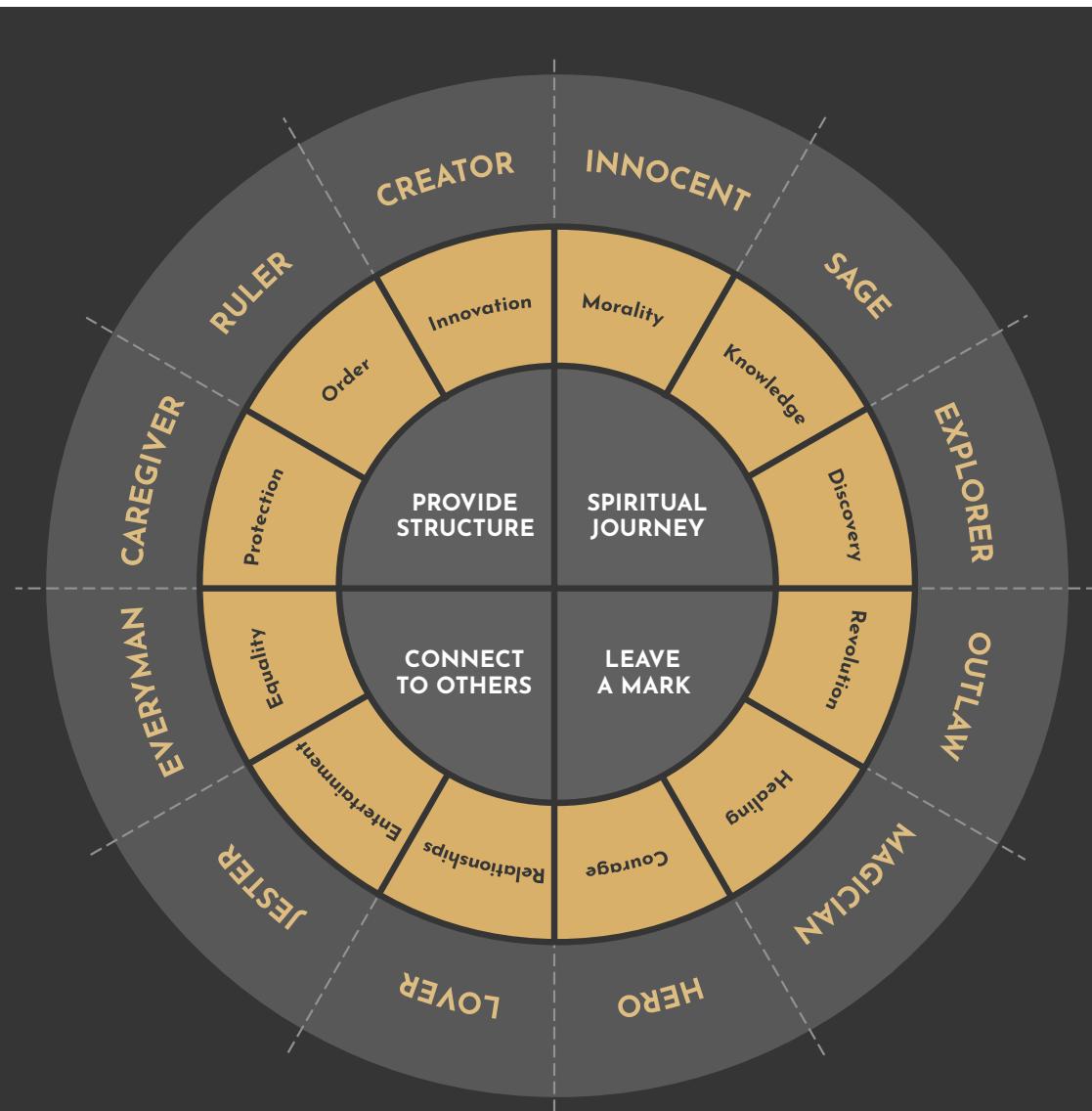
- [Mantis](#)
- [Houseplant](#)



In the book *Branding Bud* by David A. Paleschuck, 14 cannabis-specific archetypes are also outlined.⁸ While these can certainly be used as a reference point, it is worth noting that these industry-specific archetypes will continue to evolve, merely as a result of legalization status and establishment of regional industries.

As the industry advances, we will see cannabis-specific archetypes slowly turn into one of Jung's 12 archetypes (or some version/combination of them). Ultimately, this means investing in the future and creating a brand that fits what is to come – rather than what is now.

BRAND ARCHETYPES



⁸ Paleschuck, *Branding Bud*, Pages 167-71.





STEP THREE IMPLEMENTING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY

Now that you have extensively worked through the tangible and intangible aspects of your brand, you have a fleshed-out brand strategy on your hands. From here, you need to create a plan to communicate and reinforce your brand strategy across all the different customer touchpoints.

This can include things like marketing, paid advertising, public relations, promotions, packaging, customer service, in-store experience, and more. The goal of a brand strategy is to establish a clear and recognizable brand identity that differentiates the company or product from its competitors and resonates with its target audience.

Our e-books *The Secrets to Successful Cannabis Marketing* and *The Ultimate Guide to CBD Marketing* cover industry-specific marketing best practices to push out your brand on each digital marketing channel. However, it is worth noting that implementing your brand strategy should account for your brand experience to be cohesive across channels.

What does it mean to execute a brand cohesively?

Executing a brand cohesively means creating a unified representation of your brand across all your channels, from advertising to packaging to websites to products, and more.

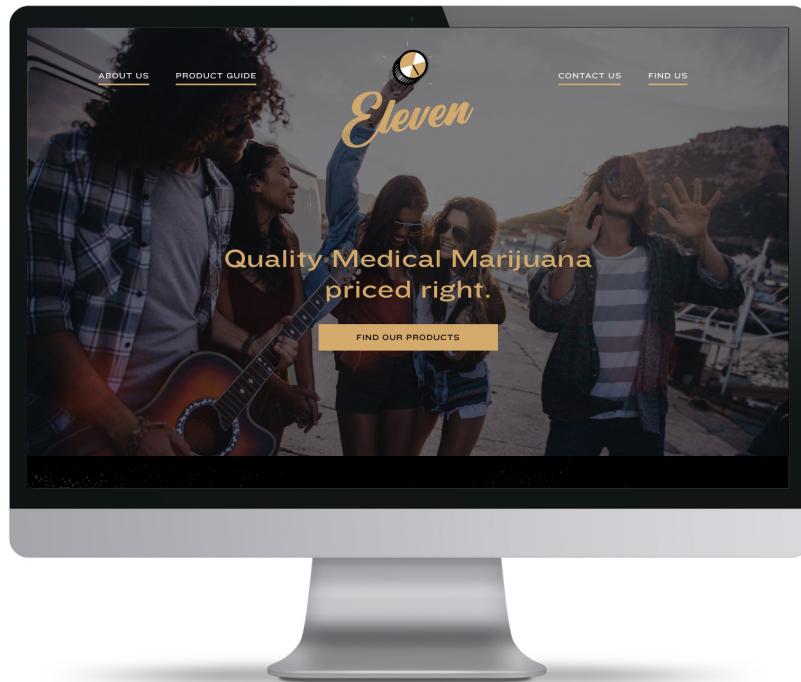
Now that you've deeply worked through your target audience, niche, mission statement, core values, brand story, messaging and voice, logo, fonts, colors, photography, and personality, you have a detailed map of your brand.

From here, you need to implement these elements into your content across marketing channels and consumer interactions so that the brand gets built consistently. In other words, your customers should feel the same way about your brand when they pick up your product versus scroll through your website.



Cohesive execution helps to reinforce your brand's messaging, values, and personality, creating a strong and memorable brand image. It also helps to build trust with consumers by demonstrating that you are professional, organized, and reliable.

Developing your brand is only half the battle. Many brands can bootstrap or DIY their way through that process, but executing cohesively is where they lose. In order to stand out from the crowd, you need a clear, organized system that implements your brand strategy across channels, both online and offline.



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STEP FOUR KEEPING YOUR BRAND PROMISE

Throughout this e-book, you have developed an intentional brand strategy and have the tools to execute it throughout your business. Doing so consistently builds trust and helps move the needle so you can stand out in the saturated market.

In being reliable through your content and overall presence, you are communicating your brand values over and over – and therefore, making a brand promise. This is a commitment made by a brand to its customers, outlining what they can expect from the brand in terms of quality, service, and experience.

A strong brand promise can help to build trust and loyalty with customers, and differentiate a brand from its competitors. However, a stand-out brand does more than market itself well.

A truly effective brand is driven by its brand promise across all functions of the company. In other words, from your product taste, efficacy, consistency, shelf appeal, and more, your products must also align with your messaging.

**Good branding
won't make up
for bad business.**

If you claim to be a brand that cares about your customers' well-being but your products are chock-full of harmful ingredients, your branding won't save you.

What every cannabis brand has to do – on top of actually opening a business and making it through the bureaucratic hoops – is to do the

due diligence to find out what's acceptable and what's not. Put a lot of time and resources into making sure every touchpoint of your business, even beyond marketing, is 100% compliant with your state regulations.

Protect yourself and your customers.

Therefore, be sure to keep your brand promise across all areas of your business: internal operations, hiring practices, research and development, product formulations, manufacturing standards, partnerships, and so on.



TLDR:THE LOW-DOWN

- In a saturated market, your brand has the power to help you stand out from the crowd.
- Branding is an intentional and artful process that goes beyond your “aesthetics” and “vibe.” It involves identifying your target audience, selecting a niche for your business, aligning with core values and a mission statement, crafting a brand purpose and story, developing messaging and a distinct voice, and designing a visual identity.
- Done correctly, branding can help you increase cross-channel awareness, credibility, customer loyalty, pricing power, and market differentiation.
- If your brand isn’t turning some people away, then you’re not doing it right. Identify a unique niche and target audience that aligns with your specialties and really dial into them.
- Your brand is ultimately what you stand for. Don’t back down from your core values and mission. Then, integrate them into the story you tell the world.
- A visual identity – logos, colors, typography, photography, etc. – is informed by your niche, core values, and overall purpose. Select each of these carefully and accordingly.
- Studying brand archetypes can help you craft a brand identity that is built for longevity. Invest in what the industry will look like tomorrow, not what it is today.
- Craft your marketing plan to consistently touch on your brand foundation across channels. Your customers should feel the same way about your brand when they pick up your product versus scroll through your website.
- Deliver on your brand promise consistently (and compliantly). Good branding won’t make up for bad business.



ABOUT CANNABIS CREATIVE

[Cannabis Creative Group](#) is an award-winning performance-based marketing agency for the cannabis and CBD industry. With decades of experience, our team works with everyone from MSOs to Mom & Pops.

We have been featured in several major cannabis publications – such as Rolling Stone, MG Magazine, Ganjapreneur, Benzinga, and more – and won many awards over the years for our campaigns and client projects.

With headquarters in Boston and Chicago, our team has worked with clients all over the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and Europe to expand their market share and grow their business through creative digital marketing campaigns.

Our team has been known to develop high-end consumer and B2B brands and works with clients on brand identity development, website design & development, search engine optimization (SEO), social media, email marketing, packaging design, and more.

To learn more about our team or how you can work with us to help develop the cannabis brand of your dream, contact us.



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