

Rebranding the Cannabis Industry



Ronn Torossian, CEO, [5WPR](#)

With legalization taking place all over the world, the cannabis industry is quickly evolving past the stoner age and into a new, slick, era of marketing. But can the birth of [cannabis-friendly marketing](#) plans, products, and industry events really pave the way for this evolution, or is cannabis still a long way from being the next big thing?

“The marijuana industry needs a branding makeover – big time,” writes University of Northern Arizona sociologist, James Bowie.

The real question to consider is whether the cannabis brand’s transformation is an evolution in the industry or a de-evolution? The problem here is one of perception: has

legalization made cannabis a mainstream product, or is it still considered underground and out of reach of normal Americans? In spite of how you might feel about the industry, cannabis is certainly rebranding. Here are a number of ways it is achieving this transformation:

Diversifying market

The increasingly diverse demographic associated with cannabis use is fast outstripping the long-time stoner stereotype. The culture coming out of the proverbial underground is quickly gathering new adherents attracted to this new shift in imagery, language, and accessibility.

Normalizing by social media

Social media is adept at making – and breaking – all manner of things. The more opinions you read about cannabis use, the more reviews you read about dispensaries, and the more financial success you see attached to certain rising brands, the more likely you are to buy. There are no language or content barriers to communication on social media, so the fact that brands are optimizing their presence online is key to cannabis' normalization.

The acceptance of medical marijuana

No one argues with the idea of wellness, not least with the idea of chronic pain concerns. Where cannabis lays claim to positive medical benefits, it lays claim to being a well-being brand. When it comes to edibles, this provides a host of new opportunities for visual and packaging differentiation.

Cannabis is on the menu

Expounding cannabis' worth in terms of cooking is leading it in an entirely new branding direction. Away from its typical psychoactive associations, cooking with cannabis has created a

sub-market for a new type of conversation. As such, with cannabis increasingly being added as an ingredient in daily recipes or exclusive cuisine, fears, and concerns about the substance are being swiftly allayed. Some neighborhoods are even beginning to swap recipes and host tastings for strains.

The classic tradeshow

Conventions, festivals, and expos have begun to pop up all over the US in an effort to expose cannabis in a new light to more people under safer circumstances. If cannabis is to become a mainstream product, rebranding initiatives will have to move far beyond traditional stoner and leaf tropes, and closer to middle America and her daily routines. If you can't convince your average soccer mom to embrace cannabis, the likelihood is that the rest of America may not be able to either.

Part of making this happen are events like "pot gatherings" where hosts serve entrees and invite guests to bring their own marijuana. While cannabis is not yet accepted as an afternoon wine in most suburbs, [branding](#) efforts are pushing it in that direction.



About the Author: [Ronn Torossian](#) is CEO of 5WPR, which works extensively on [cannabis public relations](#).