



# Social Media Guidelines for Cannabis Marketing

Strategies to Futureproof the Brand Presence of  
of Cannabis Brands in the World of AI and Algorithms  
that Regulate the Rules of Social Media

**Build.** There is no overnight leap  
to get to your goals.

You're on a **journey.**

**FACT: Brands are held to **higher standards** on social media than users are.**

This is especially true for brands in regulated categories (like cannabis).

# Standards help protect us all against fraud and deception.

No false or misleading claims

Cannot promote overconsumption

Cannot depict consumption  
whatsoever in some regions

No health or therapeutic claims; no  
medical advice

No cartoons, dancing animals, or  
imagery that appeals to children

No games or competitions related to  
consumption

**How you behave on social media  
says everything about your brand.**

# Content is customer service, public relations, and more.

There is much more than content to consider when taking a cannabis brand to social media. It's strategic communication.

Know how to behave when representing the brand.

Be prepared for handling negative feedback.

Create and maintain a crisis management system for all channels.

Consider how engaging with your brand delivers to expectations and overall experience of with the brand.

# Everyone can see what you're doing.

Risk is HIGH for cannabis brands when operating on social media platforms.

Openly violating platform rules, not to mention state and federal laws and building a business around a perceived lack of enforcement will put any social media account on watch and monitored for violations.

Having content or an account banned means starting over. But more importantly, **Openly engaging in deceptive practices shows consumers (and regulators!) that our brand is not trustworthy.**



# Why you need to avoid getting banned.

Risking your brand's future ability to use social media channels is ill-advised, despite whatever short-term advantage might be gained by skirting the rules.

A BAN means losing all the followers and engagement you've built up. Previous shares of your profile link will no longer work and SEO built up will be lost.

**When and if any social media platforms decide to allow cannabis advertising, you'll be locked out or starting from scratch.**

# Safeguard your brand presence.

Follow Social Media Policies when operating on any platform for your brand.

Follow Community Management Guidelines and Escalation Protocols.

**Follow compliance rules and guidelines in a platform's cannabis category regulations.**

**Adhere to FCC Truth-in-advertising standards and consumer protection laws.**

**Anyone** representing the brand  
is **responsible for compliance**  
with policies and guidelines.

**Know what you can say and how  
you can say it.**

# What you **CAN** say

## DO FOCUS ON SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

Take the higher ground.

Speak from your brand values not necessarily what know-it-alls insist.

Be a valuable presence in the community, not just more chatter in your audience's feed.

# What **NOT** to say

## **DON'T ANTAGONIZE THE COMMUNITY**

Don't argue with followers, competitors, or other brands.

Don't fall for trolls who prey on our impulsive responses.

Don't aim to deceive, misinform or "get away" with wording things so it looks like you're not selling cannabis.

# How you **CAN** say it

## **DO COMMUNICATE GENERALLY.**

Make observations.

Be Insightful.

Grow audience.

Engage the community.

Comment on Posts.

# How you **CAN'T**

## **DON'T ADVERTISE or PROMOTE.**

Don't use explicit calls-to-action (CTAs) like *get, find, try, visit, sale, today's special* or *buy* regarding cannabis products.

Never depict or imply over-consumption.



# Don't just go by what you see others doing!

Seeing someone break the rules is not license to break the same rules.

Social platforms rely on users and AI BOTS to police the community—eventually the content is flagged and taken down with a strike to the account.

A known tactic in cannabis is to report a competitor for violations. Respond to reports in a timely manner. Be honest.

**Failure to comply risks being suspended or permanently banned—WITHOUT NOTICE.**

**Aim to be the most upstanding  
citizen in the cannabis  
community. (You'll stand out)**

**Anyone** can make content that  
makes a **difference.**

# Get Scrappy. Stay Scrappy. Focus.

Content creation doesn't have to be overwhelming. Start with your brand objectives.

It may take **more creative effort** to get beyond the “recommended” or popular approaches,

Knowing the meaning and value your brand offers the cannabis community allows you to move faster and spend less.

Go with what you know. Use data and analytics and strategize.

# Paid advertising standards apply to organic content.

All major social media platforms with the exception of X do not allow cannabis companies to buy paid ads and content placements.






Content with commercial intentions can be interpreted as advertising by users, regulators, competitors and AI.

Violations will be cited to offending content without us knowing who, when or why the content was banned.

**By using the platform, we agree to the terms and conditions and other policies - WHETHER WE READ THEM OR NOT.**

Always adhere to **Advertising  
Policy Guidelines** by Platform.






**Bookmark these links to stay on top of ever evolving rules of engagement.**

PLATFORM	EXCERPTED RULES & GUIDELINES	REFERENCE & SOURCE LINKS
 Facebook	<p>Ads must not promote the sale or use of illegal, prescription, or recreational drugs. Due to federal restrictions, cannabis companies are prohibited from running ads even in states where cannabis is legal. Fail to comply with platform advertising guidelines and Facebook can shutdown your ads and/or delete your account without notice.</p>	<p><a href="#">Facebook Prohibited Content - Advertising Policies</a></p>
 Instagram	<p>Community Guidelines require you to share only content that you've created or have the legal right to share. That content cannot directly advertise or sell marijuana, regardless of your state or country. Instagram policies generally mimic those of parent company Facebook.</p>	<p><a href="#">Instagram Community Guidelines on Policy and Sale of Marijuana</a></p>
 X	<p>For cannabis companies to engage in advertising on X they must be pre-authorized by the platform and meet other requirements, including being licensed by the appropriate authorities and targeting audiences only in jurisdictions where they are licensed to promote their products or services online. There is a minimum ad spend.</p>	<p><a href="#">Twitter Ad Policies Drugs and Drug Paraphernalia Section</a></p>
 Pinterest	<p>Does not allow "imagery, sale or use of illegal or recreational drugs." Also, "informational material about the use or legalization of illegal or recreational drugs" and "related paraphernalia for using, storing or consuming illegal or recreational drugs." are also prohibited.</p>	<p><a href="#">Pinterest Advertising Guidelines</a></p>
 LinkedIn	<p>"Even if legal in the applicable jurisdiction, LinkedIn does not allow ads related to prescription pharmaceuticals, drugs or any related products or services. Ads that promote illegal drugs, highs, herbal medicines and treatments, psychoactive effects of substances, or aids to pass drug tests are all prohibited."</p>	<p><a href="#">LinkedIn Ads Policy</a></p>

# Pros, Cons and Hashtags by Platform.



## Hashtags use impact varies by platform.

PLATFORM	PROS	CONS	HASHTAG CONSIDERATIONS
 Facebook	Biggest audience, huge reach potential... when your brand enjoys the ability to use the platform's paid ad products.	Organic reach is zero. You need to pay to reach any audience effectively. The Feed algorithm tends to punish Pages that do not engage their followers consistently.	Hashtags typically help organic reach, but Facebook's privacy settings prohibit hashtags from working beyond your existing connections.
 Instagram	Visually oriented. Mobile-first. Typical experience is one post at a time, which helps focus users on your imagery.	If you are prohibited from paid advertising, you cannot take advantage of opportunities to target audiences across Instagram (and Facebook).	Lack of robust privacy settings means hashtags are a huge assistance in organic reach. How many hashtags used per post, and whether they're in the caption or comment, may influence discoverability.
 X	Typically used for conversations, alerts, and real-time events — or as a companion to other social channels.	It's a big messy "firehose" of content. Ads dominated by large brands. Paid ad products are necessary for businesses to reap the full benefits of this platform.	Users expect immediate responses and platform is more conversational. Have Community Management And escalation protocols in place.
 Pinterest	The premiere platform for "wish-listing". People come here for inspiration and planning. Less about community management, more about content with longer lifespan.	Organic reach can be challenging. Businesses depend on paid ad products, which are not available to the cannabis industry at this time.	While hashtags do work on the platform, they are not how users typically search. Searches are done by keyword (without a "#" preceding) and/or imagery.
 LinkedIn	The social network focused on professionals, job seeking, and recruitment. Provides important visibility into employees and employers.	This is a professional environment, where content typical of other general-interest social networks can seem inappropriate.	Hashtags and @-tagging help potential candidates and partners you don't already know, find you.

**Develop communication standards that are poised for federal legalization.**

**Anticipate** and **Futureproof** all  
communication standards when  
possible.

## NEW BRANDS: FOLLOW EXISTING STANDARDS

### State-Class

Local / Regional Standards

- Compliant with State & Municipal Laws
- Compliant with Platform Guidelines, Terms & Conditions
- Regular legal counsel to stay on top of changing regulations



## MATURE BRANDS: LEAD BY SETTING STANDARDS

### Best-In-Class

National Standards

- Compliant with Platform Guidelines, Terms & Conditions
- Compliant with the highest State standards in US, compiled from post-legalization markets as they come online.



## NEXT-LEVEL BRANDS: INFLUENCE GLOBAL POLICY

### World-Class

International Standards

- Compliant with Platform Guidelines, Terms & Conditions
- Compliant with International Laws (that don't exist yet)

FROM FOLLOWING THE STANDARDS TO SETTING THEM, YOUR BRAND MATURES INTO A MODEL CITIZEN OF THE CANNABIS COMMUNITY.

**Work Smarter Not Harder.**

Take **cues** from similarly regulated categories.

**Simple Rule:  
Mirror what the  
alcohol  
beverage  
industry does to  
self-regulate it's  
advertising and  
marketing  
content.**

ORGANIZATION	EXCERPTED GUIDELINES AND REFERENCE LINKS
<p>The Beer Institute (BI)</p>	<p>Brewers should employ the perspective of the reasonable adult consumer of legal drinking age in advertising and marketing their products, and should be guided by the following basic principles, which have long been reflected in the policies of the brewing industry and continue to underlie this Code.</p> <p>Link: <a href="#">Advertising and Marketing Code</a></p>
<p>Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS)</p>	<p>"Within months of the repeal of Prohibition, leaders in the distilled spirits industry approved their first voluntary Code of Responsible Practices. Throughout the decades, the Code has embodied the high standards and commitment to responsibility.. "</p> <p>"The DISCUS Code applies to all activities in the United States undertaken to advertise and market distilled spirits, beer, and wine. The Code covers both the responsible placement and content of beverage alcohol advertising and marketing materials, as well as provides detailed digital and media buying guidelines."</p> <p>Link: <a href="#">Code of Reasonable Practices for Beverage Alcohol Advertising</a></p>
<p>Federal Trade Commission (FTC)</p>	<p>FTC report on alcohol industry self-regulatory initiatives designed to address concerns about underage exposure to alcohol marketing. Incorporates both BI and DISCUS guidelines (above).</p> <p>"This report provides data about: how industry members allocate marketing expenditures; compliance with its advertising placement standard; online and digital marketing, including privacy practices; product placements in entertainment media; and external review of complaints regarding self-regulatory code compliance."</p> <p>Link: <a href="#">Code Self-Regulation in the Alcohol Industry Report of the Federal Trade Commission</a></p>

Rely on **studies and data** emerging  
in cannabis.



Download and refer to these helpful references and check with the source for updates.

ORGANIZATION	RESOURCE AND REFERENCE LINK
<p>The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB)</p>	<p>"In 2020, the IAB Data Center of Excellence recruited a working group of ad tech experts, brands, and publishers to educate the online media community on the application of programmatic ad buying to the nuances of the cannabis category."</p> <p>Link: <a href="#">Programmatic Advertising: A Close Look at Cannabis (May 2020) PDF</a></p>
<p>Cresco Labs</p>	<p>"Similar industries to cannabis — alcohol, healthcare, pharmaceutical and food — have self-imposed, voluntary rules that are followed by some of the most iconic brand marketers in the world." — Greg Butler, Chief Commercial Officer at Cresco Labs.</p> <p>Among the cannabis industry's most comprehensive advertising and marketing code, this consumer-packaged goods (CPG ) approach outlines guiding principles to establish ethical standards and promote a culture of responsible consumption and consumer trust.</p> <p>Link: <a href="#">Cresco Labs' Responsible Advertising and Marketing Standards   Fall 2020 Edition PDF</a></p>

**Stay current on the policies and guidelines of the social platforms.**

**HINT: Change is constant.**

**NEVER** miss a signal.

# Be authentic.

Focus on **integrity** and key brand attributes.

Keep it **real**.

Invite **creative expression**.

# Be available.

Make **access to your brand** easy  
and pain free for your audience.

From anywhere.

24/7.

# Provide a place for belonging.

Build a social-first strategy.

Tribes and micro-influencers **share brand experiences**, spread the good news and champion brands to like-minded followers.

They also inform algorithms, and AI which are the “true influencers.”

# Be mindful of who's in control.

Machine-to-machine learning  
and AI create **algorithms** which  
**inform and influence customers.**

**AI regulates the content of posts.**

# Be consistent.

Stay focused on **brand mission** and use it as true-north.

*"It's Always 420 at Vibe."*

Choose opportunities for **relevant engagement** and use consistent, sincere, relatable storymaking.



# Provide guidance.

Educate.

Offer virtual support, learning, and inspiration.

Customers seek ways to personalize, share and extend their brand experience.

# Deliver personalization.

Provide multiple ways for customers to engage with your cannabis brand.

Brands that engage all 5 senses cut through the clutter and stand out.

# Service over sales.

Focus on building trust.

Customers are in turbulent and sometimes vulnerable scenarios.

Show up. Customers look for brands who are relevant, present, and do the right thing.

**“Your brand isn’t what you say it is, it’s what they say it is.”**

- Marty Neumeier, author of “The Brand Flip”



**“The mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.”**

- Maya Angelou



**Thank you.**