
CANNABIZ

Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry

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**The Explosive Rise of the
Medical Marijuana Industry**

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For Alix

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Introduction

Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry

The seed for this book was planted in 2000, when I was a newspaper reporter in Berkeley, California. At that time, Berkeley's city council was struggling to regulate some of the nation's

first medical marijuana dispensaries. Proposition 215, the California initiative that had legalized medical marijuana four years earlier, had proven to be awkward and incomplete. For example, state law allowed dispensaries to sell marijuana, but growing or transporting it remained illegal. Under federal law, of course, marijuana was still completely illegal, and federal officials had increased their enforcement efforts after the passage of Proposition 215.

My initial idea was to write a Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry magazine story about the life of a marijuana plant from the time its seed was planted in the wilds of northern California through its harvest, shipping, and finally its sale in a Bay Area dispensary. I wanted the story to include colorful rebels Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry and misfits living on the margins of society. But I soon discovered growers were reluctant to show me their crops, much less permit me Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry to follow them through an entire season. Eventually the idea took a backseat to other stories and deadlines.

When I revisited the story idea nine years later, the Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry business of marijuana had Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry changed dramatically. The tenacious weed had grown like Jack's gold-laden beanstalk, but the gold was no fairy tale. The cannabis industry as a whole, both legal and illegal, was generating by some estimates \$115 billion annually. Cottage industries were flourishing: hydroponics supply stores, construction companies specializing in grow rooms, cannabis-friendly travel agencies, and a trade school with four campuses dedicated to training cannabis industry workers and entrepreneurs. By that time, the dispensaries had developed a support network that included elected officials, attorneys, public relations firms, unions, media, and nonprofit advocacy groups, all energetically promoting the public acceptance of medical marijuana.

And popular culture reflected that new acceptance. *Weeds*, a cable television show, featured a suburban housewife selling marijuana to make ends meet. Another cable program, *Cannabis Planet TV*, presented marijuana-based news as well as cooking and cultivation tips. Dozens of magazines, newspapers, Web sites, and blogs were focusing almost entirely on marijuana. In many states, billboards and radio broadcasts advertised medical marijuana services. Harvest festivals, THC expos, and marijuana seminars were being attended by thousands of people year round, even in states that hadn't legalized medical marijuana.

Public attitudes had shifted dramatically. According to the 2009 World Drug Report, 31 million Americans had Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry used marijuana the previous year. The corresponding number at the end of the 1960s—a few years before President Nixon launched the seemingly endless war on drugs—was 6 million. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that more than 100 million Americans had tried marijuana at least once at some point in their lifetime. Two national polls taken in 2010 showed that nearly 80 Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry percent of Americans supported medical marijuana, and roughly 44 percent would vote for full legalization.

Despite this widespread support, the industry had its critics. Many argued that dispensaries

eagerly catered to perfectly healthy people. In fact, some dispensaries were running promotions that blatantly suggested adult recreation. Their advertisements featured glossy images of glistening marijuana buds and underdressed women enveloped in tendrils of wafting smoke—more Bob Marley than Blue Cross. Also, many dispensaries marketed strains of marijuana using names like “Trainwreck,” “Big Fatty,” and “Cat Piss,” which did not sound remotely medicinal. *Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry* And though medical marijuana laws required a doctor’s written recommendation (federal law prohibited *Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry* prescriptions) to purchase pot, obtaining one was embarrassingly easy. In California, all it took was a few minutes, a couple hundred bucks, and a little imagination. Casual observation at a typical dispensary indicated a *Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry* high percentage of patients were American males between the ages of 18 and 35—one of the healthiest demographic groups on the planet.

The bar *Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry* was so low for obtaining a medical marijuana recommendation that it had become something of a joke. In a comedic scene *Cannabiz: The Explosive Rise of the Medical Marijuana Industry* of the HBO series *Entourage*, Kevin Dillon, who plays a television character actor, visits an evaluation clinic for a recommendation. But worried that whatever illness he claims might damage his virile public image, he and the doctor bandy possible ailments until they settle on a suitable anxiety disorder.

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