



CANNABIS INSIGHTS

BEST RESEARCH PRACTICES FOR A GROWING CATEGORY



It's a rare opportunity to speak with consumers about a topic or industry that is considered "emerging," but we took the opportunity at KNow when clients and colleagues started coming to us in 2019 with questions about the cannabis industry. In the Spring of 2020, we teamed up with [SoapBoxSample](#) to explore the emerging category.

The project in question was around gifting - or sharing - cannabis gifts for holidays, birthdays or "as just an act of kindness". Using survey data from thousands of cannabis consumers across the U.S., and then exploring further by conducting in-depth interviews with cannabis gift-givers and gift receivers, we uncovered trends that may have a significant impact on the 2020 holiday season, and beyond. Check out our [Case Study](#) to learn more about what we learned about consumers' perceptions of cannabis as a gift, and the key takeaways for brands!

Why connect with cannabis consumers specifically?

- **Stigmas are fading:** With the cannabis market attracting new customers every day, social norms, and customs around cannabis usage, sharing, and gifting are developing simultaneously. Old stigmas are falling away.
- **Becoming more mainstream every day:** The health & wellness benefits cannabis offers have opened the category to consumers who previously may not have been comfortable with the idea of trying or using cannabis as part of their health regimen, and for recreational cannabis users, they are happy to see that the plant they've long enjoyed finally getting its proper dues.
- **Customers are savvy:** We also discovered that cannabis users are a savvy, well informed group of consumers that know their brands, have done their homework and are happy to pass their knowledge on to others, and when speaking to them, should be treated as such.
- **Cannabis is entering new categories:** As a result of becoming more mainstream, cannabis products are now set to compete at shelf. Customers consideration sets for gifts, experiences and self-care products are expanding, and cannabis is part of that set of choices.

"I'd like to see a sampler pack. 3 to 5 different little nuggets of different strains with packaging to tell what each one does. I like the variety of that." – Kevin, Cannabis Consumer



Data gathered July 2019 using SoapBoxSample's CANNAPinion Poll, a bi-monthly survey of 1,000 cannabis consumers.

Our team embarked on cannabis consumer research ready to learn. And participants taught us all along the way. Not only about the category, but about conducting research on/in the category.

We learned quickly that finding people who were willing to talk about the details of their cannabis preference, on camera, was more challenging than we thought it would be. We started our work in the industry with hemp-derived CBD products. We found people of all ages willing to talk through the pros, cons, assumptions and resistance to these products, be they topicals or ingestible.

Then we teamed up with SoapBoxSample and learned about their great success in creating a cannabis consumer panel and all the survey data they were collecting. So we decided to reach out and talk THC with them.

- Well, we learned very quickly that while the category is growing and becoming more mainstream, that qualitative research on THC must be approached carefully. With care, an open mind, and options for participants.
- THC is not only personal and intimate, it's still illegal in some states. While participants feel comfortable talking about hemp-derived CBD products or answering THC questions in an anonymous survey, it's a much bigger ask to be interviewed on Zoom about the topic!
- We immediately pivoted and changed the invitation language to offering them a choice of video, audio or text chat and reassured them that all of their feedback would remain completely anonymous.

- Once a participant felt confident that this interview was “legitimate” (another stigma surrounding cannabis) and had more information, they were very forthcoming. Upon completion of the interview, all the participants gave permission to use their likeness and first name and mentioned they were happy to give feedback and be a part of the study.

Based on our work in the category so far, we’d like to offer 5 tips for conducting cannabis insights:

1. **Take a page from dispensaries’ playbook.** They understand their loyal customers, listen to them all along the way and create in-store environments that cater to those needs. Do the same in your research; make your participants feel at home, comfortable and secure. This may mean turning off the video camera, offering them the ability to contribute via text chat or reassuring them that the results will be anonymous
2. **Be respectful and non-judgmental.** Preconceived notions of who you “think” cannabis users are has no place when conducting research. If, as researchers, you begin with subjective ideas based on your own experiences and assumptions, you’ll be doing the participants, and study, a great injustice.
3. **Don’t limit your recruiting.** The participants we’ve spoken to about the category over the past year are parents, teachers, CEO’s, and octogenarians. They are your next-door neighbor. They are you and me. Gone are the days of “Reefer Madness”. Reach out to diverse communities and all age brackets in your recruiting efforts.
4. **Terminology is important.** Terms like the word “stoner” can turn people off. The industry as a whole is still facing a great deal of stigma in the United States, and participants would rather not be associated with negative stereotypes. Using outdated terms can erode trust.
5. **But don’t rely on too many terms!** While there are a lot of technical, medical, and scientific terms used in cannabis branding and marketing, it’s not safe to assume that all cannabis consumers are familiar with these terms or what they mean. In our Soapbox Samples’ studies, they find it helpful to define terms and provide examples to aid respondents in understanding the questions were asking them.

“I was definitely open to being interviewed. I wanted to know who my video is being shared with and those types of things, but talking about the subject matter didn’t bother me at all.” – Kara, Cannabis Consumer

We welcome the opportunity to talk with you about ways you can navigate this industry as a researcher, a brand or distributor! Continue the conversation at: admin@knowresearch.com