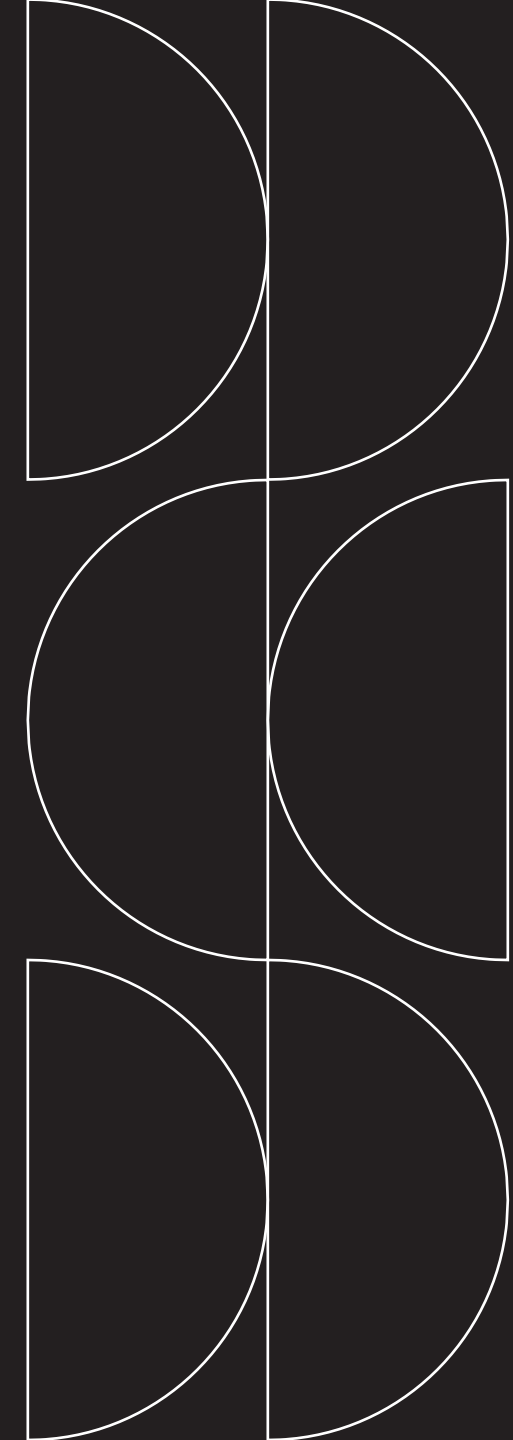


# SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR CANNABIS MARKETERS

HOW TO FUTUREPROOF YOUR BRAND PRESENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Written by Jake Setlak @ Receptor Brands, updated for NCIA: MAC / Next Gen Advertising Subcommittee.



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 against fraud and deception.

- No false or misleading claims
- Cannot promote overconsumption
- Cannot depict consumption whatsoever in some states
- 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 a lot about your brand.



It's customer service,  
public relations,  
and more.

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

- Do your employees know how to behave when representing your brand?
- How will you handle negative feedback?
- Who does the social manager call in the event of a crisis?
- **How does all this add up to people's overall experience of your brand?**



Everyone can see  
what you're doing.

We see countless cannabis brands operating on social media as if the risk is low.

They openly violate platform rules, not to mention state and federal laws. They build their business around a perceived lack of enforcement, never knowing if they've already been reported, flagged, or monitored for violations.

And if they get banned? They'll just add a hyphen to their profile name and start again. They're thinking about their business, but not their brand. That's a big mistake.

Why?

**Openly engaging in deceptive practices shows consumers (and regulators!) that your brand isn't trustworthy.**



# Why you should 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.

**When social media platforms decide to allow cannabis advertising, you'll be locked out.**





# Safeguard your brand's presence.

Three must-haves for your brand's social media marketing compliance strategy:

1. Social Media Policy for Employees
2. Community Management Guidelines & Escalation Protocols
3. Legal Counsel (for brand and agency alike) to oversee full compliance with:
  - Cannabis category regulations
  - Truth-in-advertising standards and consumer protection laws
  - Social platform policies



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

### STICK TO "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 clutter in their feed.

## DON'T

### ANTAGONIZE THE COMMUNITY

- Argue with followers, competitors, or other brands.
- Fall for trolls who prey on your impulsive responses.
- Aim to deceive or misinform.



# How you can say it:

## DO

### COMMUNICATE GENERALLY

- Make observations.
- Be insightful.
- Grow your audience.
- Engage the community.

## DON'T

### ADVERTISE OR PROMOTE

- Use explicit calls-to-action (CTAs) like *get*, *find*, *try*, *visit*, or *buy* regarding cannabis products.
- Depict or imply over-consumption.



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

- Seeing someone break the rules is not license for us to break the same rules.
- Social platforms rely on users to police the community.
- If users don't report violations, the platforms tend to not know about them. For now.
- Failure to comply risks being suspended or permanently banned — without notice.



Aim to be the most upstanding  
citizen in the cannabis community.



Anyone can  
make content  
that makes  
a difference.

GET SCRAPPY.  
STAY SCRAPPY.

Content creation for startups and small businesses doesn't have to be overwhelming. Start with measurable objectives that justify your content creation process and budget. Scale your efforts toward more effectiveness, not merely more frequent posts. Set aside time to regularly evaluate and optimize your efforts.

WELL-PLACED FOCUS  
GOES A LONG WAY.

It might take more effort to get beyond the "recommended" or popular approaches, but you may discover that you move faster and spend less when you go with what you know; the meaning and value your brand offers the cannabis community.










# Apply paid advertising standards to organic content.

- While the major social media platforms do not allow cannabis brands to buy paid ads and content placements, there's ongoing grey area around organic content.
- Content with commercial intentions can be interpreted as advertising by users, regulators, or competitors.
- Anyone can report a post or profile to the platform for violations, without you knowing who, when, or why.
- By using the platform, you agree to the terms, conditions, and other policies of the platform — whether you read them or not.








# Ad Policy & Guidelines by Platform

Bookmark these links and check them periodically 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 shut down your ads and/or delete your account without notice.</p>	<p><a href="#">Facebook Advertising Policies Drugs &amp; Drug-Related Products Section</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 Policy on Sale of Marijuana</a></p>
 Twitter	<p>Twitter policy prohibits ads for illegal goods. The <a href="#">Drugs and Drug Paraphernalia</a> section specifically lists "illegal drugs, recreational and herbal drugs, accessories associated with drug use, drug dispensaries, and depictions of hard drug use" as examples of prohibited ad content.</p>	<p><a href="#">Twitter Ads Policies Drugs &amp; 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 & Hashtags 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.
 Twitter	Typically used for conversations, alerts, and real-time events — or as a companion to other social channels.	It's a big messy "fire hose" of content. Paid ad products are necessary for businesses to reap the full benefits of this platform.	Users expect immediate responses. We can "reserve" our profile but may not want to activate until we 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 e-tagging help potential candidates and partners you don't already know, find you.



Develop standards that are  
poised for federal legalization.



# Anticipate what you can. Futureproof your 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.

# Take cues from similarly regulated categories

Rule of thumb: mirror what the beverage alcohol industry does to self-regulate its advertising and marketing content.

ORGANIZATION	EXCERPTED GUIDELINES, 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 &amp; 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 Responsible 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="#">Self Regulation in the Alcohol Industry Report of the Federal Trade Commission</a></p>



# And what's emerging in cannabis.

ORGANIZATION	DESCRIPTION, REFERENCE LINKS
<a href="#">The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB)</a>	<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>
<a href="#">Cresco Labs</a>	<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</a>   <a href="#">Download Fall 2020 Edition PDF</a></p>



Stay current on the policies and guidelines of the platforms you use.





Never miss a signal.

