

**I OWN A
CANNABIS
BUSINESS BUT
THOUGHT ALL
I NEEDED WAS
A LOGO AND
DON'T KNOW
ANYTHING
ABOUT
BRANDING.**

A how-to guide for finding your lane,
building your cannabis brand, and
staying in it for the long haul.



HIGHOPES

THE TRUTH ON CANNABIS BRANDING

Congrats! You're starting a new cannabis business! Now what?



When you think of branding, slapping a logo on your new product or service might be the first thing that comes to mind. At the very least that seems like the most fun part of the process. But branding (true branding, that is) goes way deeper than that. Branding is the foundation of who you are, what you do, and what you offer that others don't. And as your foundation, it deserves to be built to last.

There are undoubtedly a million and one things that are on your plate right now. Licensing, funding, growing, biz dev, packaging, strategy, accounting, etc etc. We get it. There's a ton to do, and sometimes it's hard to prioritize. We're not here to say your branding is THE most important element in your business. But it is pretty darn important, and a combination of sound strategy and a strong identity definitely provides a higher chance of success.

You may have a good product or service, but if you don't know how to show it off and how to speak to those that might want to buy it, you're selling yourself short.

When we build brands, we aim for the three C's:

COHESIVENESS

All the elements in your brand should have a clear connection to one another. Do you sound the way you look? Does how you interact with customers reflect your core values?

CONSISTENCY

Maintaining consistency is a key ingredient to communicate reliability to your customers, which in turn inspires loyalty. All the elements across your branding should feel the same all the time. Do you convey reliability?

CLARITY

People should be able to get what you're about. Especially the ones you're targeting. And though it's never about excluding anybody, it is about speaking to those that will hear you the loudest.

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Building a brand is an investment. If you give it the attention right from the beginning, it'll grow with you with very little maintenance needed.

At the end of the day, a business won't fail because it had a bad name or it's strategy isn't quite on target. It'll fail from a culmination of factors (some completely out of anyone's control) - bad business plan, poor product, insufficient marketing, etc., etc. But you do want to give your company the best chance of succeeding (and gain every advantage possible).

“YOUR BRAND IS LIKE A LIVING-BREATHING ENTITY.”

That's where solid branding comes into play.

Because if you don't help set up people's expectations when they experience your business first hand, you're welcoming in all sorts of mixed messaging. Pay attention to these important factors that differentiate you, and do your best to do them right the first time. Your future self will thank you.

Your brand is like a living-breathing entity. It impacts potential customers every time they interact with your brand -when they see an ad, visit your website, purchase your product, or use your service. The goal is to make sure that impact is meaningful. That's why you need to have a good sense of who you are— the identity of your brand. If you don't, then you're at risk of your brand becoming one of those bland, personality-less blobs that nobody wants to invite out for lunch.

Now that we've given in overview of the importance of the branding process, buckle up because we're about to dig deeper.



SHAPE YOUR CANNABIS BRAND'S PERSONALITY

What you say and how you say it reinforces who you are as a company. It also affects who you attract as customers.



Defining your company by giving it a personality is a cornerstone of the branding process. It helps inform what your brand sounds like and, later in the process, looks like.

Your brand's personality guides how you connect with your audience and shares with them what makes you tick. The goal here is that if someone likes what they hear they'll hop on board and become a customer. But you've gotta speak their language.

“YOUR BRAND'S PERSONALITY GUIDES HOW YOU CONNECT WITH YOUR AUDIENCE AND SHARES WITH THEM WHAT MAKES YOU TICK.”

The more honed-in a cannabis brand's personality is, the better chance you have at really being heard by your target customer.

You want to make it feel like every time they hear something from you, you're saying “I see you and I can help you” versus “if anyone is listening I think I have this cool product but I don't want to commit myself to anyone so I'm just going to leave this here. K thanks bye.”

How To Do It

A helpful way to define your brand's personality is to think of it as a person. Ask questions like:

1. What are the top 5 adjectives you would use to describe this person? Fun? Centered? Edgy? Thoughtful? Etc. etc.

2. How would they talk? Are they precise and scientific in their communication, or would they take a more inclusive approach and break down complex ideas into simple concepts that a beginner would comprehend?

Some Tips

1. Don't create a boring and bland personality

Just like you're attracted to unique people in real life, make sure your brand personality is unique and ownable. You want to stand out from the many, many other cannabis companies out there. So what makes your that special, unique snowflake in the snowstorm?

2. Have an idea of who you're NOT

An exercise we like to practice during the discovery and honing phase of a brand's personality is to not only describe who they are, but who they are not.

For example, a brand could be modern but not trendy. This would encourage the use of classic and clean elements without incorporating more short-lived trends. By honing your brand's personality in this way, you're crystalizing an image that will be easier to pull from across multiple channels of your marketing.

3. Don't create a brand-ified version of yourself

Stay away from replicating your identity for the brand. You can draw inspiration, but your brand shouldn't be limited to your personality. For the most part (and with few exceptions) your brand is NOT you. I know. It's your baby. You've shed blood, sweat, and tears to get it to this point. But this is the moment where you need to do the best for your business and let it develop into the beautiful butterfly it was meant to be.

Certainly a brand can be inspired by the awesome person you are, and it can reflect the values that you also try to live in your own life. And adding a human being behind a brand can enhance one's ability to connect with it. Because there are undoubtedly market forces that come into play when you need to make business decisions for your brand, not personal ones.

DEFINE YOUR CANNABIS BRAND'S CORE VALUES

Core values give structure, meaning, and guidance in how you act as a company, both internally- and externally-facing. They're your guiding light that help inform your brand identity.



You want your brand values to resonate with your target audience to attract them to your company and inspire them to welcome you into their lives. There are many touchpoints that serve as an opportunity to connect with your audience— branding, packaging design, packaging material, charity programs, blogs, etc, etc— and all of these should be executed with your personality and values in mind.

Values aren't only for the benefit of your interaction with customers. They play a critical role in helping define your company culture as well. Values are the qualities that you hold yourself accountable by. Leading by example inspires your employees (which represent your brand) to also embody those principles. And when you and your employees are on the same page through-and-through, your company will present itself in a more credible, trustworthy way.

How To Do It

1. Come up with a list of 20 values that define your brand. Think about what your mission as a company is, where you'd like to be in 5, 10, 15 years, and for what you want people to know your company.

Here's a list of example values to draw inspiration from:

Environmentalism	Precision
Courage	Honesty
Adventure	Humor
Loyalty	Fitness
Mindfulness	Compassion
Reliability	Education
Innovation	

2. Parse them down to maybe 3-5 defining characteristics that stand out above the rest

That doesn't mean your company doesn't embody the characteristics you didn't choose. But you need a few defining words to sum up what you believe in most.

3. Compare them with your brand's essence

You'll be doing this constantly to make sure the brand you're developing remains cohesive. Does it mesh with the overall feel of your business and positively contribute to the heart and soul of your brand?

Some Tips

Make sure your chosen values are:

1. Unique/Memorable

You want to stand out and show your customers why they should choose you. Give your customers a good reason why choosing you above your competitors is the right choice.

2. Actionable

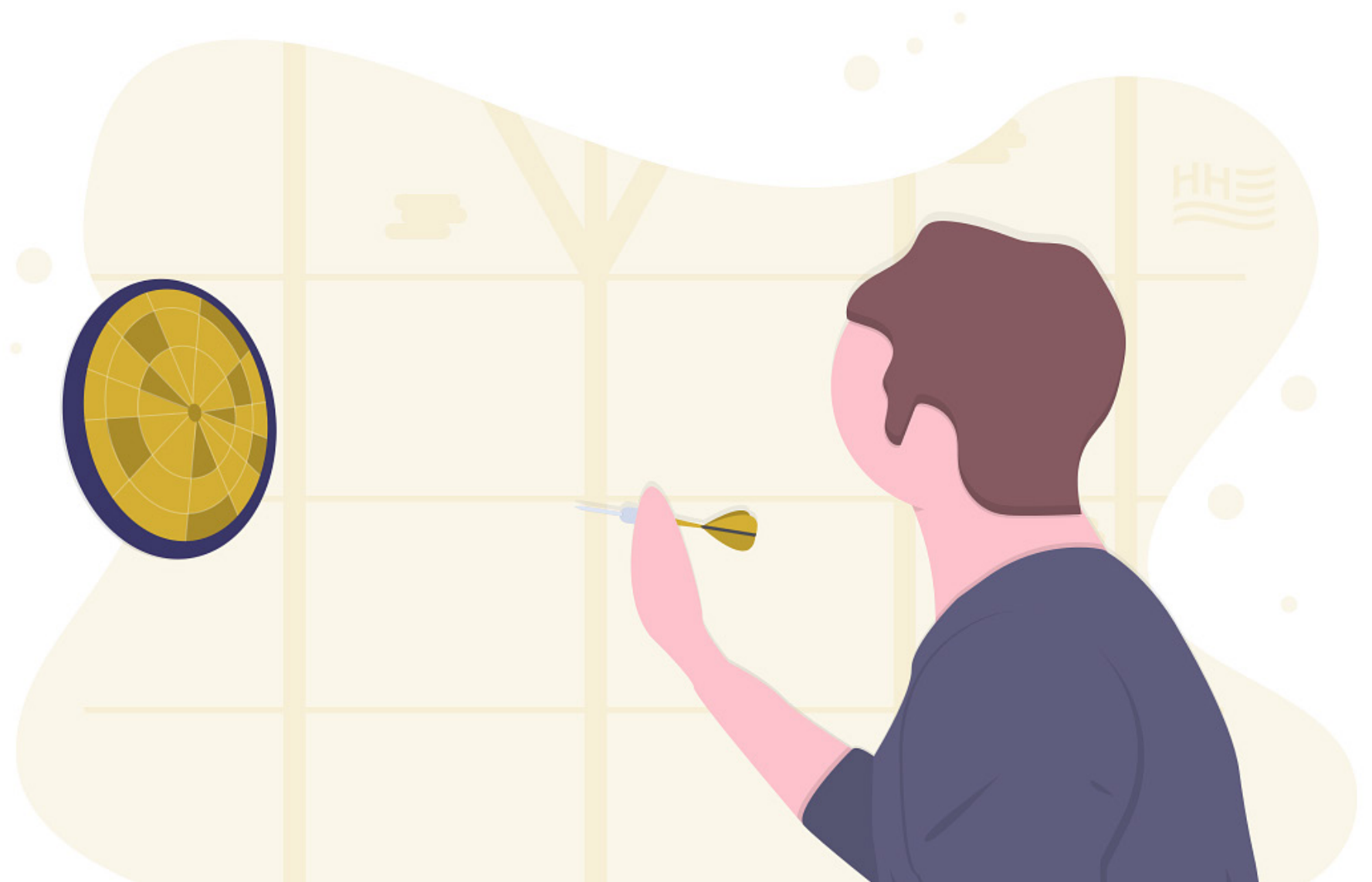
Choosing active, engaging values makes it easier for customers to identify with you and feel connected to your brand.

3. Timeless

The heart of your core values should hold true for years to come.

DETERMINE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

You want to sell to everyone and anyone, right? Wrong. Targeting too large of an audience results in no audience at all.



Alright, so you've got this great product or service that you can't wait to share with the world. You've been slaving away at developing it, perfecting it, and dreaming about how you're going to change the lives of all who buy it. Now we need to channel all that energy and target it toward someone. But who?

Knowing who you're selling to influences so many aspects of branding and marketing. It informs everything from the brand colors to tone of voice (if you're targeting men who love motorcycles then sage green and lavender probably aren't your colors).

Finding your target market and honing in with your branding and messaging will help you fight market saturation and leave your brand standing at the top. In a crowded space, finding your niche and being the best solution for that demographic is a necessary part of the game. You can't be everyone's best solution, so find your lane and go for it.

“YOU'RE JUST SPEAKING TO THOSE THAT HEAR YOU THE LOUDEST.”

That isn't to say that we actively alienate consumers that don't typically fall within our demographic. You're just speaking to those that will hear you the loudest. The message that you want to convey in the marketplace needs to speak to someone. A common phrase in the marketing world is that when you try to speak to everyone, you end up speaking to no one.

How To Do It

1. Start with answering some simple questions:

- What do you do?
- What are the benefits of your product/service? What pain points are you relieving when someone buys from you?
- What makes you stand out? What do you offer that's different from everyone else? Does it effectively differentiate your brand?
- Who do you think needs your product/service the most?

2. Work with what you've got

Sometimes the product or service is inspired by a need that helps naturally define your target market. Do you sell rubs for joint pain? The baby boomers might generation be a great market for you. Or athletes looking for relief from sore muscles.

3. Qualify your gut with as much data as you can get

There are some solid market trends that you can use to help boost the success of your brand. And as time goes on, those data-driven decisions will become more widely available for different locations and markets.

Some Tips

1. A well positioned brand is relevant and unique

Once you have the attention of your market, you need to inspire them to choose you.

2. Customer Personas Exercise

One exercise that is often helpful is to create customer personas. This gives your target market more concrete personalities that you can easily identify with and use as a guide when making branding decisions for your company (along with your style guides).

3. Talk with your potential target audience

If you are unsure your brand is going to resonate with the audience you are considering targeting then go out and speak firsthand with them. Find friends, associates, or acquaintances that fit your target audience and talk to them about your brand to see if they positively or negatively react.

NAMING YOUR CANNABIS COMPANY

Your brand name is the verbal representation of your business so make sure you use it to tell consumers who you are.



Your company name is often one of the first interactions a potential customer has with your cannabis brand. But that doesn't mean it's the first thing YOU should think of when you're building your brand. A name is much easier to come up with once you that the foundation in place. Figure out what your brand feels like and use that as a jumping-off point of inspiration.

“IT SERVES AS AN ANCHOR POINT TO TIE EVERYTHING TOGETHER.”

A name should represent and communicate aspects of your personality, values, and product/service to your target audience. It serves as an anchor point to tie everything together. Your name will eventually be wrapped into your logo design, which will also help reinforce some of these points as well. The main goal with your name is to begin to lay the threads of communication that will weave together to support the rest of your brand identity.

How To Do It

1. Free-associate

Come up with a list of words that have something, anything, to do with your company. This is where it's helpful to know what your values, brand personality, and mission are. It really helps you contextualize what you want your name to represent.

Don't be afraid to troll the depths of your imagination with no holds barred. Assume that 95% of what you write down is going to eventually be thrown out the window. Don't worry, that's how you find the gems. We promise.

2. Create a Shortlist

Once you've written down anything everything that has meaning to you, time to go through it with a more logistical eye. Are there any words or combination of words that would work well together?

Say them out loud, tell other people your name, write it down. Did they hear you right? Is it easy to write? Does it feel good to say?

Find a few potential names (we suggest 3 or 4) and save them for the next stage. Don't throw away your original list in case these don't work out and you need to go back in search of more keepers.

3. Do your research

Take your shortlist and run it through a search engine to see what pops up. Are there similar companies with similar names out there?

Check to see if there are businesses registered in your state with the same name.

If the names on your shortlist aren't available, circle back around to step #2 and try again. Don't worry, this happens all the time, and it's one of the hardest steps in the process. Go back to the drawing board and trust that your name is out there waiting for you to find it.

4. Stake your claim

Once you've landed on a name, claim it! Even if you're not ready to showcase your new brand on social media, securing these names as quickly as possible will ensure there aren't any snags once it comes time. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, whatever platforms you choose, grab them all. (Tip: it's helpful to secure the same handle to make it easy for customers to find you across platforms)

Secure a web domain, too. These will all be helpful to have on hand once you're ready to go.

Traits of a Good Name

Is it catchy?

The best way to make your name "sticky" in the minds of your customers is to make sure it's easy to remember, spell, and pronounce.

Is it available?

The last thing you want is to find THE name and then realize someone else owns it. Do your research before you publicize your name and get heartbroken.

What does it mean?

Double check your name's meaning in other languages. You don't want to be stuck in an embarrassing situation when you realize your perfect name is actually slang for something else in another language.

Is it too restrictive?

Make sure your name is in it for the long haul and will grow with you. Are you growing outdoors but have a plan to build a greenhouse? Best to avoid putting "Sun Grown Cannabis" in the name. You don't want to lock yourself down. But if that's your passion, run with it.

Some Tips

1. Avoid Canna — or any cannabis-related words, really — in your name.

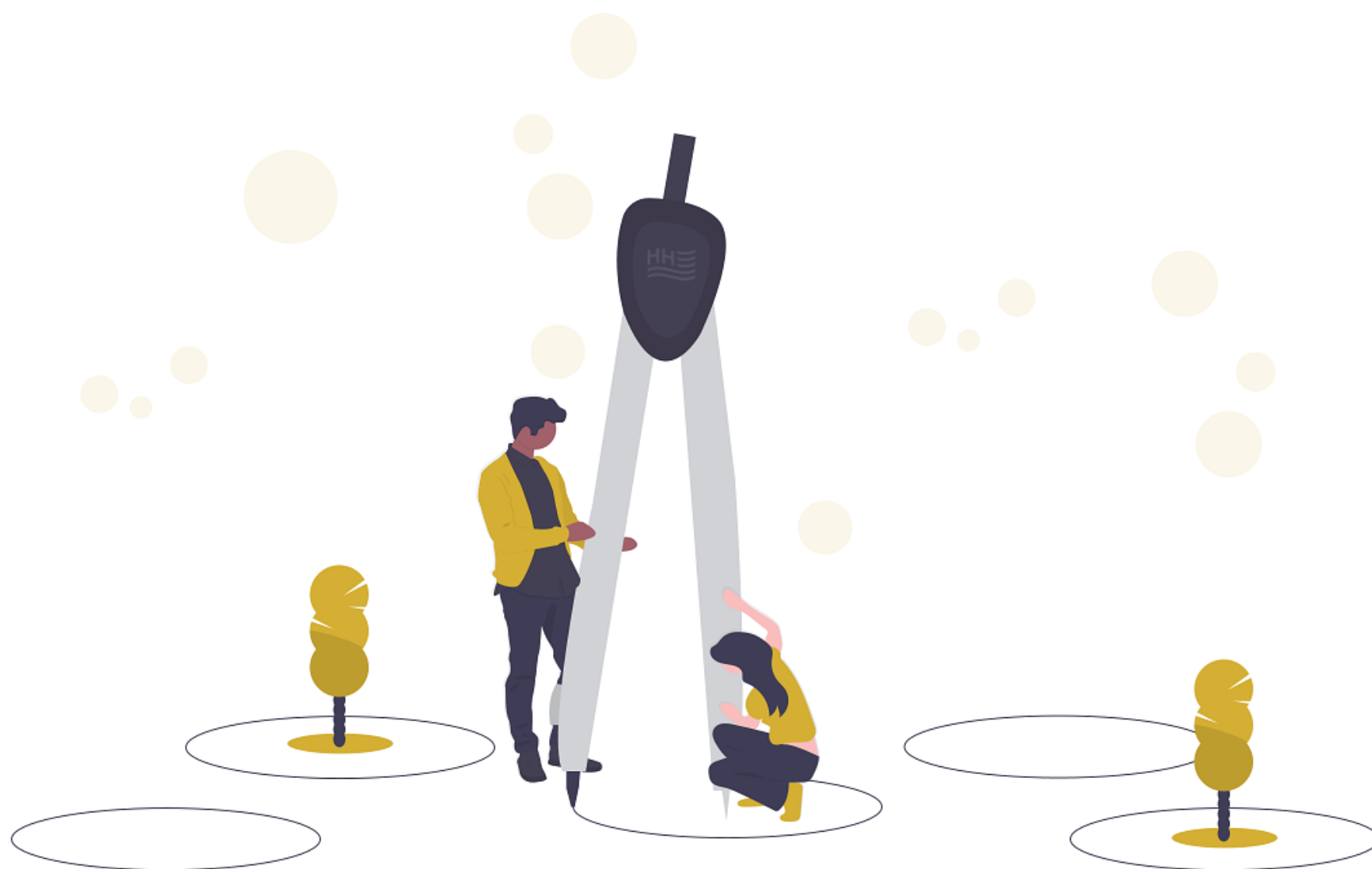
There are already so many of these in the market, so you're just making it harder on yourself to stand out.

2. Stay clear of pun names

Puns may be catchy, but they're short lived and their appreciation diminishes quickly.

CREATING A LOGO FOR YOUR CANNABIS COMPANY

Your logo is your brand's flag so make sure you want to wave it loud and proud.



Here's where the rubber meets the road and we begin to bring in some visuals. All of the foundation that you've been laying— the personality, values, target audience— begins to take shape and influence what your logo will be.

A lot of businesses jump to this step because it's the most obvious. But without the guiding light of the strategy that goes into the backend, it's easy to get lost. If you have a strong understanding of your brand's essence the logo will inevitably be easier for you to define, focus, and express.

“IT WILL MAKE SOMEONE CLICK ON YOUR WEBSITE, PICK UP YOUR PRODUCT, OR STOP BY YOUR BOOTH TO CHECK YOU OUT.”

The logo of your brand is one of the most potentially attention grabbing elements of your branding. It will make someone click on your website, pick up your product, or stop by your booth to check you out. Your logo is one of the most potent elements of your branding, and because of this, scrutiny is the name of the game. Are the letters squared or rounded? How bold is it? How intricate is the design? Every little detail should be analyzed and focused to guide the user experience and communicate exactly what you want.

Digging Deeper

A logo is a visual representation of your brand. It's the elevator pitch of the visual world. The goal for a logo is to be the symbol that sparks an understanding of who you are, what you do, and what you stand for. It's your badge that represents your company.

There are two main categories of logos: ones with a logomark and logotype and others with only logotype. Each have their benefits and drawbacks, and we're not one to judge; every brand is different and some brands just seem right with one style or the other. Additionally, logo systems are a connected set of designs that can be used in a variety of settings. We love these guys.

They're flexible by nature, so there's a best choice for pretty much any setting you can think of, from the tiny end of a vaporizer pen or favicon to a large print ad or flower jar. Logo systems are time-intensive to make since they're modifications of a single design locked up multiple ways. And you need to have an eye for the process otherwise you run the risk of it looking disjointed.

How To Do It

1. Brainstorm a direction

This is where it comes in handy to have a solid brand strategy. You can gather inspiration from your values, story, etc. to come up with a few avenues to pursue. Think abstractly. Or concretely. Then try to elevate these elements by conceptualizing them into a framework that would work for a logo.

2. Bring in fonts

Whether you have a logotype only or logotype with a logomark, the font you choose communicates a lot about who you are. A typeface that doesn't fit the brand will confuse your prospective customers. And because those first impressions are vital, we want to avoid that as much as possible.

3. Create your logomark

Make sure your logomark remains connected to the logotype and the brand as a whole (remember the 3 c's we covered in the intro?). Your logo should relate back to your brand's personality.

4. Bring in color

Here's where the possibilities of your brand really open up. Introducing colors can completely transform the look and feel of a brand, and even of a logo. Is your brand fun and funky? If so, splashes of bold colors might be the way to go. Is your brand nurturing and rooted? Maybe nudes and a flash of gold is the answer.

Traits of a Good Name

Identifiable

The last thing you want to do is fade into the masses with a blah logo. Does your logo look similar to another company out there? While it can be a strategy to leverage understanding of your company using visual archetypes, you need to make sure you are forging your own path. And nobody likes a copycat.

Stylish but not trendy

We all have to keep up with the Jones', but incorporating fast-to-fade trends is one way to guarantee that you'll look dated and have to spend money on an update sooner.

Scalable

Does your logo look good up close? How about far away? People often don't think about the different situations that your logo is going to appear. A logo should be flexible enough to use, and look stellar, in a variety of environments— t-shirts, billboards, on a website, or in a print ad.

Some Tips

1. Design in black and white

It's a good idea to start designing your logo in black and white. This helps you to dial in the true shape and meaning of your logo. And if your logo doesn't look good in black and white, it probably doesn't look good, period.

2. Use mockups

Mockups are a great way to visualize your logo out in the "real world." Sometimes giving your design context will help highlight strong elements or point out areas that might not work on a particular application.

3. Share it with your target audience

The best way to see if your target market will like it is to ask them! We do want to caveat that unless it's a formalized focus group, your mileage may vary. While asking friends and family who match your demographic may be enlightening, people can fly fast and loose with their feedback so you should take it with a grain of salt.

THE LAST THOUGHTS

Hooray! You made it through. You're now equipped with the basic tools to understand the foundational elements of branding. There's a lot of weight that it carries.

There's a lot of weight to branding. It's an important step on your journey to success, but it doesn't have to be scary if you know why you're doing what your doing.

If you take nothing else away from this document, here are some key take-away points:

- **Branding is really, really important. A picture is worth a thousand words, and your brand needs to speak for you.**

- Your brand's personality defines what makes you different.

- Your values enable customers to identify with you on a deeper level.

- Defining your target audience will help you find those that will hear you the loudest.

We hope you've learned something, had fun, and are inspired to up the ante and commit to building a strong brand that the world needs to see! Stay tuned for other articles discussing core creative elements your company will need.

You can do this! And if you can't, we are here to help. Reach out and we'd be happy to discuss how we can lend a helping hand with your next branding project.

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