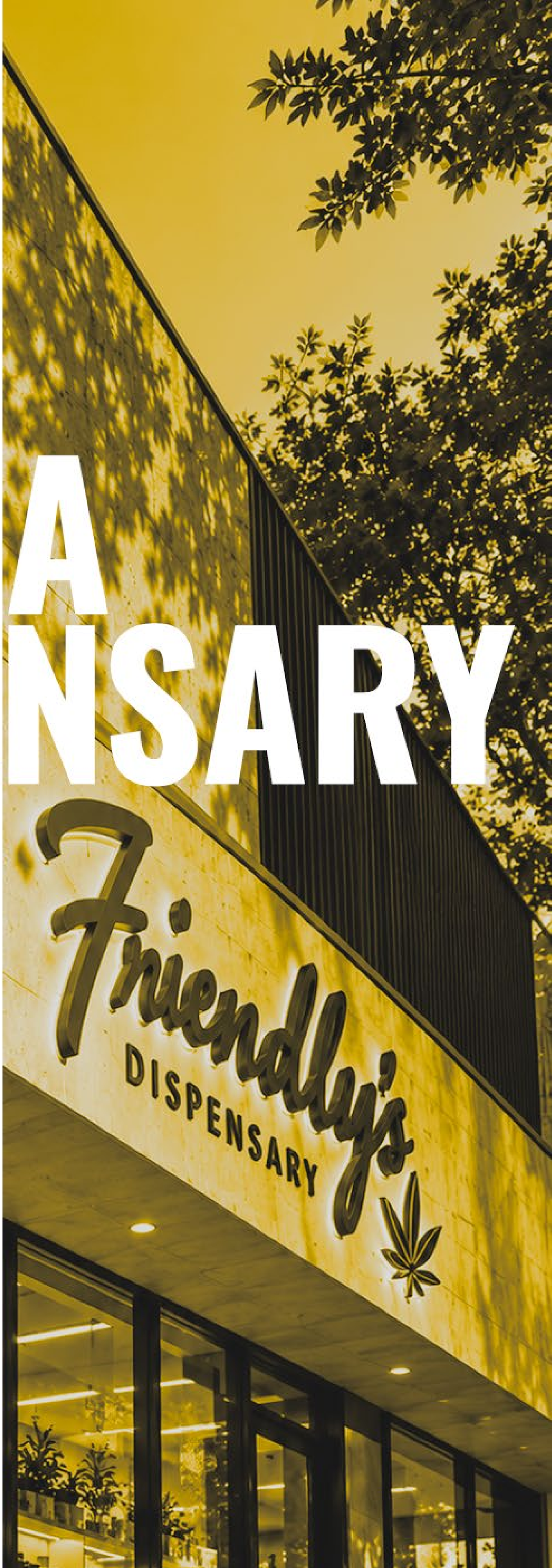
DON'T OPEN A DISPENSARY

THE HOOD COLLECTIVE GUIDE
TO OPENING ONE ANWAY

PRACTICAL ADVICE
HARD-EARNED LESSONS



SO YOU'RE GOING TO DO IT ANYWAY.

Fair enough.

Opening a dispensary can be a great business. It can also be an extraordinarily expensive way to discover that enthusiasm, cannabis experience, and a license aren't the same thing as a viable retail operation.

We've worked with enough dispensaries to see where good ideas go sideways: budgets that stop making sense, locations chosen because they were available, technology nobody knows how to run, brands built as an afterthought, and plenty of money spent before anyone has figured out whether the whole thing actually works.

This guide is about avoiding as much of that as possible.

We're not going to tell you how exciting the cannabis industry is. You already know. We're going to tell you where to be skeptical, where not to compromise, what deserves your money, and what you need to figure out before opening day.

You may still decide to open a dispensary.

We just want you to have a better shot at still being glad you did.



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THE 3 CHECKPOINTS:

EVERYTHING YOU MUST KNOW BEFORE YOU COMMIT.

1.

DON’T OPEN A DISPENSARY

- Most businesses fail
- Cannabis is harder than most industries
- The green rush is over
- Seriously. Don’t open a dispensary.
- **Still here? Prove us wrong.**

2.

ASSUME IT WILL COST MORE THAN YOU THINK

2.



YOU ARE UNDERESTIMATING HOW MUCH THIS WILL COST.

Almost everyone either starts with assumptions about what opening a dispensary will cost, or they have a fixed sum available to them and are determined to stay within that budget.

Some will be wrong.

Everyone else will be very wrong.

Treat your initial budget as a hypothesis, not a fact.

Until you've worked through the actual decisions involved in opening and operating the business, you don't really know what the business is going to cost.

If you don't have significantly more cash available to you than you expect to need, **stop now before it's too late**.

2.

DON’T START SPENDING UNTIL YOU UNDERSTAND THE ENTIRE BUSINESS.

Work through the full operation first: your business plan and structure, location, licensing, buildout, security, technology, staffing, inventory, branding, marketing, professional services, operating expenses, and post-opening capital.

MORE THAN 25% OF OUR CLIENTS NEVER MAKE IT TO LAUNCH.

They’ve already committed enough to hire us, and some still don’t get the doors open. Don’t let money already spent become the reason you keep spending. Figure out what the whole business requires before you start committing serious capital to pieces of it.



2.

DON'T GUESS THE NUMBERS

GET REAL QUOTES BEFORE YOU DECIDE WHAT YOU CAN AFFORD.

Don't build the budget from Google searches, industry averages, what another owner remembers paying, or what you hope things will cost. Get actual numbers for your state. The more assumptions you can replace with actual numbers, the more useful your budget becomes.



2.

BUDGET FOR THE MONTHS WHEN MONEY ONLY GOES OUT.

Long before you make your first sale, the bills start piling up: rent, legal and professional fees, insurance, software, utilities, management payroll, and more. Opening dates slip, often by months. Every extra month means another month of expenses with zero revenue coming in. Make sure your budget has enough pre-opening capital to absorb those costs for longer than expected.

2.



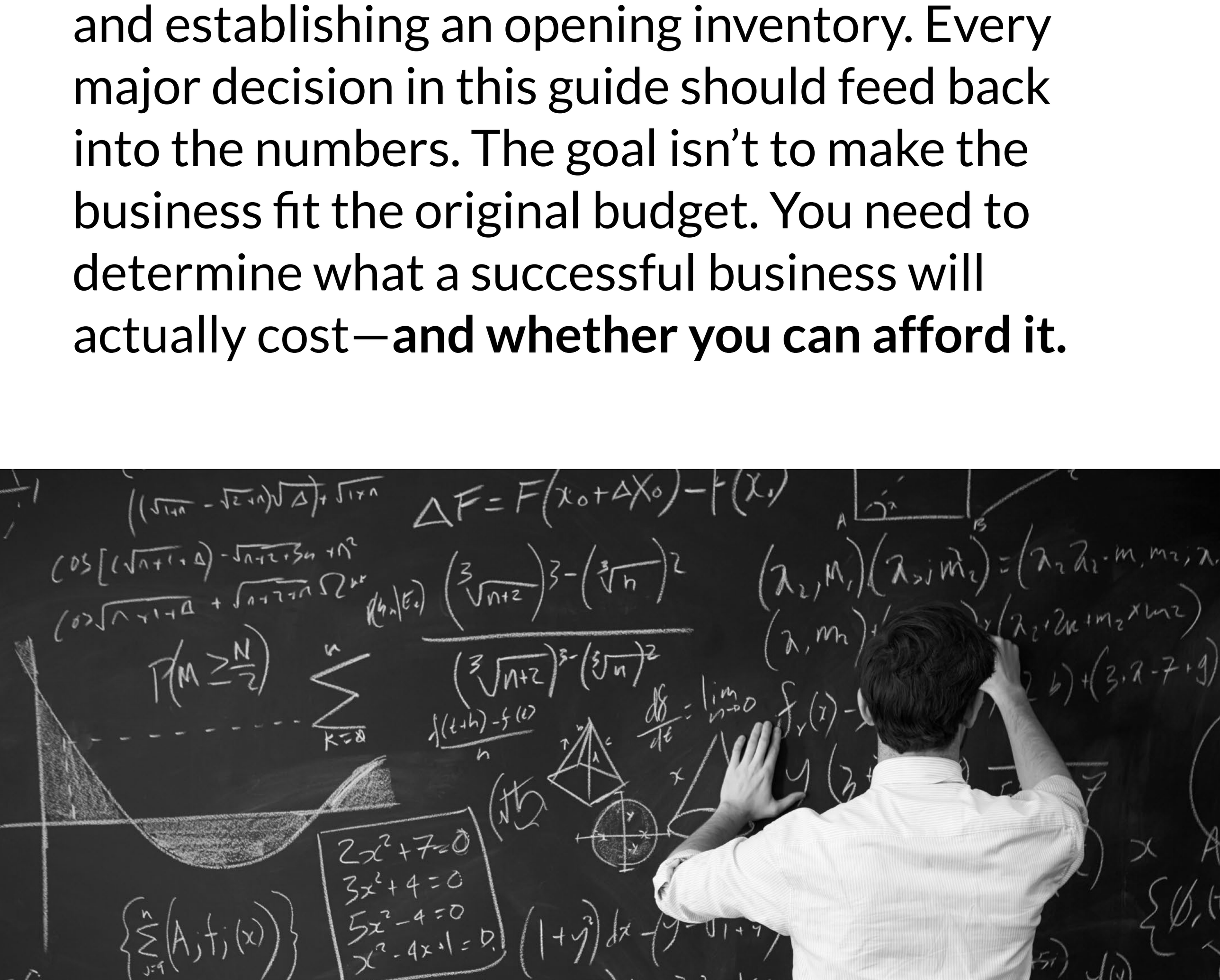
DON'T USE YOUR OPENING DATE AS THE END OF THE BUDGET.

The business also needs operating capital after launch. And the amount shouldn't be based on the assumption that sales immediately hit the level required to cover expenses. Opening the doors doesn't mean the business immediately starts paying for itself.

2.

REBUILD THE BUDGET AS THE PLAN BECOMES REAL.

The budget you made before finding a location isn’t the budget you should rely on after getting construction bids, selecting technology, planning the store, getting insurance quotes, and establishing an opening inventory. Every major decision in this guide should feed back into the numbers. The goal isn’t to make the business fit the original budget. You need to determine what a successful business will actually cost—**and whether you can afford it.**



3.

DON’T COMPROMISE ON LOCATION

3.



TALK TO OTHER OPERATORS IN YOUR MARKET.

ASK WHAT THEY WISH THEY KNEW BEFORE CHOOSING THEIR LOCATION, WHAT AREAS WORK, WHAT AREAS DON’T, AND WHAT MISTAKES THEY SEE NEW OWNERS MAKE.

3.

SPEND TIME AT THE LOCATION.

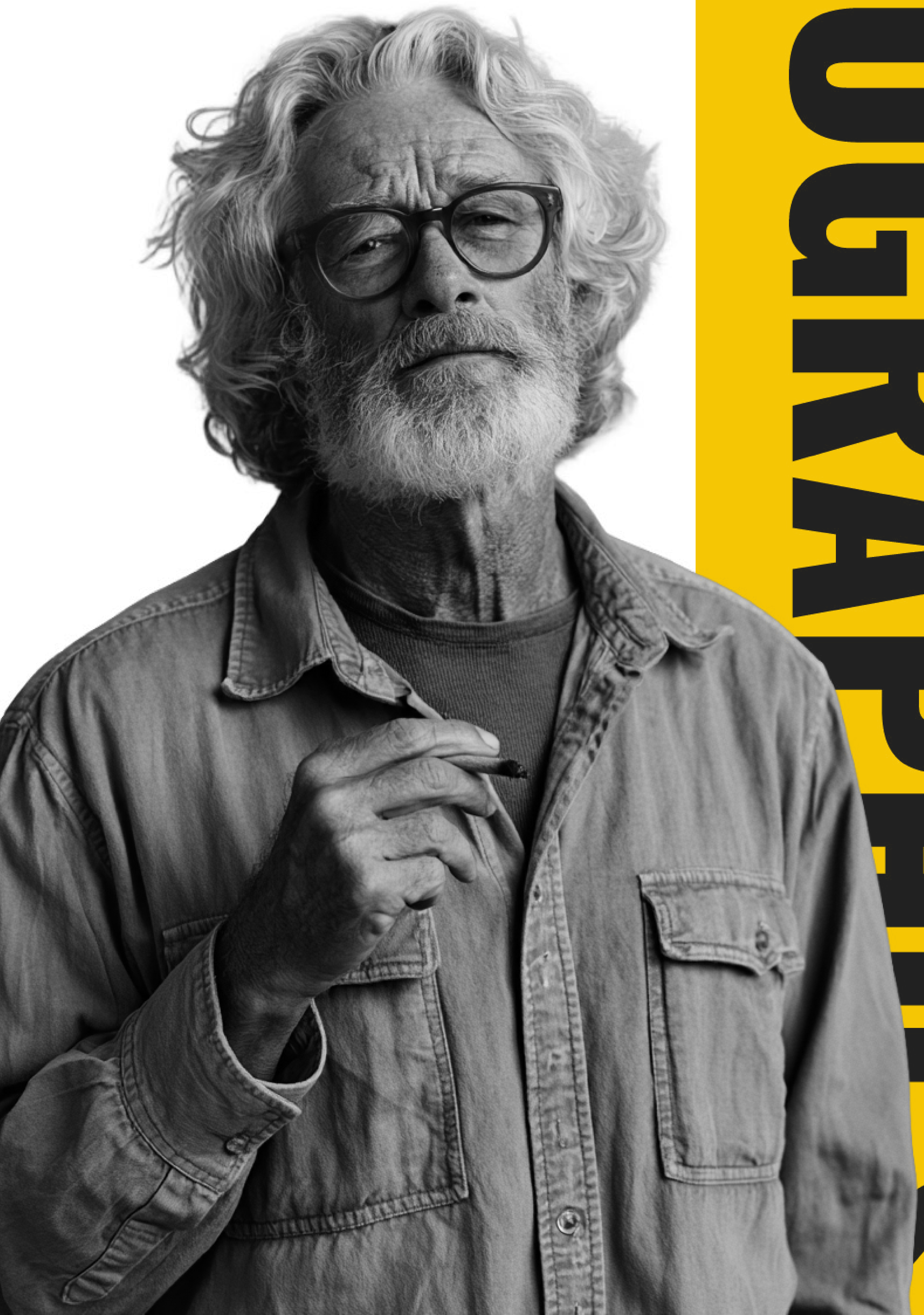
VISIT DURING THE HOURS YOU EXPECT CUSTOMERS TO SHOP. LOOK AT TRAFFIC, VISIBILITY, ACCESS, PARKING, AND WHETHER THE LOCATION FEELS CONVENIENT.

3.

UNDERSTAND THE LOCATION’S

DEMOGRAPHICS

LOOK AT WHO LIVES, WORKS, AND SHOPS NEARBY. CONSIDER AGE, INCOME, POPULATION TRENDS, AND WHETHER THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY MATCHES THE TYPE OF CUSTOMERS YOU EXPECT TO SERVE.





DON’T LET RENT BE THE DECIDING FACTOR.

YOU’RE GOING TO NEED TO MAKE A LOT OF COMPROMISES. YOUR LOCATION SHOULD ABSOLUTELY NOT BE ONE OF THEM. IF IT TURNS OUT THE ONLY LOCATION YOU CAN AFFORD IS A LOCATION YOU WOULD NEVER CHOOSE OTHERWISE, THAT’S A WARNING SIGN.

WHAT YOU MUST DO BEFORE YOU OPEN:





NOW COMES THE HARD PART

You know **branding** matters. You know you need the right **technology**. You know **customers** aren't going to magically appear.

And yet this is where smart people start making excuses:

We can improve the brand later.
This system should be good enough.
Once we open, word will spread.

Those choices solve immediate problems. They preserve cash and give you one less thing to deal with right now. The consequences come later—when changing course is more expensive, and may no longer fix the damage.

You're going to make hundreds of decisions before you open, and almost every one of them will seem important. **But they are not all equally important.**

Three of them will shape nearly everything that happens after you open. Get them right, and you give yourself a fighting chance. Treat them like three more problems to solve, and **you may spend years paying for decisions you made before the first customer ever walked through the door.**

PRIORITY 1

BRAND +

EXPERIENCE

PRIORITY 1



THE COMMON FAILURE: OWNERS TREAT THE BRAND AS DECORATION INSTEAD OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE BUSINESS.

Owners focus on what they view as necessities: getting licensed, finding a location, building the store, and stocking products. The logo and marketing often become an afterthought. But a dispensary does not compete on its products. It competes on the reason customers choose it, remember it, and keep coming back.

PRIORITY 1

BRAND STRATEGY AND POSITIONING

DEFINE WHAT THE DISPENSARY STANDS FOR, WHO IT IS FOR, AND WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT BEFORE MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT THE STORE, MARKETING, OR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE.



PRIORITY 1

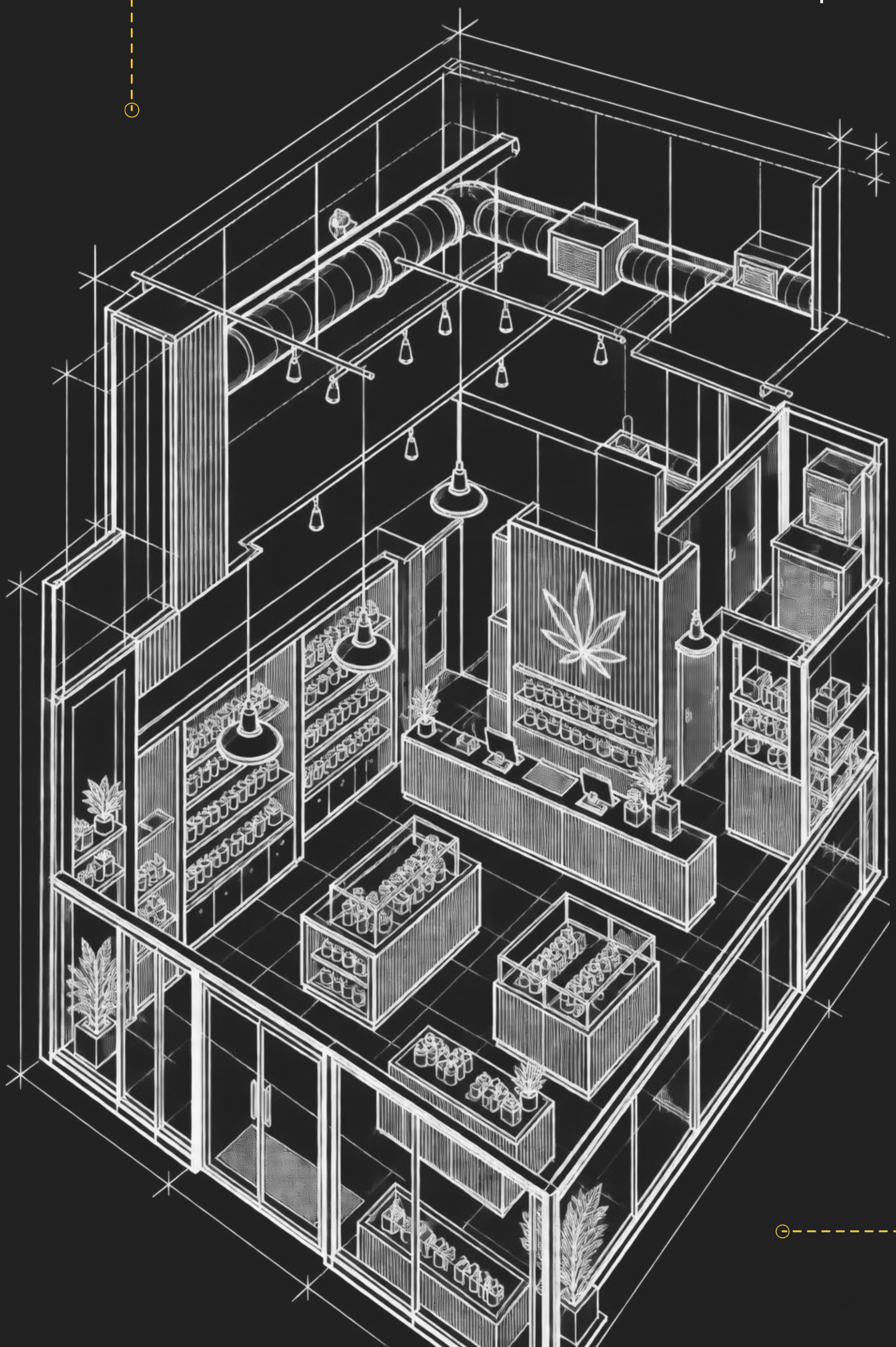
CREATE A NAME AND VISUAL IDENTITY THAT COMMUNICATES YOUR POSITION CONSISTENTLY ACROSS THE STOREFRONT, WEBSITE, PACKAGING, ADVERTISING, AND ALL CUSTOMER TOUCHPOINTS.

VISUAL IDENTITY

PRIORITY 1

STORE DESIGN AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Design the physical environment around the brand strategy, from layout and customer flow to atmosphere and how people interact with the space.



PRIORITY 1

MERCHANDISING AND PRODUCT PRESENTATION

Create a shopping experience that helps customers discover products and reinforces what the brand represents.



PRIORITY 1

SERVICE MODEL AND BUDTENDER EXPERIENCE

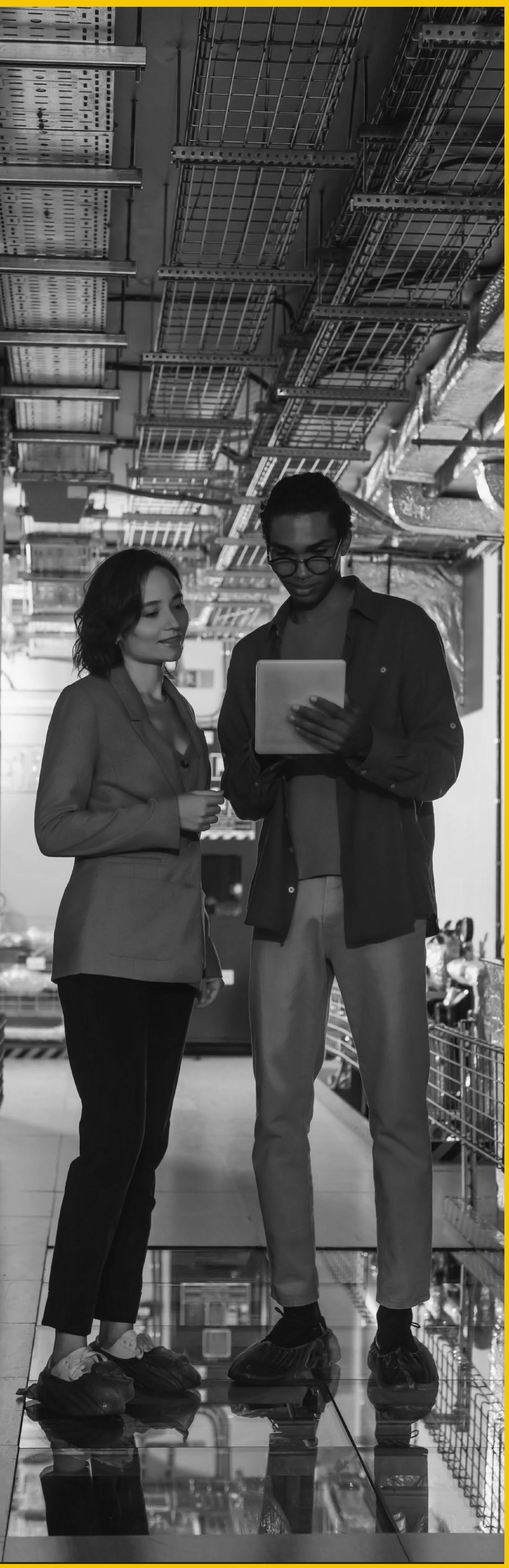
Define how your customers should be treated, educated, and guided. The people behind the counter are one of the most important expressions of your brand.

PRIORITY 2



TECHNOLOGY + E-COMMERCE

PRIORITY 2



THIS ISN’T OPTIONAL.

You aren’t running a shoe store.

Every sale has to exist inside a regulated system.

Your dispensary needs technology that can track sales and inventory, maintain the records required by your state, and work with the payment options available to a cannabis business. A POS isn’t something you add because it makes checkout easier. It is part of the basic infrastructure required to operate.

So the question isn’t whether you’re going to have a technology platform.

You are.

The question is whether you’re going to treat it as an expensive requirement—or use it to help you run a better business.

PRIORITY 2



YOUR DISPENSARY GENERATES DATA EVERY TIME SOMEONE BUYS SOMETHING.

USE IT.

Your systems can tell you what sells, what sits, when products sell, what customers buy together, which promotions actually move product, how often customers return, and much more.

That information can help you:

- Carry more of what actually sells and less of what doesn’t.
- Identify slow inventory before it becomes a bigger problem.
- Make smarter purchasing and restocking decisions.
- Understand which products, brands, and categories are actually making you money.
- Price and promote products based on what is happening in your store.
- Segment customers and make your marketing more relevant.
- Automate work that would otherwise eat up staff time.

DON’T JUST USE YOUR TECHNOLOGY TO RING PEOPLE UP.

USE IT TO RUN THE BUSINESS.

PRIORITY 2

POS

Point of Sale
The system at the center of the retail operation. It records transactions and connects sales with inventory, reporting, compliance, and other parts of the technology stack.

CRM

Customer Relationship Management
The system that organizes customer information and activity so you can understand, communicate with, and market to your customers. Loyalty, email, and SMS capabilities may be built in or connected separately.

PAYMENT PROCESSOR

This system handles the intake of money when customers pay electronically. Because of cannabis payment restrictions, available options and fees require particular attention.

E-COMMERCE

The online menu and ordering system customers use to browse products and place orders for pickup or delivery.

COMPLIANCE/ SEED-TO-SALE

The state-required tracking system used to account for regulated cannabis inventory as it moves through the legal market. Your retail technology needs to work correctly with whatever system your state requires.

INTEGRATION

The connection that allows separate systems to exchange information—for example, your POS sending inventory data to your online menu.

API

The mechanism that makes those integrations possible. You don’t need to know how to build one, but must know whether the systems you’re considering can actually connect.

PRIORITY 2

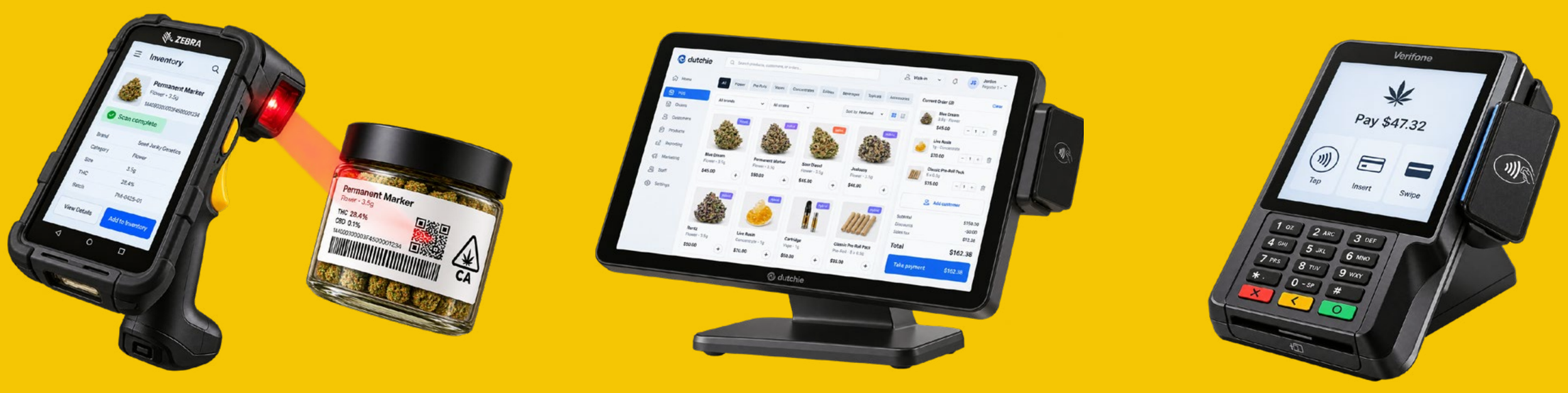
THE BIG DECISION

ALL-IN-ONE OR VENDOR STACK?

This is the first big technology decision.

An all-in-one platform puts more of the operation under one provider. Fewer vendors and integrations can make the system easier to manage—but you're also more dependent on what that provider does well, what it doesn't, and what it charges.

A modular stack lets you choose different providers for different parts of the business. That gives you more control over individual tools, but someone has to make those systems work together.



DON'T CHOOSE A POS IN ISOLATION. CHOOSE THE TECHNOLOGY STACK.

PRIORITY 2
DUTCHIE VS. BLAZE

Both Dutchie and BLAZE offer all-in-one platforms built specifically for cannabis retailers. They handle the core requirements -- POS, inventory, compliance and reporting -- but take different approaches to payments, ecommerce, and marketing.

PLATFORM	dutchie	BLAZE®
POS, INVENTORY, COMPLIANCE Core retail operations	**YES** Built-in (all-in-one platform)	**YES** Built-in (all-in-one platform)
PAYMENTS How you get paid	**DUTCHIE PAY** and Pay by Bank	**BLAZE PAYMENTS** (integrated)
ONLINE STORE Menu and ordering	**YES** Built-in ecommerce	**YES** Built-in ecommerce
FULL WEBSITE Branded website	**LIMITED** Basic templates (add-ons for more)	**YES** BLAZE Sites included
DELIVERY In-house or third party	**YES** Integrated delivery tools	**YES** Integrated delivery tools
LOYALTY Rewards program	**YES** Built-in	**YES** Built-in
CUSTOMER MARKETING Email, SMS, push	**YES** Built-in	**YES** Built-in
CRM Customer data and segmentation	**YES** Built-in	**YES** Built-in
INTEGRATIONS Third-party tools	**YES** Growing ecosystem	**LIMITED** Focused ecosystem (most tools included)
APPROACH Overall strategy	**BROAD ECOSYSTEM** Wide range of tools and partner integrations. Flexible but may require add-ons for a full website.	**ALL-IN-ONE EXPERIENCE** Everything you need in one platform, including a full website and built-in marketing. Fewer third-party tools, but less to manage.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Both platforms can run your entire operation. Dutchie offers more flexibility and a larger ecosystem of partner tools, while BLAZE provides a more complete built-in solution, including a full website and marketing.

PRIORITY 2
FLOWHUB vs. TREEZ

Flowhub and Treez focus on flexible, modular systems. Both offer strong core tools for retail operations, but take different approaches to payments, delivery, and third-party integrations.

PLATFORM	flowhub	TREEZ
POS, INVENTORY, COMPLIANCE Core retail operations	**YES** Built-in (all-in-one platform)	**YES** Built-in (all-in-one platform)
PAYMENTS How you get paid	**FLOWHUB PAYMENTS** (and partners)	**TREEZ PAYMENTS** (and partners)
ONLINE STORE Menu and ordering	**YES** Built-in ecommerce	**YES** Built-in ecommerce
FULL WEBSITE Branded website	**NO** Need a separate website	**NO** Need a separate website
DELIVERY In-house or third party	**LIMITED** Via partners	**YES** Built-in delivery tools
LOYALTY Rewards program	**YES** Built-in	**YES** Built-in
CUSTOMER MARKETING Email, SMS, push	**YES** Built-in	**YES** Built-in
CRM Customer data and segmentation	**YES** Built-in	**YES** Built-in
INTEGRATIONS Third-party tools	**YES** Open API, Broad ecosystem	**LIMITED** Strong, third-party ecosystem
APPROACH Overall strategy	**OPEN AND FLEXIBLE** Wide range of tools and partner integrations. Flexible but may require add-ons for a full website.	**DELIVERY-FOCUSED MODULAR** Everything you need in one platform, including a full website and buit-in marketing. Fewer third-party tools, but less to manage.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Both platforms give you flexibility and strong core tools. Flowhub is a good fit if you want an open, modular system. Treez stands out for its built-in delivery capabilities and deep integration options.

PRIORITY 2
COVA vs. BIOTRACK

Both Cova and BioTrack are cannabis retail POS platforms with inventory and compliance at the core. Cova emphasizes an open partner ecosystem, while BioTrack brings deep seed-to-sale roots and robust native retail functionality.

PLATFORM	COVA	BIOTRACK
POS, INVENTORY, COMPLIANCE Core retail operations	✓ **YES** Built-in (all-in-one platform)	✓ **YES** Built-in (all-in-one platform)
PAYMENTS How you get paid	✓ **COVA PAY** (and partners)	− **VIA INTEGRATIONS** Payment tool partners
ONLINE STORE Menu and ordering	✓ **YES** Cova eCommerce (Native plug-and-play)	− **YES** Available via dedicated partner solutions
FULL WEBSITE Branded website	− **NO** Not a full website builder	− **NO** Separate website req.
DELIVERY In-house or third party	− **LIMITED** Via partners	✓ **YES** Native delivery and pickup workflows
LOYALTY Rewards program	✓ **YES** POS loyalty features	✓ **YES** Native options
CUSTOMER MARKETING Email, SMS, push	− **VIA INTEGRATIONS** Partners with Springbig, Alpine IQ, etc.	✓ **YES** Native email and SMS
CRM Customer data and segmentation	− **VIA INTEGRATIONS** Features work with Springbig, Alpine IQ, etc.	✓ **YES** Native customer profiles and data-driven CRM
INTEGRATIONS Third-party tools	✓ **YES** Open API and partner ecosystem	✓ **LIMITED** Includes e-commerce, delivery, payments, etc.
APPROACH Overall strategy	**OPEN ECOSYSTEM** A POS-centered platform that gives you flexibility to choose the best tools for your stack.	**COMPLIANCE-FIRST** A retail platform with deep seed-to-sale roots and robust functionality, with partner tools for additional capabilities.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Cova is strongest for retailers who want a POS at the center of a flexible partner ecosystem. BioTrack combines deep compliance infrastructure with more native CRM, loyalty, and operational tools, while relying on partners for e-commerce and some extensions.

PRIORITY 2
THE 10 KEY QUESTIONS

Use these questions to compare platforms and get clear responses from vendors on what's included, what costs extra, and how the platform fits your business.

1. **WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE POS, INVENTORY, COMPLIANCE, AND REPORTING? WHAT COSTS EXTRA?**
2. **WHAT PAYMENT PROCESSOR(S) DO YOU USE? WHAT ARE THE TRANSACTION AND MONTHLY FEES?**
3. **IS THE ONLINE STORE INCLUDED? ARE THERE ADDITIONAL FEES INVOLVED?**
4. **IS A FULL BRANDED WEBSITE INCLUDED? CAN THE MENU LIVE ON OUR DOMAIN? WHAT CUSTOMIZATION IS AVAILABLE?**
5. **DO YOU OFFER DELIVERY TOOLS? HOW ARE ROUTES, DRIVER TRACKING, AND MANIFESTS HANDLED? ANY ADDITIONAL FEES?**
6. **IS A LOYALTY PROGRAM INCLUDED? IF NOT, WHICH PARTNERS DO YOU INTEGRATE WITH? ANY ADDITIONAL FEES?**
7. **WHAT EMAIL, SMS, AND PUSH MARKETING TOOLS ARE INCLUDED? ARE THERE ADDITIONAL COSTS FOR MESSAGING CONTACTS?**
8. **WHO OWNS THE CUSTOMER DATA? CAN WE ACCESS AND EXPORT OUR CUSTOMER DATA IF WE CHANGE PLATFORMS?**
9. **WHAT INTEGRATIONS DO YOU OFFER? DO YOU HAVE A PUBLIC LIST OF INTEGRATIONS? ANY ADDITIONAL FEES?**
10. **WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED IN THE QUOTE? ARE THERE SET UP AND IMPLEMENTATION FEES? WHAT'S THE CONTRACT LENGTH AND ANY TERMINATION FEES?**

PRIORITY 2

ALL-IN-ONE OR MODULAR?

Most major cannabis platforms can handle the basics: POS, inventory, compliance and reporting. The decision gets harder when you move beyond the basics.

An all-in-one platform may also provide your payments, e-commerce, loyalty, CRM, marketing and delivery tools. That means fewer systems to buy, connect and manage. But “included” doesn’t necessarily mean best-in-class. You may find that some of those tools are limited, poorly supported, or simply not as good as what a specialized provider offers.

A modular approach lets you choose separate providers for those functions. That gives you more choice, but every choice creates another relationship to manage. More contracts. More integrations. More bills. And when two systems don’t work together properly, you may be dealing with two companies instead of one.

The tradeoff isn’t features. It’s control versus complexity.

The more you consolidate, the easier your technology may be to manage—but the more dependent you become on the strengths and weaknesses of one platform.

The more you separate, the more control you have over the individual tools—but the more responsibility you take on for making the whole system work together.



PRIORITY 2

PRICE THE TECH SYSTEM YOU ACTUALLY NEED

A POS quote doesn’t tell you what your technology will cost.

Start adding e-commerce, payments, loyalty, email and SMS, delivery, integrations, hardware, implementation, support—and potentially a separate website—and the number changes quickly.

GET A COMPLETE QUOTE.

Know what is included, what costs extra, what requires another vendor, what carries transaction fees, and what happens to the price as the business grows.

This also ties directly back to the budget section: technology is one of the major decisions that is supposed to feed back into the real operating budget.

PRIORITY 2

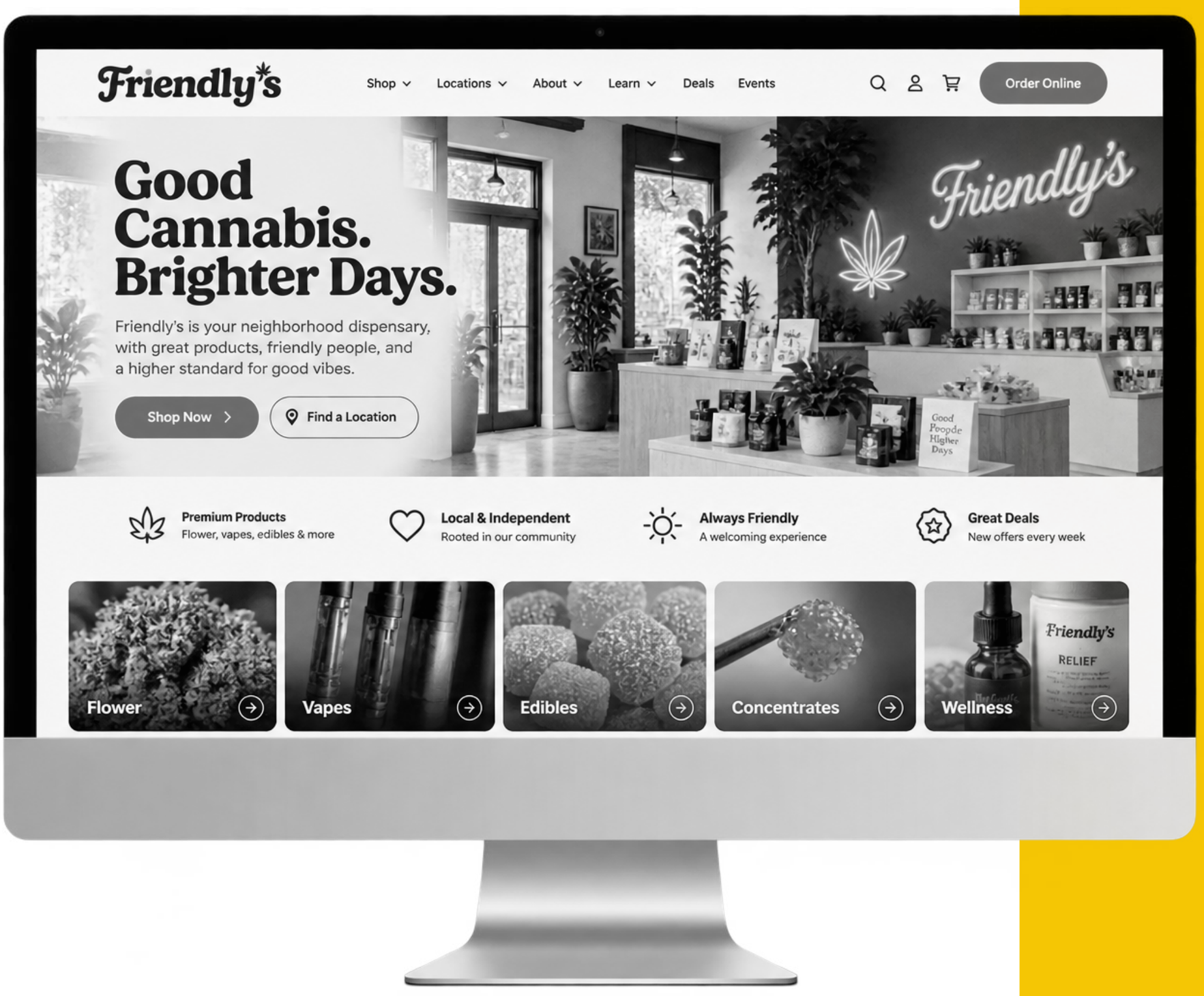
YOUR ONLINE STORE IS NOT YOUR WEBSITE.

Your e-commerce platform handles shopping. Your website has a much bigger job.

It is where your brand lives online, where customers find you through search, and where you control the experience surrounding the menu—from your story and locations to education, promotions, events, and everything else you want customers to discover.

For most dispensaries, the menu should live inside a properly designed website, not become the website.

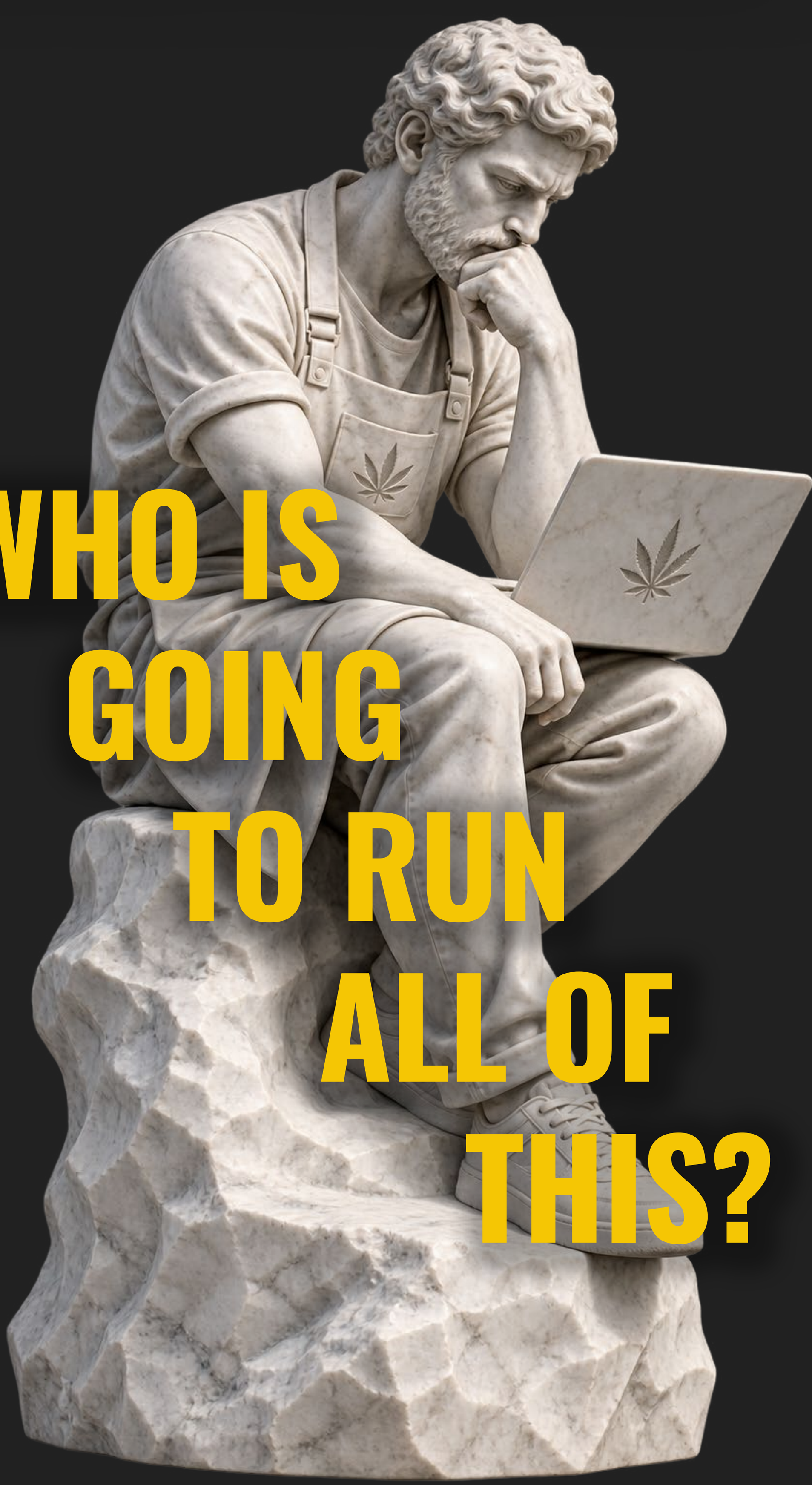
DON’T LET THE LIMITATIONS OF YOUR POS PLATFORM DICTATE THE QUALITY OF ONE OF YOUR MOST IMPORTANT CUSTOMER-FACING ASSETS.



BUT IT SHOULD NEVER LIMIT WHAT YOUR BRAND CAN BE.

PRIORITY 2

NOW LOOK AT EVERYTHING ABOVE...



WHO IS GOING TO RUN ALL OF THIS?

PRIORITY 2



HIRE FOR THE BUSINESS YOU'RE ACTUALLY RUNNING.

When dispensary owners think about who should run the store, cannabis experience can seem like the obvious qualification. A person who knows the products, the brands, the growers, and the industry feels like a person who understands the business.

But look at the business we've actually been describing.

It runs on inventory, technology, e-commerce, compliance, data, vendors, processes, and people. The difficult part isn't getting cannabis onto the shelves. Every producer in the state wants to sell you product.

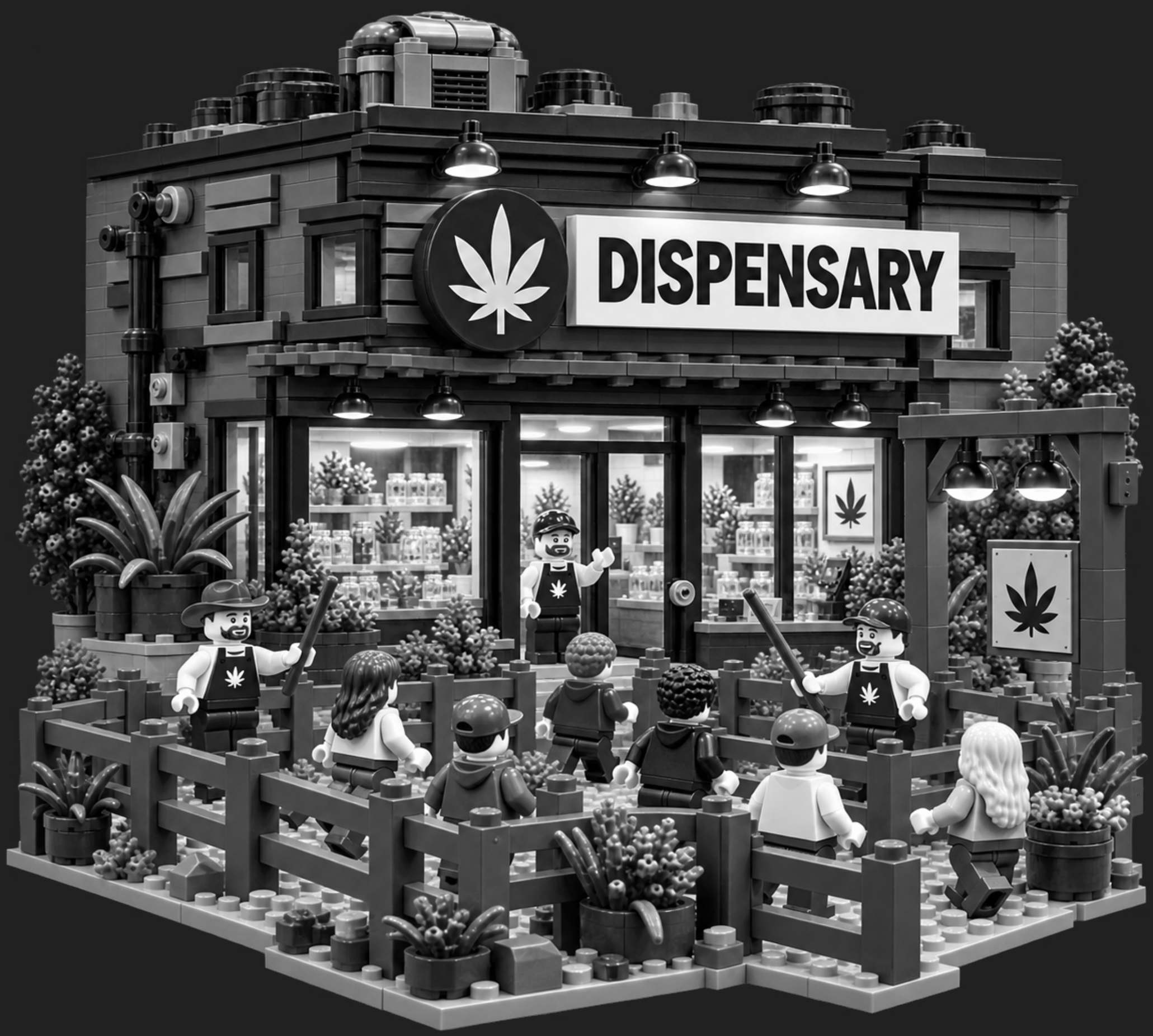
Your true challenge is managing this highly complex business while turning a profit. You need someone on your team who has expertise building and operating retail systems and understands data analysis.

IF THAT'S YOU, CONGRATULATIONS.

IF IT'S NOT, IT NEEDS TO BE THE FIRST PERSON YOU HIRE.

PRIORITY 3

CUSTOMER ACQUISITION + RETENTION



PRIORITY 3



THE TECHNOLOGY, DATA, AND OPERATIONAL EXPERTISE YOU'VE INVESTED IN SHOULD GIVE YOU A POWERFUL ADVANTAGE: THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND YOUR CUSTOMERS, REACH MORE OF THEM, AND TURN MORE FIRST VISITS INTO LASTING RELATIONSHIPS.

PRIORITY 3

CHOOSE THE CHANNELS YOU CAN ACTUALLY SUCCEED WITH

- CONCENTRATE RESOURCES RATHER THAN TRYING TO DO EVERYTHING POORLY.

- CHOOSE CHANNELS BASED ON GENUINE ADVANTAGES: EXPERTISE, EXISTING AUDIENCE, LOCATION, COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS, ETC.

- WE GENERALLY RECOMMEND SEO/ LOCAL SEARCH + EMAIL/LOYALTY AS THE TWO OPTIONS WITH THE BEST ROI.

- AVOID HIGH COST, LITTLE RETURN CHANNELS, SUCH AS SOCIAL, AND STEER AWAY FROM AREAS THAT AREN'T A GOOD MATCH.

PRIORITY 3

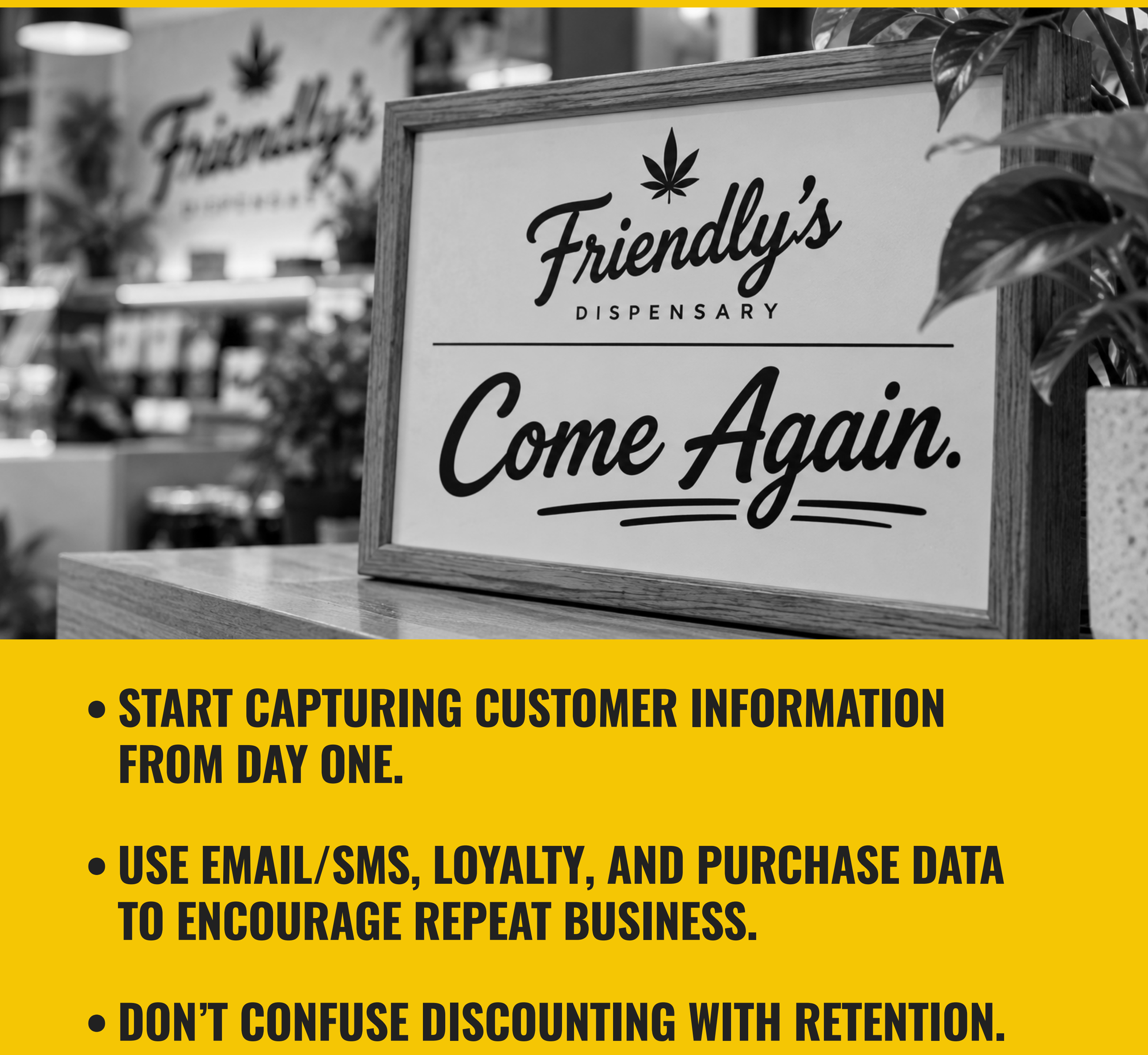
HIRE THE RIGHT PERSON OR TEAM



- AS WITH THE OPERATIONS SIDE, MARKETING REQUIRES ACTUAL EXPERTISE. DON’T MAKE IT AN AFTERTHOUGHT OR ASSIGN IT TO WHOEVER HAPPENS TO HAVE TIME.
- HIRE SPECIFICALLY FOR THE TWO OR THREE CHANNELS YOU IDENTIFY AS MOST ESSENTIAL TO YOUR SUCCESS.
- MAKE MEASUREMENT, REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY PART OF THE ROLE FROM THE BEGINNING.

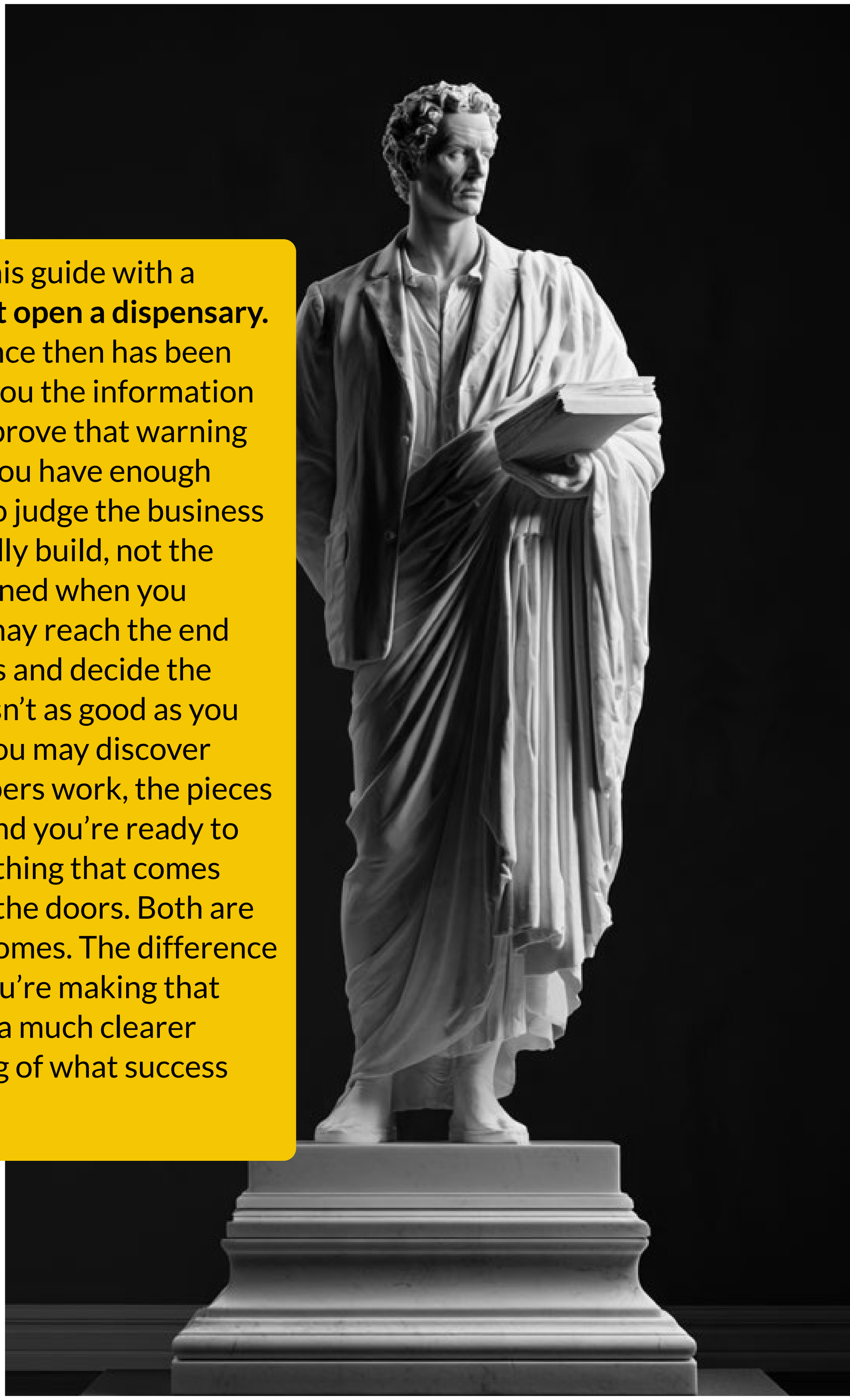
PRIORITY 3

CONCENTRATE ON TURNING FIRST TIME CUSTOMERS INTO REPEAT CUSTOMERS



- **START CAPTURING CUSTOMER INFORMATION FROM DAY ONE.**
- **USE EMAIL/SMS, LOYALTY, AND PURCHASE DATA TO ENCOURAGE REPEAT BUSINESS.**
- **DON'T CONFUSE DISCOUNTING WITH RETENTION.**

THE FINAL DECISION



You started this guide with a warning: **don’t open a dispensary.** Everything since then has been about giving you the information necessary to prove that warning wrong. Now you have enough information to judge the business you can actually build, not the one you imagined when you started. You may reach the end of this process and decide the opportunity isn’t as good as you thought. Or you may discover that the numbers work, the pieces fit together, and you’re ready to take on everything that comes with opening the doors. Both are valuable outcomes. The difference is that now you’re making that decision with a much clearer understanding of what success will require.

HEY HOOD

WE'D RATHER HELP YOU MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION THAN SELL YOU THE WRONG SERVICE.

We've worked exclusively in cannabis since 2017. We've watched businesses thrive, struggle, pivot, and disappear, and that experience shapes the advice we give our clients. Sometimes that means telling someone not to open a dispensary. Sometimes it means telling a client that social media isn't worth their time or money. And sometimes it means recommending a solution that gives us less work, not more.

Because our job isn't to sell you marketing. It's to help you build a stronger business.

When great branding and marketing are part of that answer, that's where we come in. From brand strategy and identity to packaging, web design, SEO, graphic design, photography, video, and digital marketing, we bring high-level creative work together with an understanding of how the cannabis industry actually operates.

Please reach out to schedule a free consultation.

www.hoodcollective.com

YOUR CANNABIS IS A WORK OF ART.

WE TREAT IT THAT WAY.