

Are Cannabis Consumers Loyal to Brands or Products?

Are Cannabis Consumers More Loyal to Brands, or Products?

The Unusual Loyalty Dynamic in Cannabis Retail

In most consumer packaged goods (CPG) industries, brand loyalty reigns supreme. Shoppers walk into stores specifically seeking Coca-Cola, Nike, or Tide. If those brands aren't available, many leave without making a purchase.

Cannabis retail, however, tells a different story. Here, product loyalty often outweighs brand loyalty, reshaping the way dispensaries and producers compete. While some cannabis companies are investing in recognizable logos, packaging, and celebrity endorsements, consumers remain primarily focused on product attributes—format, effects, and price.

This distinction is one of the defining features of cannabis retail today and a central challenge for businesses seeking to build long-term consumer loyalty.

Survey Data Shows Product Over Brand Preference

Fresh survey results from the Brightfield Group, highlighted in the Q3 edition of the MJBizFactbook, provide a closer look at this consumer mindset.

- **60% of cannabis consumers** say brands don't matter; they buy products that meet their needs.
- **80% of consumers** report they will switch to a similar product from another brand if their preferred option is out of stock.
- At the same time, **only 30% believe all cannabis brands are interchangeable**, suggesting that while brand preference exists, it is rarely a dealbreaker.

Kate Stevenson, Director of Client Strategy at Brightfield Group, explained that product quality and availability remain the strongest purchase drivers. "Most consumers think about the product itself before the brand when making a purchase decision," she said.

In practice, this means a vape shopper might prefer one brand but will happily select another if their favorite isn't available, rather than leaving empty-handed.

Why Brands Still Matter in Certain Markets

While products dominate loyalty overall, some companies are finding success by building strong brand identities in markets where regulations allow.

Green Dot Labs, a Boulder, Colorado-based cannabis producer, has leaned into this approach. CEO and co-founder Alana Malone said the company focuses on markets like Colorado and Arizona, where branding is not only permitted but critical to consumer engagement.

Malone emphasized that Green Dot Labs avoids markets with restrictive branding rules, such as Canada, Connecticut, and Florida, because those limitations prevent companies from fully showcasing their product portfolios.

The company has carved out a niche serving premium cannabis consumers, whom Malone describes as an underserved but discerning group. While branding attracts new buyers, she noted, lasting loyalty is built on product quality. "They won't be fooled by flashy designs if the product doesn't perform, and we wouldn't want them to be," Malone explained.

Retailers Gain Leverage from Product Loyalty

For dispensaries, product-first loyalty provides a different advantage. If consumers prioritize product formats and effects over brand names, retailers gain flexibility in steering purchases through promotions, inventory management, and pricing strategies.

Stocking a strong mix of flower, pre-rolls, edibles, vapes, and beverages is often more valuable than securing exclusive relationships with specific brands. Retailers that consistently meet consumer needs with reliable inventory are better positioned to build repeat business.

The Future of Cannabis Loyalty: Brands Plus Products

As the cannabis industry matures, the balance between product and brand loyalty is expected to evolve. Industries like craft beer demonstrate how consumer categories can eventually support both strong product types and recognizable brand identities.

For cannabis companies, building loyalty means delivering consistent potency, reliable quality, and aligning with consumer values such as sustainability and local production. The most successful brands will be those that pair strong product delivery with compelling storytelling that resonates with consumers both inside and outside the store.

Chicago-based musician and entrepreneur Vic Mensa, who will share marketing insights during a fireside chat at MJBizCon on Dec. 3, underscored the importance of this balance. "Dealing with people and creating things requires tact," he noted, pointing to the deeper connection brands must establish beyond flashy design.

A Market Still Defined by Products First

For now, cannabis remains a product-driven retail environment. Consumers seek experiences that meet their needs, not just names or packaging. Retailers who recognize this dynamic and adjust inventory strategies accordingly will be best positioned to capture repeat shoppers.

As markets stabilize and regulatory frameworks mature, brands will gain more room to invest in marketing, packaging, and consumer engagement. Over time, cannabis could begin to mirror traditional CPG industries, where product categories anchor decisions but brands command premium loyalty.

Until then, cannabis loyalty remains rooted in the product itself the effects, formats, and value that keep consumers coming back.

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