

# The typography of CANNABIS

From packaging to logos



*An example of modern cannabis packaging that makes great use of typography.*

As the U.S. continues to legalize the use, cultivation, and sales, of both medical and recreational cannabis, industry brands and related businesses are encouraged to get to grips with a more sophisticated approach to branding and marketing.

One area that has the power to create a huge impact on the brand-consumer relationship, but which often gets overlooked, is the choice of font. Fonts play an integral role in all brand communication, from packaging and logo design to website and social media campaign content.

## ***A Brand Voice Can Be Seen As Well As Heard***

Don't doubt for a second that the average cannabis brand has already spent time deliberating over a range of visual elements and photography styles to be used on all brand material, both on and off-line. But, how many cannabis brands, launching their products and services today, stop to take a look at fonts in more detail?

Make no mistake. Fonts have the power to convey and strengthen brand identity. By carefully selecting the fonts used, a brand can begin to curate its voice and create that all-important connection with its target audience. For example,

- » **Classic Fonts:** A family that's been growing cannabis on the same farm for decades will probably want to craft a visual identity that focuses on legacy, and so it would make sense to invest in a classic serif font to match.
- » **Display Fonts:** Brands that hope to attract consumers with the promise of a high impact THC experience, might opt for a powerful display font to help establish that bold connection.
- » **Prohibitions:** And don't forget, any brands growing or selling in the state of California now need to stay clear of decorative or script fonts that could be argued as being appealing to children.
- » So, how does a brand go about choosing the right kind of font to match its core identity and purpose?

## The Big Five

While it might seem like there's an endless array of fonts to choose from, most can be slotted into one of five style groups: serif, sans serif, slab, script, and display, which is also sometimes referred to as decorative.

Serif and sans serif are the two most important font groups to get to grips with. Serif fonts are characterized by a distinguished combination of thick and thin lines and are most commonly associated with luxury brands and luxury industries. Giorgio Armani is one of the most famous luxury brands to don a modern serif font as its word mark logo.



Sans serif fonts, on the other hand, don't have the little "feet" that serif fonts have. Nor do they combine the use of thin and thick lines. They ooze strength and clarity, making them perfect for brands with a modern appeal. Heavier styles can sometimes feel masculine and hard-working, while thinner sans serif fonts have a certain glamor and nobility about them. The Facebook word mark logo is a clear example of a heavy sans serif font in action.

*An example of cannabis packaging with a warning label as required by California Law.*

## And What About Font Hierarchy?

On top of selecting the type of font that best reflects brand identity, it's also important to consider the impact that font hierarchy can have on a brand's ability to communicate efficiently and with purpose. A packaging design, for example, is likely to exhibit at least three different fonts or font styles at once: one font for the name of the product, another for the name of the brand, and one more for detailed information about the

product, the package contents, and/or the ingredients. Most logo designs tend to incorporate the use of two different fonts: one font for the product name and another for the tagline. Successful font hierarchy is all about contrast.

## What About Font Trends in the Cannabis Industry?

With luxury brands leaning toward serif fonts and forceful corporates squeezing out the potential of the sans serif group, are there any indications that the cannabis industry might be drawn to a certain style of font as time moves on?

### **The Two Clear Trends**

Out of all the possible directions that cannabis fonts could take, two seem to dominate: premium, yet affordable indulgence, followed by wellness-supporting. The decorative and sans serif fonts that are seen on health food products work really well with edibles and topicals. Similarly, the classic serif, used to denote a sense of luxury, is both popular and effective. So, if any two font styles were to reign in the cannabis industry, place bets on premium quality and wellness-supporting. Time will tell.

*Packaging for prerolled joints that uses a serif font.*







## Dispensary Brand Dynamics: Developing a Cannabis Business Logo

Branding is a fine art. Achieving the right combination of personality traits, visual identity and value sets – and expressing them in an intentional way – can be confusing and overwhelming. However, there are some fundamentals in which company executives should be well versed.

In the past, the goal has been to achieve a recognizable logo and a relatable personality when it comes to branding. This was usually enough to convey the brand message and create trust through familiarity. However, with the introduction of social media, which opened the lines of communication between consumers and brands, many companies are finding that most brand strategies are rather inflexible when it comes to fitting into the

modern world. They lack the robust personality to engage in multiple conversations, both in text and visual design. Ultimately, they lack brand dynamics.

There are multiple layers to a brand identity: logos, color pallets, typography, brand voice and brand message—all of which make up the brand's look and feel. Each element plays a different role in communicating the brand identity. When these elements are out of sync with one another, the brand can feel confusing—or worse, inauthentic. The message becomes lost, and the brand struggles for recognition.

The challenge for most non-branding professionals is creating an accurate representation of their brands using the elements listed above. In an attempt to come up with something, they often stage their brand, trying to make everything “look” right without knowing the brand's true spirit.

### ***Be Goal-Oriented***

The first (essential) step is to identify the company's goals. Is it trying to be a national product that can scale? The more people it wants to be palatable to, the more neutral the type should be. Helvetica is a good option because of its neutrality. If it wants more options, and has the money to spend on fonts, then Univers, Frutiger and Trade Gothic are other neutral options. And if the company wants to go further, hire a reputable graphic designer, as type and font research can become convoluted and intensive. Designers will be able to navigate this process and ensure your typography remains appropriate while still standing out.

Is the company trying to build a small, long-lasting craft dispensary? Niche and small audiences want a brand that is tailored to their needs, so it might need something more handmade (likely hand drawn and

extremely custom). It will want a strong “voice” created by a designer or typographer who understands the micro-culture of the audience. Inside of that and beyond is a broad spectrum of possibilities old and new.

### ***Beware the Competition***

Who is the competition and what do they look like? Who already buys from them? What are the fashion trends in that community? What transcends fashion into ideals and principles? Who are their vendors? What do ancillary businesses look like? These questions will not only help the company identify what is visually common in the marketplace, but also how to stand out and be visible in a crowded market. The idea behind analyzing peers is to understand what is appropriate and what is not, and to know how to be appropriate while still being able to stand out. Companies don't want their brand to be “average.”

When it comes to typography decisions, many choose overly characterized fonts (i.e., Snap ITC or Al Fresco) they feel will help deliver the brand's message. Going back to Papyrus, it has a specific, carved-in-rock design that makes it feel ancient when used correctly, and cheesy when it's not.

### **Keep it Simple**

Overly characterized fonts can overshadow words and their meaning. Put another way, the font's style and shape distract from the message the company is trying to convey. This will likely lead to the words appearing either a little too appropriate, which can make the brand seem like a poser, or will miss the mark entirely. If the font is too decorative, such as a cursive or handwritten font, it may break laws in states that have laws prohibiting the sale and marketing of cannabis to minors.

A long tradition exists for over-stylized logos and type that we should move away from. Everyone has seen the drippy, hyper-psychedelic cartoon-style logos and art that some liked as teenagers. These only further the stigmatizing “stoner” story.

Thankfully, that is changing. Companies like White Fox Medicinals, Bloom Farms, Potters Cannabis Co., PAX, dosist, Willie's Reserve, Whoopi & Maya, and many more are broadening the spectrum and using a wide range of typography and an elevated brand voice.



*One of the companies mentioned, Willie's Reserve, makes great use of a Western font for its logo.*

## Write Your Ticket

Typography is a big part of the branding pie. It is especially exciting when cannabis brands get this component right because when they do, it allows them to express themselves more genuinely and even convey moods. The reason the company is putting the message out, after all, is to elicit a response.

Remember that the average consumer sees more than one thousand messages daily. If people like what they see, they'll respond. If they don't, they tune out. Consumers may not know why, specifically, they tuned out a message, but it can often be traced back to unsettling delivery through poor type choice. \*

## Sources

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