



FROM GREEN LIGHT TO GRAND OPENING

HOW TO OPEN A DISPENSARY, STEP BY STEP

2026 EDITION

The planning workbook for independent cannabis retailers and delivery operators. Checklists, worksheets, and field notes from more than a decade of dispensary launches.

SELL MORE CANNABIS WITH LESS WORK



From First Idea to First Sale

Opening a dispensary is one of the hardest builds in retail. You'll be a real estate scout, a licensing applicant, a security planner, a fundraiser, a buyer, a recruiter, and a marketer, often in the same week. Nobody is an expert in all of it.

This workbook gives you the structure. It turns a long, uncertain process into a sequence you can manage: what to do, in what order, and what to watch for.

It's built from what we've seen since 2014. Meadow has helped cannabis retailers launch, switch, and scale, from single storefronts to Off the Charts, which now runs 40 stores on Meadow. The checklists reflect what actually happens between "I want to open a dispensary" and your first compliant sale.

We wrote it for independent owners: single stores, small groups, and delivery operators, usually with the owner on the floor. Big chains have finance teams and lawyers on staff. You have this workbook, a few good advisors, and your own hours.

Every state and city is different. Treat this as a planning guide, not legal advice. Where the rules matter, we point you to your regulator.

How to use this workbook

- **Start with The Short Version** on page 03. It's the whole path on one page.
- **Work the timeline and worksheets in order.** Write in them. They become your business plan.
- **Read the field notes.** Each one shares a lesson from a real Meadow dispensary.
- **Delivery-only?** Read Running Delivery on page 36 first, then read the rest with a depot in mind.
- **Use the Toolkit** at the back: regulators for six states, a glossary, and the sources behind every Fast Fact.

Pro tip: Before you spend a dollar, write down the date you'll walk away if you're not licensed. Pick it now, while you're calm, not three months behind.

Building now? Talk to the team that has launched dispensaries since 2014.
getmeadow.com/schedule-demo

“

We share one common goal: growth as a company while expanding access to cannabis to those in need. With Meadow, that vision became reality.

JORDAN KUHL

General Manager, Off the Charts San Francisco

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How to Open a Dispensary in 10 Steps

Opening a dispensary comes down to three things: a compliant location, local approval where your city requires it, and a state license. Funding, build-out, team, and technology all get sequenced around them. Here's the whole path on one page.

- 01 Choose your market, concept, and model.** Storefront, delivery-only, or both? It changes your license, your site, and your team. Confirm your city allows it before you fall in love with a neighborhood.
- 02 Learn your state's license path.** Application windows, license caps, lotteries, merit scoring, and social equity programs vary by state.
- 03 Raise capital early.** SBA loans aren't available to plant-touching businesses. Plan for private capital and a runway that outlasts licensing.
- 04 Secure a compliant location.** Verify zoning and buffer rules in writing, get landlord consent, and tie the lease to license approval where you can.
- 05 Apply locally and to the state.** Expect to show property control, full ownership, a security plan, and background checks.

Pro tip: Call the city clerk before you call a broker. Ask how many cannabis permits exist, how many are taken, and when the council last voted on cannabis.

- 06 Design and build to spec.** Your floor plan, camera coverage, and limited-access areas are part of your application. Build exactly what you submitted.
- 07 Choose your technology.** Your POS has to sync with your state's track-and-trace system, enforce purchase limits, and verify IDs on day one.
- 08 Hire and train your team.** Budget time for state worker permits and background checks before anyone can work a shift.
- 09 Pass final inspections and activate your license.** Then receive opening inventory through compliant manifests.
- 10 Soft open, then grand open.** Rehearse with real transactions, fix what breaks, and track your first 90 days every week.

How long does it take? Use 12 months as a working sequence. Your license path sets the real pace: some cities approve in months, while capped markets and application windows can take years.

FAST FACT

State processing alone varies widely. Michigan took about 40 days to process an adult-use retailer license in fiscal 2025, after a separate prequalification step of about 36 days. California's FY 2024-25 report shows averages of 174 days for a storefront and 190 for delivery-only. [1-2]

Timeline Planning

BEFORE OPENING

12 MONTHS

- ☐ Define your concept and brand vision
- ☐ Draft a business plan and financial model with a cannabis CPA, including 280E and local taxes
- ☐ Research your state's license types, application windows, and local rules (caps, merit scoring, lotteries)
- ☐ Check social equity eligibility: fee relief, priority review, grants
- ☐ Start market research: demographics, licensed competitors, delivery coverage, saturation
- ☐ Identify green-zone properties that meet zoning and buffer rules
- ☐ Engage a cannabis attorney and CPA; a licensing consultant if needed
- ☐ Map financing around private capital, and start talking to cannabis-friendly banks. Approval can take months.

11 MONTHS

- ☐ Refine your product philosophy; start a brand and vendor wishlist
- ☐ Shortlist locations. Get zoning confirmed by the city **in writing** before you tour.
- ☐ Build your startup budget (page 14) and runway through licensing
- ☐ Start application prep: entity documents, ownership disclosures, background checks

Read this first. Cannabis timelines are local. Treat this countdown as a **sequence**, not a **stopwatch**, and let your licensing milestones set the pace. If your license lands early, compress. If it slips, every step after it slips too.

10 MONTHS

- ☐ Select a location. Negotiate the lease or purchase **contingent on license approval**.
- ☐ Secure property-control documents for your application
- ☐ Apply for local authorization or a conditional use permit
- ☐ Hire an architect with cannabis build-out experience
- ☐ Meet your council member and local police before you need them
- ☐ Get insurance quotes, including cash, inventory, and commercial auto. Read the exclusions.
- ☐ Secure initial financing commitments

09 MONTHS

- ☐ Finalize and sign the lease, with cannabis contingencies
- ☐ Produce design drawings **and the security plan** together
- ☐ Submit your state application, or queue for the next window
- ☐ Selling medical? Ask counsel if April 2026 federal rules require a DEA registration.
- ☐ Submit building permit plans and set a construction timeline
- ☐ Close investor or lender capital

08 MONTHS

- ☐ Approve design plans; start construction bidding
- ☐ Choose technology: POS, menus, delivery, payments, cameras, payroll
- ☐ Delivering? Check vehicle, driver, and depot rules before buying cars
- ☐ Start branding: name clearance, logo, signage concepts

BEFORE OPENING

07 MONTHS

- ☐ Sign the construction contract; start demolition and structural work
- ☐ Track permit and license status. Answer deficiency notices fast.
- ☐ Build a pre-opening marketing plan that fits your state's advertising rules

06 MONTHS

- ☐ Order long-lead items: vault or secure storage, cameras, display cases, check-in and POS hardware
- ☐ Set your assortment strategy and price tiers
- ☐ Start vendor evaluation; set intake standards for COAs, terms, and manifests
- ☐ Plan roles and write job descriptions; hire your general manager

05 MONTHS

- ☐ Construction continues: electrical, network, security infrastructure
- ☐ Start the pre-launch marketing calendar (page 37)

04 MONTHS

- ☐ Fixtures and furnishings arrive
- ☐ Write SOPs: compliance, security, cash (drawer and safe limits, two-person counts), delivery, opening and closing
- ☐ Set up cannabis-friendly accounting, payroll, and scheduling
- ☐ Post jobs. Note your state's worker permit or badge rules.
- ☐ Design the loyalty program and open pre-registration

03 MONTHS

- ☐ Construction finishes; schedule building, fire, and security inspections
- ☐ Interview and hire
- ☐ Stand up your POS, menus, and delivery software. Configure taxes and receipts.
- ☐ Connect track-and-trace credentials (such as Metrc) and run a full test
- ☐ Order signage, exit bags, and printed materials
- ☐ Delivering? Register vehicles where required, install required equipment, and badge drivers

02 MONTHS

- ☐ Onboard and train staff: compliance first, then product and POS
- ☐ Deep clean and merchandise the floor
- ☐ Pass final inspections and close the punch list
- ☐ Place opening purchase orders, timed to license activation
- ☐ Launch the grand opening campaign

01 MONTH

- ☐ License activates, track-and-trace goes live, first inventory arrives on manifests and gets audited in
- ☐ Run friends-and-family rehearsals with real transactions
- ☐ Fix staffing, station flow, and service gaps
- ☐ Publish the live menu and hours; lock the grand opening date and offers

OPENING MONTH

- ☐ Hold a limited-hours soft launch and collect feedback
- ☐ Run the grand opening
- ☐ Start the weekly First 90 Days scorecard (page 43)

Pro tip: Ask each inspector for their checklist before the visit. Most will tell you what they look at if you ask early.

Vision and Goal Setting

A vision statement says what your dispensary wants to become and the role it wants to play in its community. It's the tiebreaker for every hard decision: which site, which products, which hires. It also tells staff and investors what you're building.

Write it from your values and the experience you want customers to have. Keep it specific. Then set goals that prove you're getting there: measurable, time-bound, and tied to customers, revenue, team, or community.

Example vision statement

"To be our neighborhood's most trusted dispensary, where first-timers feel welcome, regulars feel known, and every product on the shelf has earned its place."

Example goals

- Reach monthly break-even, after the tax reserve, by month six
- Pass every state inspection with zero findings
- Partner with two community organizations in the first year
- Hand every open shift to a trained lead by month nine

Your vision statement

Your goals

Pro tip: Give each goal an owner and a date. A goal nobody owns is a wish. And write one goal just for you, or the store will take every hour you have.



CHAPTER 01

Start Here: Before You Sign Anything

Every good dispensary starts with a clear concept: what you'll carry, who it's for, and why it matters. Then you test it against the market. Shop your competitors. Count foot traffic. Map who already delivers to your zip code. The goal is to match your vision to real demand before you sign a lease or file an application.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Dispensary concept worksheet · Market research and competitive analysis · Demographics, traffic, and delivery zone study · Feasibility summary

01

Dispensary Concept

Name and working title

Check your state's naming rules and run a trademark search early.

Product philosophy and core categories

What will you carry, and why? Craft and legacy brands? Wellness? Value? Flower-forward?

Target customer

Patients, curious first-timers, connoisseurs, value shoppers, seniors, tourists. Who is this for first?

Service model

Walk-in, express pickup, delivery from your store, delivery-only (page 36), drive-thru or lounge where allowed.

Why you, not them

Who's the chain near you? Who sells unlicensed nearby? What can you do that neither will?

Brand personality and experience

How should a customer feel walking out? Calm apothecary? Gallery minimal? Neighborhood familiar?

Pro tip: Write one thing you'll be known for and one thing you won't do. "Something for everyone" isn't a concept, and if you can't say it in two sentences, your budtenders can't either.

Market Research and Feasibility

Know your local market before you commit to a site. You're looking for three things: real demand, a gap you can fill, and risks you can live with.

Pro tip: This research does double duty. Many merit-based license applications score community knowledge and local planning. Write it once here and reuse it in your application, your investor deck, and your lender package.

FAST FACT

New Jersey had more than 270 dispensaries operating by the end of 2025. Markets fill fast, so map who opens next, not just who's open now. [3]

FIELD NOTE · DON'T FIGHT A PRICE WAR

Unlicensed sellers skip taxes and testing. Big chains grow their own and can price below your cost. You won't win on price against either. Win where they can't copy you: brands they won't carry, regulars you know by name, a value tier you're proud of, and speed. Give staff one line for price questions: "It's tested, it's taxed, and we stand behind it."

Competitive Analysis

In cannabis, "nearby" includes every delivery service that covers your zip code. Map storefronts and delivery together.

Primary competitors

List 3 to 5 licensed storefronts and delivery services. Name, location, strengths, weaknesses.

Shop them as a customer

Go Friday at 5pm and Tuesday at 11am. Buy one item each time and keep the receipt: prices, taxes, loyalty pitch, wait.

Your differentiators

Deeper curation, faster pickup, better loyalty, real delivery coverage, a warmer first visit.

Demographic Research

No location is perfect, and investors trust owners who say so. Be honest about the gaps you find.

Target customer segments

Primary segment:

Secondary segment:

Local data to gather

- ☐ Population density and growth
- ☐ Age and household income
- ☐ Daytime vs. nighttime population
- ☐ Dispensaries per capita (saturation)
- ☐ Nearby towns that ban cannabis retail. Their residents may become your customers.
- ☐ Licenses approved but not yet open near you

FAST FACT

At the end of 2025, Minnesota had issued 119 cannabis business licenses, while more than 1,400 applicants held preliminary approval. Count the pipeline, not just the storefronts. [4]

Traffic and Delivery Zone Study

Two sites on the same street can perform very differently. A storefront serves whoever walks in. A license with delivery serves a radius. Study both.

Foot traffic counts

Weekday AM / PM: _____ Weekend AM / PM: _____

Traffic drivers

Anchor businesses:

Parking, transit, highway access:

Delivery zone

How far can a driver go and get back at Friday dinner time? Who already delivers there? Where are the gaps?

Seasonality

Tourism, festivals, holidays. And plan for 4/20 the way other retailers plan for Black Friday.

Feasibility Summary

Opportunity assessment

Is there enough demand and differentiation to succeed here?

Strengths

Risks

Decision: move forward with this location and concept?

- ☐ Yes, move forward
- ☐ No. Re-evaluate or gather more data.

Pro tip: Show this page to one owner who has run a store and has nothing to sell you. Ask which red flag you're underrating.

RED FLAGS

Stop and re-check if any of these are true

- The city hasn't confirmed zoning **in writing**.
- The landlord won't put consent to cannabis use in the lease.
- Your runway doesn't cover the licensing timeline **plus** six months of operations.
- Your plan depends on a rule that isn't final yet.
- The nearest competitor already wins on price, selection, **and** speed.
- You can't name your first 100 customers or where they'll come from.
- You haven't written down the date you'll walk away.

One red flag isn't a dealbreaker. Two or more means slow down before you spend.



CHAPTER 02

Funding and Finding Your Space

A dispensary costs more to open than most retail, and the money plays by different rules. SBA loans are off the table for plant-touching businesses, including medical-only operators, and many banks won't lend. Security and licensing add costs other stores never see. And you'll carry rent for months while you wait on approvals.

This chapter helps you price the build honestly, line up the right capital, and lock in a location without betting the business on a lease.

IN THIS CHAPTER

What it costs · Your holding cost · Startup budget and tax reserve · Funding the build · Federal status, October 2026 · Banking and cash · Location and depot must-haves · Lease negotiation

02

What Does It Cost to Open a Dispensary?

The honest answer: there's no reliable single number. Your total depends on your state's fees, your city, your square footage, your build-out, and how long licensing takes. Two dispensaries opening the same year can differ several times over. Price your own build with real quotes, line by line.

Cost category	What drives it	How to price it
License and application fees	State and local fee schedules. Some are non-refundable if you're denied.	Your regulator's fee schedule (page 44)
Real estate	Scarce green-zone sites, landlord premiums, rent while you wait	Broker comps for compliant sites only
Build-out	Square footage, condition of the space, security rules	Two or three contractor bids on the same drawings
Security	Cameras, secure storage, alarms, access control	Quotes from cannabis-experienced integrators
Opening inventory	Assortment depth and number of SKUs. New stores usually pay on delivery.	Draft purchase orders by category, priced as cash
Technology	POS, hardware, website and menus, payments	Vendor quotes, all-in
Pre-opening payroll	Hiring and training before revenue, permit timelines	Your staffing plan times weeks before opening
Insurance, banking, cash	Required coverage and cash limits, bank compliance fees, armored pickup	Cannabis brokers, your bank, an armored carrier
Vehicles (delivery)	Purchase or lease, required equipment, commercial auto	Dealer and broker quotes
Professional fees	Attorney, CPA, licensing consultant, architect	Engagement letters with scopes
Working capital	Operating costs while sales ramp, plus taxes	Monthly burn times your ramp months
Contingency	Licensing delays, change orders, re-inspections	A fixed line you don't spend unless something slips

Pro tip, your holding cost: The cost most owners miss is time. Add up what you pay each month before you open: rent, insurance, interest, retainers. Divide the cash left after the build by that number. That's how many months of delay you can survive. Too few? Fix it before you sign the lease.

Startup Budget Worksheet

Fill in three scenarios. Plan to the likely case, raise for the high case, and know what you'd cut to survive the low one.

One-time startup costs	Low	Likely	High	Quote source
License and application fees				
Deposits and pre-opening rent				
Build-out and construction				
Security systems				
Fixtures and displays				
Opening inventory				
Technology and hardware				
Pre-opening payroll and training				
Professional fees				
Branding, signage, launch marketing				
Working capital reserve				
Contingency				
TOTAL TO OPEN				

Monthly operating costs	Per month
Rent and CAM	
Payroll and benefits	
Security monitoring	
Insurance	
Technology, payments, banking	
Marketing	
Utilities, supplies, other	
Owner pay (even if it's zero for now)	

MONTHLY FIXED COSTS

Your break-even line

Monthly fixed costs ÷ gross margin % = break-even monthly sales

Example: \$80,000 in fixed costs at a 40% gross margin means \$200,000 in monthly sales. That's **before income tax**. Under 280E, adult-use sellers can break even on paper and still owe a big tax bill. Fund a separate tax account every week, at a share your CPA sets.

Funding the Build

Financing option	What to know
Private and cannabis lenders Debt from lenders who underwrite cannabis	Higher rates than conventional loans. Real estate collateral can improve terms.
Equity investors Angels, family offices, cannabis funds	Capital and expertise, in exchange for ownership. Ownership changes usually need regulator approval.
Social equity programs Grants, fee relief, low-interest loans in some states and cities	Eligibility is specific and money can arrive slowly. Don't build your runway on it.
Personal capital Savings, home equity	Fast and flexible. The risk is all yours.
Other Friends and family, seller or landlord financing, equipment leasing	Every option carries expectations. Put terms in writing.
SBA loans	Not available to plant-touching cannabis businesses, including medical-only operators, as of October 2026.

For planning only. Get legal, tax, and financial advice from professionals who work with cannabis businesses in your state.

Line up capital that covers the build *and* the wait. The options below are what cannabis retailers actually use. Each comes with tradeoffs in cost, control, and time.

FEDERAL STATUS · OCTOBER 2026

- **Selling adult-use? Plan as if 280E applies to you.** Adult-use cannabis is still Schedule I. The DEA's broader rescheduling case was paused on September 29, before the judge's recommendation, and there's no final rule. [6]
- **State-licensed medical cannabis moved to Schedule III** on April 28, 2026. Because 280E reaches only Schedule I and II, it's expected to stop applying to those medical sales. Court challenges continue. [5, 7]
- **Selling both?** Treasury has promised 280E guidance on splitting expenses between medical and adult-use activity. It's still pending, and its 2026-27 plan sets no deadline. [8]
- **SBA loans** still exclude cannabis businesses, medical and adult-use, under rules effective October 1, 2026. [9]

These rules are moving. Confirm the current status with your attorney and a cannabis CPA before you finalize your model.

Pro tip: Ask every lender what happens if your license slips. Interest-only months and payment holidays can matter more than the rate.

Capital, Banking, and Cash Readiness

Lenders want a thorough plan, a clean ownership structure, and proof your license is real. Your bank wants the same, and no bank can stop an opening as surely as no license.

Documents to gather

- ☐ Business plan with market analysis, financial model, and tax assumptions
- ☐ Startup budget worksheet with quote sources (page 14)
- ☐ License application status and local approval evidence
- ☐ Property control: lease, LOI, or purchase agreement
- ☐ Entity documents and full ownership structure. It must match your license application.
- ☐ Owner financials: credit, tax returns, bank statements, resumes
- ☐ Security plan summary and use-of-funds breakdown

Terms to understand

- ☐ **All-in cost of debt:** rate, points, and fees together
- ☐ **Collateral and personal guarantees:** what you're pledging
- ☐ **Dilution and control:** board seats, approval rights, exit terms
- ☐ **Debt service coverage:** can cash flow cover payments after taxes?

Banking and cash

- ☐ Apply to a bank or credit union that serves cannabis. Expect deep questions about owners and where your money came from.
- ☐ Line up a backup bank. Accounts can close with little notice.
- ☐ Price armored pickup and monthly compliance fees.
- ☐ Ask your insurer how much cash you can keep on site.
- ☐ Set a drawer limit and drop extra cash to the safe during the shift.
- ☐ Ask your bank which card payments are allowed. Don't trust a workaround because a processor pitched it.
- ☐ Count cash with two people, on camera, with a signed log.

FAST FACT

Banks still follow FinCEN's cannabis guidance from February 2014. The SAFE Banking Act of 2026 hasn't moved past committee. And any business that takes more than \$10,000 in cash in one transaction, or related ones, must file IRS Form 8300 within 15 days. [10–12]

Pro tip: Before you take money from anyone, ask counsel whether they must be disclosed to the regulator. An undisclosed investor can stall your license.

Location Requirements

In cannabis, real estate is the gate licensing walks through. Zoning maps, buffer distances, and license caps shrink the field before you tour a single space. Score every site against this list.

Must-haves

- ☐ Zoned for cannabis retail, confirmed by the city **in writing**
- ☐ Meets required buffers from schools, parks, and other sites (distances vary by jurisdiction)
- ☐ Landlord consent to cannabis use, and their lender allows it
- ☐ Visibility within local signage rules
- ☐ Easy customer access and parking
- ☐ Discreet delivery and loading access
- ☐ Room for security: cameras, secure storage, limited-access areas
- ☐ Power, HVAC, and network capacity
- ☐ Nearby anchors that drive traffic
- ☐ A layout that fits your service model
- ☐ Room to grow: a delivery hub, more registers, more storage

Pro tip: Verify zoning *before* you tour. In cannabis, the compliant site that exists beats the perfect site that doesn't.

Delivery-Only? Your Depot

A depot is still a licensed premises, with a vault, cameras, and limited-access areas. Swap visibility and anchors for these:

- ☐ Zoning that allows a non-storefront cannabis business. It's often industrial.
- ☐ A loading area out of public view
- ☐ Secure parking for every vehicle, with 24/7 access
- ☐ Quick road access to your whole zone at rush hour
- ☐ No public signage, if your state or city requires that

Questions for the landlord

- ☐ Who were the last three tenants, and why did they leave?
- ☐ Has the property had break-ins? Ask the neighbors too.
- ☐ Will the landlord's lender and insurer sign off on cannabis?

Lease Negotiation Guide

Clauses to negotiate

- **Licensing contingency.** The big one. Tie rent, or your exit, to license approval. Ask for reduced rent while you're in the application process.
- **Permitted use.** The lease must explicitly allow licensed cannabis retail.
- **Renewal options at a set rent.** Lock them now. At renewal, the landlord knows your license can't easily move.
- **Right of first refusal.** If the landlord sells, you get the first chance to buy.
- **Rent and increases.** Fixed, percentage, or escalating? Watch for cannabis premiums. Ask how CAM is calculated.
- **Tenant improvement allowance.** Will the landlord help pay for construction, including security?
- **Assignment.** Selling the business means transferring the lease and the license. Make sure the lease allows it.
- **Exclusive use.** Can another dispensary open in the same center?
- **Personal guarantees.** Are you personally on the hook?
- **Percentage rent or landlord equity.** Ask counsel first. It can make the landlord someone you must disclose to the regulator.
- **Early termination.** What happens if the license is denied or delayed?
- **Regulator access.** Inspectors must be able to enter. The lease can't block them.

In most states your license is tied to this exact address. That makes the lease one of the most important documents you'll sign.

Dispensary-specific asks

- Written landlord consent (many applications require it)
- Permission to install cameras, a vault or safes, and reinforced doors
- Clear expectations on odor control and ventilation
- Discreet access for cash pickup
- Exterior improvement allowances
- Co-tenancy or "go-dark" protections if an anchor leaves
- Delivering? 24/7 vehicle access and assigned parking

Pro tip: Never sign on a tour and a handshake. Use a real estate attorney who has closed cannabis leases, and ask who owns repairs to the roof and building systems.

This guide is informational and doesn't replace legal advice. Leasing law varies by location.



CHAPTER 03

The Build-Out: Where Design Meets Compliance

In cannabis, your floor plan is a regulatory document. The state reviews your diagram, your camera coverage, and your limited-access areas. Then it inspects what you built against what you submitted.

This chapter covers the build sequence, the approvals you'll need, how to pass inspections the first time, and the mistakes that push opening day back.

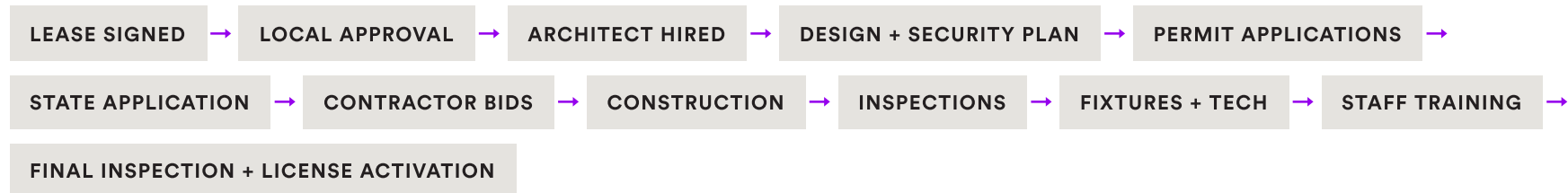
IN THIS CHAPTER

The build sequence · Licenses, permits, and approvals · Passing inspections · Common mistakes that delay an opening

03

The Build, Step by Step

Organize the professionals, the drawings, the permits, and the inspections in one sequence. Names and order vary by jurisdiction, so confirm yours with your state and city.



Licenses, permits, and approvals

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ State cannabis retail license | ☐ Fire inspection |
| ☐ Local cannabis permit or conditional use permit | ☐ Security plan approval |
| ☐ Business license | ☐ Alarm and camera registrations, where required |
| ☐ Employer Identification Number | ☐ ADA accessibility |
| ☐ Seller's permit and state tax registrations | ☐ Waste disposal plan |
| ☐ Building permits | ☐ Track-and-trace account and credentials (such as Metrc) |
| ☐ Signage permit | ☐ Utilities |
| ☐ DEA registration, if you sell medical cannabis (confirm with counsel) | |
| ☐ Vehicle registrations, if you deliver and your state requires them | |

How to pass inspections the first time

- **Hire people who've done it.** Use architects and contractors with licensed cannabis projects behind them.
- **Build exactly what you submitted.** The state compares your space to your diagrams. Changes need amendments, not improvisation.
- **Test security before the inspector does.** Camera coverage and retention settings, alarms, locks, limited-access areas.
- **Keep paperwork ready.** Permits, certifications, SOPs, and service contracts in one place. Inspectors ask.
- **Run a mock inspection.** Walk the space with your contractor and compliance lead and fix what you find.

FAST FACT

The April 2026 federal order says entities that transfer marijuana to patients, including dispensaries, must register with the DEA. Selling medical? Check the DEA's registration page for the current form. [5]

Pro tip: Have your security integrator sign off on camera spots before drywall. Moving a camera later means patching, painting, and maybe an amendment.

AVOID THESE

8 Mistakes That Delay an Opening

- 01** **Signing a lease before zoning is confirmed in writing.** A verbal "should be fine" from the city isn't approval.
- 02** **Changing the floor plan after you submit it.** Every change can mean an amendment and another review.
- 03** **Ordering fixtures before the security plan is approved.** You may have to rip them out.
- 04** **Leaving track-and-trace to the last week.** Credentials, training, and a test transfer take time you won't have.
- 05** **Hiring before workers can be badged.** Permit timelines can leave a trained team unable to work.
- 06** **Announcing a grand opening date before the license is active.** Pick the date after activation, not before.
- 07** **Budgeting the build but not the wait.** Licensing delays turn into months of rent with no revenue.
- 08** **Choosing technology last.** Your POS touches intake, compliance, menus, and training. Decide by month eight.

FIELD NOTE · START CLEAN

Before West Coast Cannabis went live on Meadow ahead of 4/20, the team completed a full Metrc audit and inventory cleanup. Every package and report was accurate from day one. Hardware went in the night before, with zero disruption for customers.

Pro tip: Keep one dated log of every call with the city and state: who said what, and when. When your reviewer changes, the log is your memory.



CHAPTER 04

Designing Your Dispensary's Identity

Your brand is the story people feel in your space, see on your packaging, and wear out the door. In cannabis it does extra work. Most paid advertising is restricted, so your storefront, your signage, and the experience inside *are* your marketing.

IN THIS CHAPTER

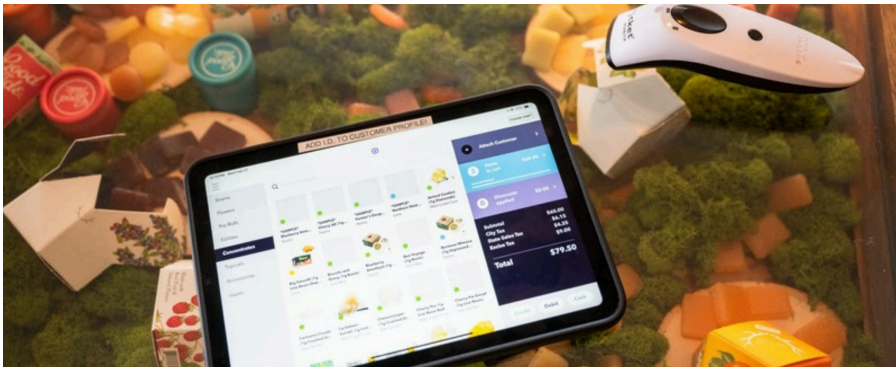
Brand moodboard · Packaging, signage, and merch audit

04

Can You Feel a Brand?

A moodboard sets the tone for every brand decision. Collect images, textures, fonts, and colors that feel like your shop, and write down why each one belongs.

Element	Questions to answer
Colors	Warm and earthy? Clean and clinical? Bold and loud?
Type	Modern sans, apothecary serif, hand-drawn?
Materials	Wood, steel, glass, greenery, neon, terrazzo
Feeling	Welcoming, expert, calm, electric, discreet, proud
Music	What's playing at 11am? At 7pm?



Display case at PleasureMed, Los Angeles. Fixtures carry the brand as much as the logo does.

Packaging and Signage Audit

Packaging and signage are your first physical touchpoints, and in cannabis both are regulated. Plan them early.

Packaging

- ☐ Exit bags (child-resistant where required)
- ☐ Branded shopping bags
- ☐ Stickers and labels
- ☐ Discreet, compliant delivery packaging
- ☐ Tissue, wraps, or sleeves
- ☐ Receipts. Loyalty points print here.
- ☐ Merch: start with lighters and one shirt, where your state allows it

Signage

- ☐ Exterior sign: permit first, fabricate second
- ☐ Window treatments (many cities limit what's visible)
- ☐ Required postings: license, age, state warnings
- ☐ Wayfinding: check-in, pickup, ADA
- ☐ Menu boards. Live-synced beats reprinting.
- ☐ Digital logo and type files

Pro tip: Order compliant exit bags from two suppliers. Running out on a Saturday can stop sales. And get the sign permit approved before you pay for fabrication.



05

CHAPTER 05

Building Your Menu

Your menu is the most creative part of opening a dispensary, and it's where profit gets made or lost. Core categories, price tiers, house exclusives, limited drops: every choice shows up on your P&L.

This chapter covers assortment, margin math, and how to pick vendors who make your job easier.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Menu development · Margin calculator · Vendor evaluation checklist

Every Shelf Tells a Story

Your menu and your vendors drive profit, customer satisfaction, and staying power. Build an assortment that fits your concept, then manage it with numbers.

Shrink controls that cost nothing

- Two people in the vault, every time.
- Blind drawer counts: the counter doesn't see the expected total.
- Only managers void, return, or discount. Review those logs weekly.
- Count your highest-value items every day, and run cycle counts while you're open.
- Spot-check camera footage at random, not only after a loss.
- Vary deposit times and routes. If you're robbed, comply. People aren't replaceable.



At the counter at Coast to Coast, Los Angeles.

Menu Development

- **Match your concept.** Craft and legacy, wellness, value, or connoisseur. Your shelf should say it before a budtender does.
- **Cover the core categories.** Flower, pre-rolls, vapes, edibles, concentrates, tinctures, topicals, beverages, accessories. Decide where to go deep and where to stay narrow.
- **Offer price tiers.** Value, mid, and top shelf in every major category. Every customer should find a yes.
- **Choose vendors for reliability.** Then negotiate payment terms, promo support, and education days where allowed.
- **Make the menu easy to shop.** Organize by category. Show potency and effects clearly. Keep descriptions honest, with no medical claims. Feature high-margin items in prime spots online and in store.
- **Stay operational.** Every SKU you add is a SKU you count. Size the assortment to your storage, your team, and your counting discipline.
- **Refine constantly.** Watch sell-through on your top sellers weekly, mark down dead stock early, and keep a rhythm of new drops that gives regulars a reason to come back.

Pro tip: Open with fewer SKUs than you think, and keep cash for reorders. An empty slot on a best seller hurts more than a missing brand.

Product Margin Calculator

Know your true unit economics before a product hits the shelf. Unit cost = case cost ÷ units per case. Margin % = (price – unit cost) ÷ price. Check margin before and after your usual discounts and loyalty rewards. Taxes vary by state and city, so confirm with your CPA which apply at cost and which at the register, and let your POS calculate them at checkout.

Product / SKU	Case cost	Units	Unit cost	Price	Margin \$	Margin %

Notes: average discount and loyalty cost _____ % · payment costs _____ · target blended margin _____ %

FAST FACT

Even under 280E, the IRS says you can reduce gross receipts by properly calculated cost of goods sold. Clean inventory and cost records are a tax strategy, not just good housekeeping. ^[13]

Pro tip: New stores usually pay vendors on delivery. Terms come after you pay on time for a while. Never pay a vendor late to cover rent. Word travels, and you'll lose terms everywhere.

Vendor Evaluation

Your vendors affect cost, reliability, and compliance. Score new brands here and re-score current ones every quarter.

	Yes	No
Product quality, and it sells through	☐	☐
Current COAs and testing documents	☐	☐
Licensed, with clean manifests every time	☐	☐
Competitive pricing, with terms in writing	☐	☐
Flexible order minimums	☐	☐
Credits or swaps slow sellers, in writing	☐	☐
Local, craft, or exclusive items	☐	☐
Responsive sales rep	☐	☐
Easy ordering and reordering	☐	☐
Promo and education support, where allowed	☐	☐
References from other retailers	☐	☐
A backup vendor exists for this category	☐	☐



06

CHAPTER 06

Tech That Powers Cannabis Retail

Your POS isn't just a register. It has to talk to your state's track-and-trace system, enforce purchase limits, verify IDs, keep every menu in sync, and run delivery, all at once, all day. Pick it early. Almost every launch task touches it. And judge it like an owner: what it costs all-in, and how you leave if it doesn't work.

IN THIS CHAPTER

What your POS must do · POS evaluation worksheet · Launching with Meadow

Non-Negotiables for Any POS

- **Fast checkout on every channel.** In-store, express pickup, and delivery orders in one place, with no juggling tablets. PleasureMed checks customers out in under 30 seconds on Meadow.
- **Compliance built in.** Track-and-trace reporting such as Metrc should happen automatically, with no manual CSV uploads. Purchase limits enforced at the register. ID checks at the door. An audit log behind every action.
- **Menus that match the shelf.** Your website and marketplace menus, like Weedmaps and Leafly, should update in real time. A search-friendly menu on your own domain turns searches into sales you don't pay commission on.
- **Delivery built in.** Dispatch, routing, driver tracking, inventory by vehicle, and compliant manifests, not a bolted-on app.
- **Inventory you can trust.** Real-time counts, purchase orders, and cycle counts you can run while the store is open.

A dispensary runs at speed: several sales channels, high volume, and compliance on every receipt. Hold every system you evaluate to this list.

- **Loyalty at checkout.** Points should accrue automatically and print on the receipt, and your marketing should run from the same customer data.
- **Reporting you'll actually use.** Live dashboards plus exportable detail on sales, velocity, discounts, and taxes.
- **Permissions and accountability.** Role-based access and a log of every price change, void, and adjustment.
- **Reliability and real support.** Downtime costs sales and creates compliance risk. Ask for an uptime record and support from people who know cannabis.

Pro tip: In every demo, ask what happens when the internet or track-and-trace drops mid-rush, or a driver loses signal. Make them show you, not tell you.

FAST FACT

All six states Meadow serves run track-and-trace on Metrc. New York moved its retailers onto Metrc in early 2026. Learn it before you open, not during your first transfer. ^[16]

\$5B+

in cannabis retail orders on Meadow since 2014

99.999%

uptime since 2014, and 100% every 4/20

#1

rated cannabis POS on G2, with a 4.9 average

POS Evaluation Worksheet

Your POS will run your business every day for years. Score each system on what matters most to your launch, then ask each vendor to prove it in a live demo.

	POS 1	POS 2	Notes
Checkout stays fast at peak hours			
Track-and-trace sync is automatic			
Purchase limits and ID checks are automatic			
Website and marketplace menus sync in real time			
Delivery built in: inventory by vehicle, tax by address			
Loyalty accrues at checkout			
Onboarding, training, and support that knows cannabis			
Uptime record you can verify			
Keeps selling if the internet or track-and-trace drops			
Clear reports, and you can export all of your data			
Contract length, and how you exit			
Total cost: software, hardware, payments, onboarding			
References from stores your size, in your state			

“

Switching to Meadow was a choice we took really seriously. Meadow is our third point of sale software that we used. The biggest thing that Meadow has going is the simplicity and clean interface while still being a very robust software. It gives you the reporting that you need. ... But it's super user-friendly.

COREY SCHWARTZ

COO, Coast to Coast, Los Angeles

Pro tip: Call one reference the vendor didn't hand you, from a store your size. Ask how their last support problem went.

Sell More Cannabis with Less Work, From Day One

Meadow is an independent dispensary software company, founded in San Francisco in 2014 as Y Combinator's first cannabis startup. Meadow serves dispensaries in California, Michigan, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Minnesota. Here's what launching on Meadow looks like.

- 01 Plan the rollout together.** Meadow's team maps your workflows and settings before go-live. For PleasureMed, that meant two walkthroughs during the build-out.
- 02 Start with clean compliance data.** Meadow checks your Metrc account, imports your inventory, and confirms your settings before your first sale.
- 03 Load your menu fast.** Meadow's Weedmaps product import loads product details for you. Off the Charts cut 30+ minutes from receiving each invoice.
- 04 Train before day one.** Meadow Mastery, a self-paced video course, gets budtenders ready before their first shift.
- 05 Go live with help.** On-site or virtual support on launch day, then fast answers from cannabis-industry veterans.

PROOF

Off the Charts stands up new stores in as little as a week on Meadow, and now runs 40.

At Off the Charts, every new employee started with Meadow Mastery, so new stores opened with staff ready to serve customers on day one.

“

Within a couple of days of using Meadow, I knew we had a better system.

MARISSA MOLLOY

Regional Manager, Off the Charts

One flat monthly fee. No per-transaction fees.

See Meadow live and get a quote:

getmeadow.com/schedule-demo



CHAPTER 07

Building the Right Team

Your team is the experience. In cannabis retail, compliance is part of every job description: every ID check, every manifest, every cash count. Hire for judgment, train for compliance first, and give people a path to grow.

IN THIS CHAPTER

People, payroll, and the plan · Interview prompts · Onboarding and training checklist

07

People, Payroll, and the Plan

Map how much help you need on the floor, at check-in, and in the back of house. Then make expectations clear and build a place people want to stay.

- **Define roles.** General manager, inventory manager, compliance lead (often the GM at first), budtenders, check-in, delivery drivers, security.
- **Train compliance and service together.** ID checks, purchase limits, manifests, recalls, and cash handling, alongside product knowledge.

Check worker rules first. Many states require employee permits or agent badges, and background checks are standard. Build that time into your hiring plan.

Choose cannabis-friendly payroll and banking early. Some mainstream providers won't serve the industry, and wage and tip rules vary by state.

Staff for your peaks. Plan a core team, then flex with part-time staff for weekends, holidays, and 4/20, which deserves Black Friday staffing.

Show a path. Budtender to lead to inventory or management. Fair pay, real schedules, and visible growth keep your best people.

If you can fund a full team	Hire by	Owns before opening
General manager	6 months out	SOPs, vendor setup, hiring plan
Inventory manager	4 months out	Intake standards, track-and-trace setup, opening order
Compliance lead	4 months out	Badges, training, inspection readiness
Budtenders and check-in	2 to 3 months out	Product and POS training, soft opening
Delivery drivers	2 months out; with your first hires if delivery-only	Routes, manifests, ID checks at the door

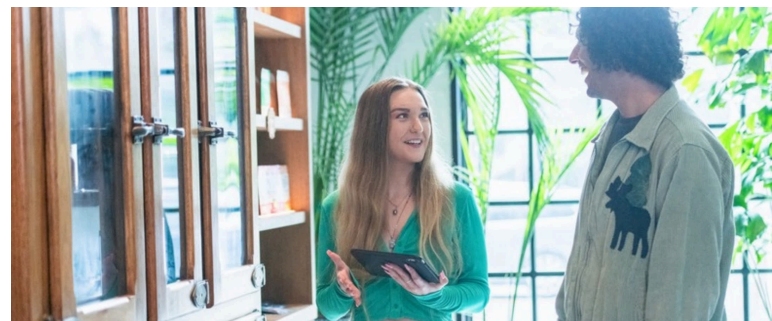
MOST INDEPENDENTS START HERE

If You're the GM

Most independent owners start as GM, buyer, and compliance lead. That's fine. Plan for it.

- ☐ Get your own badge first.
- ☐ Name a second keyholder who can open, close, and count the vault.
- ☐ Hire one lead who can run a shift without you by month three.
- ☐ Hire budtenders as soon as badges allow, not before.
- ☐ Put your own pay in the budget, even if it's zero for now.
- ☐ Pick the day you stop working every open shift. Write it down.

Pro tip: Cross-train everyone to open, close, and count. On a small team, one sick call shouldn't leave you without someone who can lock the vault.



On the floor at PleasureMed, Los Angeles.

Interview Prompts

Ask	Listen for
Why cannabis retail?	<i>Real interest in the plant and in serving people.</i>
How would you help a nervous first-time customer?	<i>Questions before recommendations. Plain language. Patience.</i>
A customer asks what will help them sleep. What do you say?	<i>Product information without medical claims.</i>
Tell me about your toughest rush.	<i>Calm, clear communication, no blaming.</i>
How do you keep up with new products?	<i>Self-driven learning.</i>
An ID looks off. What do you do?	<i>No exceptions, calm de-escalation, call a manager.</i>
What makes a dispensary feel welcoming?	<i>Empathy and pride in service.</i>
What does responsibility mean in this job?	<i>Owning mistakes. Consistency without supervision.</i>

Pro tip: Add a short cash count and an expired-ID test to every interview. What they do tells you more than any answer.

Onboarding and Training Checklist

Onboarding

- ☐ Warm welcome
- ☐ Paperwork: I-9 and ID, W-4, direct deposit, NDA
- ☐ State worker permit or badge, where required
- ☐ Background check, where required
- ☐ Accounts: payroll, POS with role permissions, scheduling, chat
- ☐ Handbook and SOPs, with signed acknowledgment
- ☐ Your mission and story

Training

- ☐ Compliance first: IDs, limits, manifests, recalls, cash
- ☐ Robbery and emergency response
- ☐ POS, check-in, menus, cameras
- ☐ Product by category, without medical claims
- ☐ Shadow shifts
- ☐ Who to call for what
- ☐ 30, 60, and 90 day goals

Pro tip: Make POS training self-serve with short videos so new hires are ready before their first shift. Meadow customers use Meadow Mastery for this.



CHAPTER 08

The Flow Is the Experience

Customers remember how your store felt more than what they bought, at the counter or at their door. This chapter covers the service flow, running delivery, a pre-launch marketing plan built for cannabis advertising rules, and a loyalty program that brings people back.

A note on marketing: most paid channels are restricted for cannabis. The stores that win build on what they own: their website, their email and SMS list, their listings, and their reputation.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Steps of service · Running delivery · Pre-launch marketing calendar · Loyalty programs

08

Steps of Service

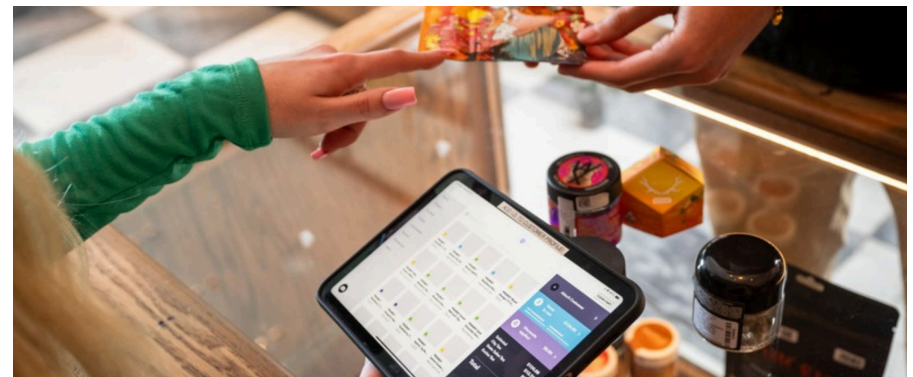
- 01 Check-in and verification.** A warm greeting and a quick ID scan, every customer, every time. Give medical patients a clear lane if you serve them. Be honest about wait times during rushes.
- 02 Orientation.** Read what each person needs. Some want to browse, some want guidance, some pre-ordered and want speed. Never rush a first-timer or slow down a regular.
- 03 Building the order.** Ask about the experience they want and their budget. Educate without medical claims. Use purchase history to personalize. Let the POS track purchase limits so your team never does that math mid-conversation.
- 04 Fulfillment.** Counter, express pickup, or delivery: stage orders so they're ready when promised. For delivery, see page 36.

Pro tip: In the first month, time five transactions every shift, door to door. The numbers show where the line really forms.

- 05 Add-ons and discovery.** Suggest, don't push. New drops, accessories, something for the road. Make loyalty sign-up a one-tap question, not a form.
- 06 Payment and farewell.** Keep payment smooth and cash handling invisible. Thank them by name if you can. Final impressions drive repeat visits.
- 07 Reset.** Restock, tidy, and check queue times and feedback with the team. At close, reconcile drawers, verify inventory, and prep for tomorrow.

FIELD NOTE · SPEED IS SERVICE

PleasureMed once tried another POS that took about three minutes to get an order out. They switched back to Meadow, where an order takes about 30 seconds. On a busy Saturday, that gap is the difference between a line out the door and a customer who comes back.



Checkout on Meadow at PleasureMed, Los Angeles.

Running Delivery

Delivery is a store on wheels. Every car carries product, cash, and one of your people. Plan it like a second location.

License and depot

- ☐ Confirm which license lets you deliver. Some states license delivery-only operators. Others add delivery to a retail license (page 44).
- ☐ Check the rules where you're based and in every city you deliver to.
- ☐ Plan the depot like any licensed premises: vault, cameras, limited access (page 17).

Vehicles and drivers

- ☐ Register vehicles with the regulator, if required, and install what your state requires, such as locked storage or GPS.
- ☐ Get commercial auto coverage. Personal policies often exclude this work.
- ☐ Check every driver's license and record. Badge them before their first route.
- ☐ Ask counsel whether drivers must be employees.

On the road

- ☐ Every trip leaves with a manifest and comes back reconciled. Unsold product is counted in the same shift.
- ☐ Check ID at the door, every time. Deliver only where your state allows.
- ☐ Set a cash limit per car and drop cash at the depot before you reach it.
- ☐ Vary routes and times. Drivers check in with dispatch at every stop. If robbed, drivers comply.

Menus and ETAs

- ☐ Show only what's in stock for that zone or car.
- ☐ Promise a window you can hit on a Friday night, and text when the driver is close.

Two ways to run it. Hub and spoke: each order is packed at the depot. Carry inventory: cars carry a set menu and fill orders on the road, where your state allows it. Meadow supports both.

Your per-order math

Per order	Your number
Average order value × gross margin %	
– Driver cost (hourly cost ÷ orders per hour)	
– Vehicle cost (fuel, insurance, upkeep)	
– Payment, packaging, and marketplace fees	
= CONTRIBUTION PER ORDER	

Set your minimum order and delivery fee so this stays positive at your slowest hour.

Pro tip: Your profit lives in orders per driver hour. Tighten zones and batch routes before you add drivers. On peak days, pack cars heavy with what's on special and offer long delivery windows so dispatch can route well.

FAST FACT

As of September 2026, Massachusetts's 9 delivery couriers and 16 delivery operators had grossed more than \$14 million combined for the year. Statewide adult-use sales were \$156 million in June alone. Size the business to real demand. ^[14]

Pre-Launch Marketing Calendar

Cannabis reality check: most paid ads on major platforms are off-limits, and platform rules change without notice. The channels you own, like your website, your list, and your loyalty program, can't be taken away. Invest there first, and check every message against your state's advertising rules.

BEFORE OPENING

90 DAYS

- ☐ Finalize branding and signage concepts
- ☐ Launch an age-gated "Coming Soon" page with email and SMS sign-up
- ☐ Claim your Google Business Profile
- ☐ Open social accounts; post age-gated teasers with no sales content

60 DAYS

- ☐ Share behind-the-scenes build content
- ☐ Announce your opening window
- ☐ Pitch local press and cannabis media
- ☐ Build Weedmaps and Leafly profiles; publish when the menu is live
- ☐ Write your website's foundations: location page, FAQ, your story

30 DAYS

- ☐ Send a press release to local media
- ☐ Open early loyalty sign-up with a launch perk, within your state's promo rules
- ☐ Finalize grand opening offers within discount rules
- ☐ Book vendor pop-ups and education days where allowed

14 DAYS

- ☐ Host an invite-only friends and family preview with real transactions
- ☐ Set up cross-promotions with neighboring businesses
- ☐ Check every listing: hours, address, menu link
- ☐ Brief staff on opening offers and flow

OPENING WEEK

- ☐ Post when you have something real: new drops, team intros
- ☐ Run opening-week promotions
- ☐ Reply to every review and tag

WEEKS 1 TO 4

AFTER OPENING

- ☐ Share customer photos and reviews, with permission
- ☐ Pitch press again with first-month milestones
- ☐ Start a weekly email and SMS rhythm
- ☐ Review top sellers, basket size, and repeat rate every week

Pro tip: Collect phone numbers with SMS consent from day one, within your state's rules. Your own list is the one channel nobody can shut off.

Loyalty Programs for Dispensaries

Program types

- **Points.** The workhorse. Customers earn on every purchase automatically, and points print on the receipt so every visit reinforces the program.
- **Visit-based rewards.** A digital punch card. Simple to run and easy for value shoppers to love.
- **Tiers.** Rewards that grow as customers spend more. Treat your best customers like the regulars they are.
- **Win-back.** Loyalty also means noticing who stopped coming. Reach lapsed customers with a targeted offer before they settle somewhere else.
- **One program, every channel.** Customers should earn in store, on pickup, and on delivery, in one profile tied to your POS.

Pro tip: Run your reward through the margin calculator on page 26 before launch. If the math doesn't work, shrink the reward, not the program.

“

It was tough having loyalty on a different system as it never tied into the point of sale. When we did introduce Meadow, their built-in loyalty points works out really well for us.

COREY SCHWARTZ

COO, Coast to Coast

Seven loyalty principles from David Hua, co-founder and CEO of Meadow

1. **Make every customer feel like a regular.** Use purchase history to greet, recommend, and remember. Even an express pickup can feel personal.
2. **Loyalty lives in the POS.** If points don't accrue at checkout and show on the receipt, the program doesn't exist for your customers or your staff.
3. **Enroll in one tap.** A phone number is enough. Every extra field costs you members.
4. **Discount with intent.** Blanket discounts erode margin. Target win-backs, slow days, and category pushes, and measure the lift every time.
5. **Let data beat instinct.** Sales velocity and basket data show which promos work and which products earn shelf space.
6. **Fund new and returning separately.** Listings and search bring first-timers. Loyalty and SMS bring them back. Different jobs, different budgets.
7. **Stay compliant by default.** Rewards must follow state rules. Your POS should enforce them so compliance never depends on memory during a rush.



CHAPTER 09

The Final Sprint

Opening day ends months of work, sometimes years. It also starts the real job. A good soft opening finds the problems while the stakes are low, so your grand opening runs on systems you've already tested.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Soft opening checklist · Post-event review

09

Soft Opening Checklist

A soft opening is a rehearsal. The goal isn't to impress everyone. It's to find what breaks and fix it before the grand opening.

It's still licensed retail. Your license must be active, track-and-trace must be live, and every transaction must be real and compliant. Many states prohibit giving away cannabis, so thank your helpers with hospitality, and merch where your state allows it, not product.

Planning and invitations

- ☐ Confirm license is active and track-and-trace is live
- ☐ Pick 1 to 3 limited-hours days
- ☐ Invite friends, family, local partners, community leaders
- ☐ Set pricing within your state's discount rules
- ☐ Cap capacity per shift

Operations and staffing

- ☐ Train on the full menu, POS, and service flow
- ☐ Assign roles: check-in, floor, fulfillment, delivery dispatch
- ☐ Schedule to match real opening hours
- ☐ Hold a pre-shift meeting on goals

Pro tip: Don't run a register yourself. Stand back, watch the line, and write down every time someone has to ask for help.

Menu and inventory

- ☐ Opening inventory received on manifests and audited in
- ☐ Online and in-store menus live and matching the shelf
- ☐ Prices and taxes configured; receipt math checked
- ☐ Cycle count completed before day one
- ☐ Exit bags and supplies stocked

Technology and systems

- ☐ Real low-volume transactions run end to end
- ☐ ID scanning tested at check-in
- ☐ Track-and-trace sync verified every test day
- ☐ Online ordering, pickup, and delivery tested end to end
- ☐ Delivery: real orders to a few addresses in a small zone, then a full cash count and manifest check
- ☐ Payment terminals and cash drawer workflows tested
- ☐ Cameras recording with required retention
- ☐ Backup internet, printers, and hardware ready

Customer experience

- ☐ Signage, menus, and ordering instructions up
- ☐ Required postings visible
- ☐ Flow tested from check-in to checkout
- ☐ A service time goal set and measured
- ☐ Feedback collected by card, QR code, or survey

Post-Event Review

- ☐ Debrief with staff right after close
- ☐ Review sales, service times, and inventory accuracy
- ☐ Group customer feedback into themes
- ☐ Write down every fix for systems, menu, or training
- ☐ Update the grand opening plan

Pro tip: Don't aim for perfection. Every mistake you find at a soft opening is one your grand opening customers won't see.

Grand opening day

- ☐ Staff for twice your soft-open peak, plus one runner
- ☐ Put one person on the line outside: ID checks, menus, honest wait times
- ☐ Order extra change, exit bags, and receipt paper
- ☐ Keep a backup ID scanner, printer, and internet connection ready
- ☐ Cap opening deals so best sellers last past noon
- ☐ Reply to every review that week



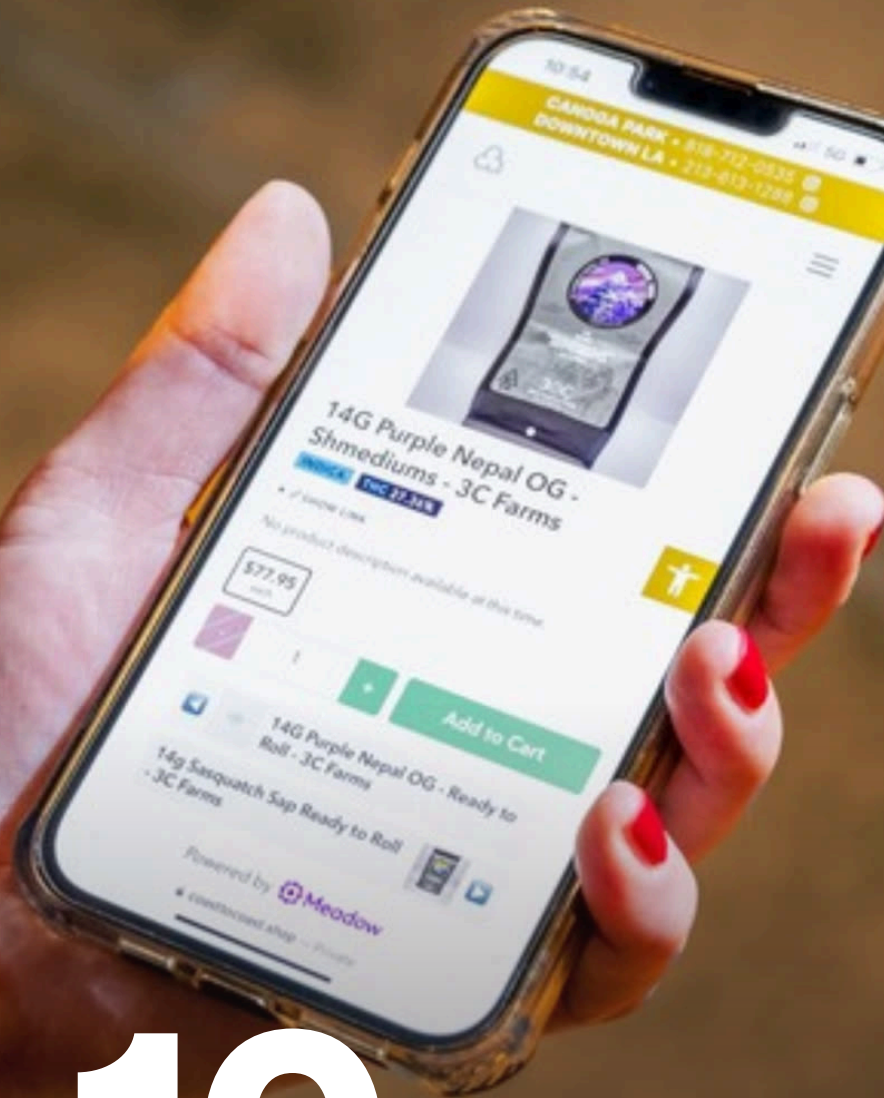
The lounge at PleasureMed, Los Angeles.

Grand Opening Go / No-Go

Write these conditions before the soft open. It's easier to move a party than to fix a sync error during one.

- ☐ Every transaction synced to track-and-trace without errors
- ☐ Cycle count variance resolved
- ☐ Cash drawers and the safe balance, with two-person counts
- ☐ Every staff member badged and trained on their station
- ☐ Online menu matches the shelf
- ☐ Delivery: every manifest reconciled and every car's cash counted in
- ☐ Fixes from the debrief closed

If any box is empty, move the date. A late grand opening is forgotten in a week. A bad one shows up in reviews for a year.



10

CHAPTER 10

The First 90 Days

Your first three months tell you whether the plan is working. Most of what goes wrong in a new dispensary shows up in the numbers weeks before it shows up in the bank account.

Pick a weekly review time, look at the same metrics every week, choose one fix, and give it an owner. Thirty minutes every Monday beats a long meeting once a quarter.

IN THIS CHAPTER

First 90 days scorecard · Weekly review rhythm

First 90 Days Scorecard

Track these every week. Write your target next to each one, compare it to the plan from your budget worksheet, and act on the biggest gap first.

Metric	Why it matters	Your target	Wk 1	Wk 4	Wk 8	Wk 12
Net sales	Your break-even line. Compare it to the number from page 14.					
Transactions and average basket	Traffic vs. spend. Good traffic with a low basket points to recommendations and add-ons.					
Repeat rate	Are first-timers coming back? The clearest early sign your concept works.					
Loyalty enrollment	The share of customers you can reach again.					
Gross margin by category	Where you actually make money.					
Discount rate	How much of your sales you're giving back. Launch promos should taper.					
Inventory variance and shrink	Catches loss and compliance risk early.					
Sell-through and dead stock	What to reorder and what to mark down.					
Checkout time	Speed is service, especially at peak hours.					
Compliance exceptions	Sync errors, ID issues, manifest problems. The target is zero.					
Labor as % of sales	Whether staffing matches traffic.					
Cash over/short	By drawer and by person. Small, repeated shortages show up here first.					
Delivery	On-time rate and contribution per order (page 36).					

Pro tip, the weekly review in 30 minutes: 1. Review the scorecard. 2. Name the biggest gap. 3. Pick one fix and one owner. 4. Check last week's fix. Meadow's 20+ exportable reports cover sales, discounts, and inventory, so most of your Monday review starts with the data already pulled.

Find Your Regulator

Rules change. Your regulator's site is the source of truth for license types, fees, windows, purchase limits, and ad rules. Then check your city or county. **Pro tip:** sign up for the regulator's email bulletins and read every one.

State	Regulator	Official site	Meadow guide for this state
California	Department of Cannabis Control (DCC)	cannabis.ca.gov	getmeadow.com/california-dispensary-software
Massachusetts	Cannabis Control Commission (CCC)	masscannabiscontrol.com	getmeadow.com/blog/how-to-open-a-dispensary-in-massachusetts
Michigan	Cannabis Regulatory Agency (CRA)	michigan.gov/cra	getmeadow.com/blog/how-to-open-a-dispensary-in-michigan
Minnesota	Office of Cannabis Management (OCM)	mn.gov/ocm	getmeadow.com/blog/how-to-open-a-dispensary-in-minnesota
New Jersey	Cannabis Regulatory Commission (CRC)	nj.gov/cannabis	getmeadow.com/new-jersey-dispensary-software
New York	Office of Cannabis Management (OCM)	cannabis.ny.gov	getmeadow.com/blog/how-to-open-a-dispensary-in-new-york

Delivery licensing at a glance, October 2026 ^[15]

State	Delivery-only license?	What it's called and how it works
California	Yes	Type 9 non-storefront retailer. Storefront retailers can also deliver.
Massachusetts	Yes, equity-led only	Courier and Delivery Operator, for businesses majority-owned and controlled by equity participants through April 1, 2029
Michigan	No	Retailers and microbusinesses deliver once the state approves their plans
Minnesota	Yes	Cannabis delivery service: buys from licensed retailers and delivers to customers
New Jersey	Yes	Class 6 Cannabis Delivery, delivering orders for licensed retailers
New York	Not open yet	In the law, with no application window yet. Authorized dispensaries deliver today.

Glossary

280E. A federal tax rule that bars deductions, other than cost of goods sold, for businesses trafficking in Schedule I or II substances. It's why many cannabis retailers pay tax on gross profit.

Adult-use. Cannabis sold to adults 21 and over without a medical recommendation. Also called recreational.

Buffer zone. The minimum distance a dispensary must keep from schools, parks, or similar sites. Set by state or local law.

COA. Certificate of Analysis. The lab report that confirms a product's potency and safety testing.

Conditional use permit (CUP). A local approval that allows a specific use, like cannabis retail, at a specific property.

Contribution per order. What a delivery order leaves after product cost, driver and vehicle cost, and fees. It must stay positive at your slowest hour.

Cycle count. Counting part of your inventory on a rolling schedule instead of everything at once. It catches discrepancies early.

Delivery-only license. A license to deliver cannabis without a storefront. Some states issue one; names and rules vary by state.

Depot. The licensed, non-public premises a delivery operator ships from. It needs the same security as a store.

Excise tax. A cannabis-specific tax set by your state, and sometimes your city, on top of sales tax in many places.

Green zone. An area where local zoning allows cannabis businesses.

Holding cost. What you pay each month before you open: rent, insurance, interest, retainers. It sets how long a delay you can survive.

Limited-access area. Space restricted to authorized staff, such as storage or the vault.

Manifest. The track-and-trace record that documents a transfer of cannabis between licensees.

Merit-based licensing. A process that scores applications against criteria instead of using first-come or a lottery.

Metrc. A track-and-trace system used by many state cannabis programs, including all six in this guide.

Property control. Proof you have the right to use a site, such as a lease, LOI, or deed. Many applications require it.

Purchase limit. The most cannabis a customer can legally buy in a set period, such as per transaction, day, or month. Set by your state.

Schedule I and Schedule III. Federal drug classes. As of October 2026, adult-use cannabis is Schedule I, and state-licensed medical cannabis is Schedule III, subject to pending court challenges.

Sell-through. The share of inventory you sold over a period. Low sell-through means cash sitting on a shelf.

Shrink. Inventory you paid for but can't account for: theft, damage, and counting errors.

Social equity program. State or local programs that give priority, fee relief, or funding to applicants affected by past cannabis enforcement.

Soft opening. A limited, low-key opening to test systems and service before the public launch.

Track-and-trace. The state system that records every cannabis package from cultivation to sale. Also called seed-to-sale.

Working capital. Cash on hand to cover operating costs while sales ramp.

Sources for Fast Facts and federal status

1. **California DCC**, Annual Legislative Report FY 2024-25, Exhibit 2 (Mar 2026). cannabis.ca.gov
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3. **New Jersey CRC**, High Points (Feb 5, 2026). nj.gov/cannabis
4. **Minnesota OCM**, 2026 Annual Report (Apr 2026). mn.gov/ocm
5. **Federal Register**, 91 FR 22714, medical marijuana rescheduling, effective Apr 28, 2026. [govinfo.gov](https://www.govinfo.gov)
6. **Troutman Pepper Locke**, "Pending Marijuana Rescheduling Put on Hold" (Oct 5, 2026). regulatoryoversight.com
7. **mg Magazine**, D.C. Circuit denies stay of the Schedule III order (Sep 10, 2026). mgmagazine.com
8. **IRS**, 2026-2027 Priority Guidance Plan, item 9 (Sep 29, 2026). irs.gov
9. **SBA**, SOP 50 10 8.1, effective Oct 1, 2026. sba.gov
10. **FinCEN**, FIN-2014-G001 (Feb 14, 2014). fincen.gov
11. **Congress.gov**, S.4942, SAFE Banking Act of 2026. congress.gov
12. **IRS**, Marijuana industry page, Form 8300. irs.gov
13. **IRS**, FS-2024-32 (Dec 2024). irs.gov
14. **Massachusetts CCC**, \$10 billion in gross sales release (Sep 9, 2026). masscannabiscontrol.com
15. **Delivery licensing**: DCC retail license types; CCC license types and Mar 2026 regulations; Mich. Admin. Code R 420.207; Minn. Stat. 342.41; NJ CRC home delivery guidance; NY OCM licensing page.
16. **Metrc**: DCC (Jul 2024); CCC (Jan 2026); Michigan CRA (May 2024); Minnesota OCM; NJ CRC Resolution 2022-2; NY OCM bulletin (Dec 2025).

This guide is for planning only and is not legal, tax, financial, or compliance advice. Cannabis remains federally regulated, and state and local rules vary widely and change often. Federal status is described as of October 2026. License types, fees, zoning and buffer rules, security requirements, advertising rules, purchase limits, and tax obligations depend on your jurisdiction. Verify current requirements with your state regulator and local authorities, and consult a licensed attorney and a cannabis-experienced CPA before making decisions. Customer quotes reflect individual experiences. Product capabilities describe Meadow's platform; availability may vary by state and license type.

What You Built

Once the doors open: what would you tell someone twelve months behind you?

THANK YOU AND GOOD LUCK ON OPENING DAY

Talk to the team that's launched dispensaries since 2014.
See Meadow live, ask about your state, and get a quote.
getmeadow.com/schedule-demo



Sell more cannabis with less work.

\$5B+ IN CANNABIS RETAIL ORDERS · 99.999% UPTIME SINCE 2014 · #1 RATED CANNABIS POS ON G2

Independent, founded in San Francisco in 2014. Serving dispensaries in California, Michigan, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Minnesota.

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