



Crystal-Gazing For The New Year: 2019 Predictions For The Legal Weed Business

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Yes, it's that time of the year again when we become introspective, reflecting on the key takeaways of the passing year as we look ahead toward the new one. What business trends do you foresee for the legal cannabis sector? Will the CBD market continue to boom, or will it plateau, replaced by the psychoactive cannabis market? And, will the U.S. market begin feeling the heat from our friends in the Great White North as more big U.S. strategic firms pour their money into Canadian cannabis companies?

Without further ado, let's do some crystal-gazing for the legal weed market. With some assistance from a cross-section of industry pros, here are a few predictions that might jolt you out of your holiday-addled daze.

Here are mine:

The next state [to legalize recreational use](#) will be my home state of New Jersey. I think there's going to be a close tug of war between its mightier neighbor New York but in the end, the Garden State will come in first, followed by New York shortly thereafter. Sorry, Governor Cuomo.

CBD will still be a craze, drawing the interest of bigger beverage companies. Despite their [fervent denials of](#) interest in the market, I think Coca-Cola will finally ink a deal with Aurora Cannabis, with whom they were [reportedly in talks](#) with last September, or if not, another Canadian cannabis company. The focus will be on developing CBD-infused drinks. And, after this deal, I agree with leading cannabis analyst [Vivien Azer](#): I think [Pepsi will be next](#), their [publicly cautious](#) stance notwithstanding.

I predict an ex-president (pick your choice) will make headlines in 2019 by not only following ex-House Speaker John Boehner's lead in becoming a [prominent and vocal cannabis champion](#) and investor, he will also become either a CEO or chairman of a cannabis company

(and it'll be a U.S. one, of course). This ex-president's advocacy could catalyze the movement one step closer to overturning prohibition.

George Allen, president of [Acreage Holdings](#), a company that grows and sells marijuana (and has Boehner sitting on its board), offered a few predictions I found fascinating.

He expects to see more women appointed to C-suite positions in the cannabis industry. Also, he predicts that “as cannabis use continues to increase among baby boomers, this will lead to a major demographic shift in how cannabis companies market their products.” Allen does echo my sentiments about “canna-beverages” (his term for it) only he's thinking beyond beverages “to protein powders, metabolism boosters, and work-out recovery systems designed for the self-tuning individualist.”

Nick Kovacevich, CEO of California-based [KushCo Holdings Inc](#), which sells packaging, containers and other ancillary products for licensed cannabis businesses, feels the CBD market will continue to grow in the new year. “Beverages, in particular, will make a lot of noise and we'll see a lot of new innovation on that front, both with CBD and THC infusions,” he predicts. “However, we still don't expect beverages to be a big piece of the revenue pie until later years such as 2021 and beyond.”

Like me, Kovacevich also foresees more politicians and VIPs embracing cannabis in the new year.

“2019 will be a banner year for the normalization of cannabis. Throughout the year, thought leaders, CEOs, government officials and local community leaders will continue to drive the new and emerging narrative in mainstream media: cannabis is here to stay and the people buying the products are our neighbors, physicians, stay-at-home parents, young adults, seniors and more. This product cuts across geographies and age bands like social alcohol consumption does; it's just not as socially acceptable yet, but it will be made more normalized and acceptable in 2019.”

Dr. Jonathan Rothbard, CEO of Toronto and Palo Alto, California-based [Katexco Pharmaceuticals](#), a medical cannabis company that is currently developing a drug that will treat Crohn's disease, rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis, predicts there will be a “revival of interest” in the space by large pharmaceutical companies.

“While beverage and alcohol companies are joining the CBD bandwagon, it makes sense that big pharma steps in too,” he said. “Many pharmaceutical companies have identified small molecular weight and orally bioavailable agonists of cannabis which were tested in preclinical experiments and will now enter human trials in 2019.”

Further, he predicts the FDA will be approving more cannabis-derived drugs and that “CBD will be used as an add-on or created synthetically in drugs. Patients and consumers will start looking for quality and quantifiable dosage, which will be provided by pharmaceutical companies rather than the current nutraceutical companies that are getting product from anywhere and prescribed loosely.”

And, finally, Joe Lusardi, president and CEO of Wakefield, Massachusetts-based Curaleaf, a multi-state cannabis operator, feels “the number of dispensaries and grow sites will be expanding in states that have already legalized, particularly in states like Massachusetts and Michigan that just recently legalized adult-use. Massachusetts only just recently opened its first two adult-use dispensaries, so there’s plenty of room to grow there. Michigan doesn’t even have adult-use dispensaries yet, but they probably will.”

How about you? What are your 2019 predictions for the legal cannabis business market? Please let me know as I’d love to hear from you.

Happy Holidays!

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