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## Growing A Marijuana Business, Legally

By Seth Fiegerman



It's the impossible dream of many a college student. But now, thanks to changes in different state laws and some federal policies, many have the opportunity to open and operate legitimate (mostly) marijuana enterprise. Why mostly? Well, despite changes, these dispensaries still exist in a legal gray area.

In California, marijuana distribution has become the next gold rush - there are close to 1,000 marijuana dispensaries registered in Los Angeles alone (check out a map of them [here](#)). But these dispensaries are sprouting up in plenty of other places too. There are 15 dispensaries in [Colorado](#) and four in Oregon, medical marijuana is now legal in [13 states](#) and it is on the docket to be legalized in 15 more. That would mean the majority of states in this country will tolerate it.

"We're creating an entirely new industry with plenty of new job opportunities," said George Boyadjian, President and Founder of the Cannabis Career Institute, which offers courses to those who want to enter the medical marijuana field.

Can you really earn an honest living from working in a marijuana dispensary? Yes, but you won't necessarily be rolling in crazy money. Employees at dispensaries make as much as \$20 dollars an hour, according to Boyadjian. If you own the place, your income will also be relatively limited because all the states that allow dispensaries mandate that they be run as [non-profits](#).

Perhaps the most lucrative dispensary on the west coast is the Harborside shop in Oakland, which reported close to \$15 million in sales in 2008. The owner of the store, Stephen DeAngelo, [estimates](#) that the average marijuana shops grosses \$3-4 million each year. However, if you're an owner, much of that money is heavily taxed. In Oakland, owners pay 15 times the tax that other store owners do. But, according to Forbes, most owners actually asked to pay more taxes so they could appear as better citizens.

Aspiring marijuana entrepreneurs must meet one very important condition before opening a dispensary: they have to be a patient.

If you want to distribute legally, you have to obtain it legally, which means your doctor must prescribe you medical marijuana. Doctors will "recommend" marijuana for anything from anxiety and insomnia to more life threatening conditions like cancer. Some doctors simply charge a nominal fee to write the prescription. Once your doctor gives the OK, he or she can also authorize you to grow your own pot legally.

At the moment, laws for distribution in states like California are determined on a local level. For example, authorities Sonoma County lets dispensaries grow and sell up to 99 plants at a time.

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