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New cannabis app Tetragram aims to simplify the industry for patients

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A team of Maryland entrepreneurs have built a new technology platform and app aimed at simplifying the buying experience for medical cannabis consumers.

Their new software platform is called Tetragram, and is designed to help medical cannabis patients better understand the products they are buying and using to treat their various ailments. The platform launched earlier this month, and more than 100 people have downloaded the app so far, said CEO Otha Smith III. His hope is get up to 50,000 users in the first year. But to get there, the company will need some help with funding and marketing.

Smith and his two co-founders, G. Lucas Roe and Julius Moore, have spent more than three years and over \$200,000 of their own money building the



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Otha Smith III is the founder behind a new tech platform designed for the cannabis industry, called Tetragram.

platform. They have managed to gain some early momentum locally through word of mouth, but they are aiming to land an investment of at least \$750,000 to help grow the business and hire additional employees.

Smith said Tetragram was born out of his own experiences as a medical cannabis patient in Maryland. After being involved in a car accident in 2003, he was provided a number of different opioids to help manage his pain. Smith said he developed a dependency over the course of two years, but ultimately decided the safer option was to switch to using cannabis. He acquired and used the drug illegally until Maryland's legal medical cannabis market opened.

The prospect of the new industry was exciting, Smith said, and he ultimately left behind a job at the Baltimore-based energy company Constellation to work inside the industry at a Maryland dispensary. But it was not an easy transition.

"When I entered a dispensary for the first time, I was just completely overwhelmed by the options," he said. "Reading about the products felt like a new language. I didn't know anything about cannabinoids or terpenes. The whole experience was very confusing."

Smith said he thought he had pretty good background knowledge of cannabis, but realized there was a lot he didn't understand about the different strains and the concentrations of the cannabis compounds in each. He expected that if he was having such trouble, people even less familiar with the drug would also be overwhelmed. He was motivated to build something that could help.

A pair of IT professionals, Roe and Moore, helped build the Tetragram platform based on Smith's original idea. The mobile tech provides a kind of journal that enables cannabis patients to keep track of each product they purchase, including details like the amount of terpene and cannabinoid

compounds, and whether or not the product is actually effective in addressing their medical needs.

"The goal is to help people keep track of what works best for them, and develop a better baseline knowledge of the industry overtime," Smith said.

Smith said his team was making concerted efforts to find potential investors prior to the economic shutdown related to Covid-19, but that work has since stalled. Additional funding would allow the team to invest in expanding its user base and adding new features to the Tetragram platform. Ultimately the company hopes to add a social engagement element to the platform, which would allow patients to consult and share information on their experiences with certain products, he said.

As a Black man, Smith said Tetragram is his opportunity to get his "foot in the door" of the highly lucrative cannabis industry. In Maryland, the sector has faced criticism for a lack of diversity among the business owners cleared to grow, process and sell the drug, in part due to extremely high costs of entry.

Smith expects building a cannabis-related business with his team of diverse founders will still have its challenges, especially when it comes to accessing capital, but he hopes Tetragram will be part of growing the industry's impact in Maryland.

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