

Tetragram Provides Cannabis Users a Safe Environment to Explore the Medicinal Benefits of the Plant

BY MADELINE COLLI

SUFFERING FROM A tragic accident, Otha Smith-III, sought out medical cannabis to treat his underlying health conditions. A main issue Smith encountered was that there were no instructions or guides on how to use medical cannabis. While a growing audience wants to see legalization and decriminalization, the US federal government labels cannabis as a Schedule I drug along the likenesses of heroin, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), methaqualone (meth), and so on. Because of this scheduling, it is difficult to obtain research on cannabis so that more can be known about the plant. Smith wanted a platform where novices and more experienced users could anonymously share their experiences as well as what cannabis products worked and did not work for them. With this idea, Tetragram was born. Smith created Tetragram as a mobile application that can be easily downloaded onto your mobile device, tablet, and so forth. By using this app, users can anonymously track cannabis products and tailor a cannabis regimen with products best suited for their needs. Here, Smith shares his personal journey and how it led to an app to help advance the cannabis industry through real-world data.

A Patient First

In 2006, Smith was involved in a serious car accident where he almost lost his life. From the accident, he had a six-inch, 34-plus staple scar on the top of his head. Once he was discharged from the hospital, Smith was prescribed several different kinds of opioids for his neck and back pain. “After three years of using prescription pills, I decided I wasn’t going to use pills every day for the rest of my life and completely stopped use,” Smith said.

Never shy around cannabis, as he had been a fan of the plant during high school and college, Smith decided to take a chance on cannabis to self-medicate for his health ailments

rather than use pills. “Once Maryland legalized cannabis for medical use, I hurried up and got my medical card, but I will never forget how overwhelmed I felt during my initial visit to a dispensary,” he explained.

In Maryland, each dispensary is required to have a clinical director on staff. Smith found this very helpful and was able to learn more about cannabis. “I became good friends with the clinical director at my local dispensary, Barbara Orchester. She was instrumental in educating me on the medical benefits of cannabis,” he said. “Barbara was the one responsible for making me aware of terpenes and cannabinoids and the effects associated with each. But consequently, since cannabis affects everyone differently, I didn’t feel comfortable with other people’s recommendations.”

Smith decided to venture out on his own through a lot of trial and error to find the right product to address his medical needs. Figuring out the right product though didn’t come quickly and was, at times, frustrating due to the huge selection of products to choose from.

Entrepreneurial Drive

Inspired by his own medical cannabis journey, Tetragram was born. “As a patient myself, I can remember how frustrating it was to find the right cannabis product to address my medical needs. More importantly, I’ve worked in dispensaries and understand how challenging it is for doctors and dispensary staff to make accurate product recommendations to customers,” said Smith. Every cannabis user goes through their own trial and error journey to find the best product or products for them. “I vividly recall everyone I spoke with, whether they were a patient, worked at a dispensary, or a doctor; one thing that was constant in all my conversations was people recommending that I keep a journal. I noticed dispensaries would sell paperback journals and I met a few people that went as far as creating

detailed excel spreadsheets to keep track of products they purchased and how it made them feel. That's when I said to myself, there needs to be an app that makes the process of recording my experience with cannabis and cannabidiol (CBD) fun and engaging," Smith said.

With cannabis still federally illegal, there isn't a lot of sufficient data or published studies for people to rely upon for guidance. The medicinal plant also effects every user differently, which can make the process more challenging. "Tetragram is a smart, digital journal that empowers medical cannabis patients and recreational users with the ability to track, rate, and share their personal experiences with cannabis through our mobile app," Smith explained. "Tetragram is free and will always be free for consumers to download from the Google Play Store or the Apple App Store." Smith further explained that they are currently developing a V2 of Tetragram which will provide new features and functionality not just specifically for consumers, but for dispensaries, cultivators, and consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies, as well as the medical community.

Tetragram's growth and rise in popularity has been solely organic. "Myself, along with my two business partners, Julius Moore (CTO) and Lucas Roe (CDO), are each medical cannabis patients. Therefore, we take privacy extremely seriously, which is why Tetragram is HIPAA-complaint as well. Though users can share their reviews with others on Tetragram, the user's personal identity remains anonymous," Smith added.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, it was both good and bad for the app. During the pandemic, the public was placing stronger focus and attention on personal mental and physical health. Cannabis consumption dramatically rose during this period. More products were being purchased and people were paying closer attention on the effects associated with each product they were purchasing. "The only downside to launching Tetragram during the COVID-19

pandemic was that there were very limited options to make consumers aware of Tetragram. Cannabis companies have very limited options for marketing their products and services to consumers due to cannabis being federally illegal," he said. Cannabis companies mainly rely on tradeshows and conventions to reach consumers. With everything shutdown, it was very difficult to introduce new or current products.

In the cannabis market, there are so many products to choose from. This can make it daunting to novices interested in becoming cannabis users or even be challenging to the most experienced of consumers. "With Tetragram, we empower the consumer to take control of their personal journey with cannabis by providing them with a platform that makes it fun to keep track of each product purchased and its associated effect. By doing so, consumers will be able to draw conclusions more effectively on not only which product but understand which terpenes and cannabinoids and consumption methods are providing them with the most relief," Smith said. The app is also available nationwide which allows users to access it and explore products no matter what state they are located in.

To access Tetragram, you can download it from the App Store or Google Play store. Upon download and opening the application, you will be prompted to create an account and verify your email address. Once these steps are completed, users will be able to sign in and begin logging product information. Smith further added, "We placed a lot of time on the user experience to make sure Tetragram would be easy to navigate. Once you open Tetragram, simply click on our logo and you can start logging away by first entering in the product information, then where you made the purchase, and how you consumed the product." Users are also able to select a medical condition from a list of default options or create their own symptom, rate that symptom before and after use, and add any detailed comments associated with the product. Another aspect

of the app that gives users more flexibility is that they are able to choose what method of consumption they are using. For example, if the user is consuming orally, topically, or inhaling and will then be able to select the device being used (bong, joint, vape pen) or form of the product (flower, hash, shatter).

A major issue in the cannabis industry Smith sees is the need for standardization. Each state across the country that has medical or adult-use programs require products to be tested by a laboratory, but testing requirements vary from state-to-state. "This is the reason why we aim to get the certificate of analysis (COA) directly from the cultivator to make sure the information presented on the label matches the COA. But the problem is much bigger than just blaming the manufacturer: for example, testing facilities have been caught taking more money from companies to increase the percentage of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) on the COA," Smith said. Having the same standardization across all states would ensure that every laboratory is following the same rigorous testing requirements to provide safe and accurate products to consumers.

Smith is proud of what him and his partners have created with Tetragram. The app provides a platform and haven for users to track the products that work best for them and see what works for others anonymously, which helps improve their quality of life. It is why Tetragram's slogan is, "Built for patients, by patients." If you are interested in using Tetragram or learning more about it, they can be found on social media, for Instagram and Facebook, they can be found @ **thetetragramapp** or people can visit our website at tetragramapp.com. Smith is also involved in several exciting research projects, listen to our recent podcast episode to learn more:



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