



LESSONS LEARNED: Evolution of Cannabis Education Campaigns in the US

Overall, states experimented with various tones and messaging approaches since legalization. There have been many lessons learned through trial and error, which can help inform cannabis public information campaigns in other states.

- **Tone is very important.** The target audience, cannabis consumers, need to be respected. You can incorporate humor but not at the expense of the cannabis consumer. Avoid unrealistic or derogatory scenarios that may elicit mockery.
- **Avoid threats/scare-tactics.** Take a neutral stance rooted in education about the laws and dangers. Additionally, don't pair images of death and destruction with cannabis use.
- **Partner with the industry.** Allow the cannabis industry and stakeholders to carry the message as they are trusted sources for consumers.
- **Encourage peer-to-peer communication.** There is a lot of distrust in the government, so a peer-to-peer approach is more engaging for cannabis consumers.
- **Encourage alternatives.** Messaging emphasizing that driving after using alcohol or drugs is a choice that should be avoided. Calling on a designated driver is the solution if the choice to ingest cannabis is made.
- **Be credible and factual.** Use statistics and cite sources. Emphasize slowed reaction time. Additionally, discuss credible risks and consequences.
- **Messaging that connects** the risks of driving while high and the risks associated with doing other things (such as surgery or transporting kids) under the influence. Incorporating kids has been shown to elicit more of a response from the target audience.

Successful Ads

The most successful campaigns included the “Wisdom” ads, the “Uncomfortable High” ads, and Colorado’s 320 campaign.

- **Wisdom Ads (Massachusetts):** [The Wisdom ads](#) were successful because they used a peer-to-peer approach; research shows that cannabis consumers want to be talked to like a friend, not lectured by the government.
- **Uncomfortable High (Colorado):** [The “Uncomfortable High” ads](#) were the most effective campaign among survey respondents across all demographics and driving behaviors because it invoked a feeling of discomfort around driving after using cannabis — the feeling of unease provides an opening that can start a process of questioning, increased awareness, and progress toward sustained behavior change.
- **320 Campaign (Colorado):** Since 420 is known for getting high, 320 was about planning ahead. Leading up to the 420 “holiday,” Lyft vehicles were branded with the 320 slogan — “Plan a Ride Before You’re High.” Information cards were left in the backseat highlighting the dangers of driving while high, as well as Lyft credits. The 320 campaign in Colorado drove cannabis consumers from awareness to action — ads should be solution-oriented (e.g. positive suggestions for avoiding a DUI — designate driver, ride share, taxi or just spend the night).



“Wisdom” ads, Massachusetts.



“Uncomfortable High” ad campaign, Colorado.



320 Campaign, Colorado.

Unsuccessful Ads

Some of the least successful campaigns, according to the state representatives interviewed for this report, included California's "DUI doesn't just mean booze" ad, Colorado's "Grilling" ads, and Colorado's "Dangerous Combination" ads.

- **"DUI doesn't just mean booze" ad (California):** The ["DUI doesn't just mean booze" ad](#) used a peer-to-peer approach but instead of deterring cannabis-impaired driving, it encouraged cannabis use; ads should avoid being too pro-industry and focus on the issue.
- **"Grilling" ads (Colorado):** The ["Grilling" ads](#) were funny but also very stereotypical — cannabis users are sensitive to the stoner stereotype and said that an effective campaign needs to be inclusive of a wide variety of cannabis users and not play into negative stereotypes.
- **"Dangerous Combinations" ads (Colorado):** The "Dangerous Combination" ads connected cannabis use with death and destruction — scare tactics are interpreted as condescending or out of touch.



"DUI doesn't just mean booze" ad campaign, California.



"Grilling" ad campaign, Colorado.



"Dangerous Combinations" ad campaign, Colorado.



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