

Q&A with James Dagonas, Weedmaps GM & Sr. Director, Global Payments Strategy

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By WM Communications Team



For cannabis retailers, navigating the industry is a complex and ever-changing challenge, especially when it comes to finding reliable and compliant payment solutions. To help alleviate this pain point, [WM Business](#) is developing a number of solutions to enable retailers to compliantly process payments, so they can focus on growing their business.

James Dagonas, General Manager & Sr. Director of Global Payments Strategy for Weedmaps explains how his team is navigating the complexity of payments for cannabis retailers and the growth of the cannabis and fintech industries.

Q: Tell us about your role at Weedmaps.

My role is focused on developing and executing a multi-year, multi-jurisdictional, omnichannel payments strategy for Weedmaps. This involves working at the intersection of the traditional payments industry, a complex state and federal regulatory environment, and cutting edge fintech solutions as we work to develop a fully-compliant payment solution that benefits both our retailers and consumers.

Q: What excites you about working in the cannabis tech space?

The most interesting and probably challenging element of the role is how rapidly evolving the industry is combined with the fact that the regulatory environment we operate in today will almost certainly pivot entirely and unlock a whole new set of possibilities. Some of the problems we're trying to solve today may not even exist a few years from now, or only exist because of a certain regulation, or a single state.

In a more macro sense, we're still in the very early stages of an industry that will continue to grow and evolve, spurring new problems but also increasing innovation in parallel. We have the unique opportunity at Weedmaps to directly, and significantly, influence the evolution of this industry. In particular, as I think of the relatively nascent cannabis payments space and look towards all the innovation in fintech and more recently defi or decentralized finance -- it's hard not to be excited about what lies ahead!

Q: What are some of the unique challenges that cannabis retailers face, and how are you planning to help address them?

Access to traditional financial services is arguably the most difficult challenge that retailers face in this industry. Legal cannabis sales exceeded \$24B last year, yet the main card networks like Visa, and Mastercard, and the majority of banks are unwilling to serve the industry. Simply put, with cannabis still a federally illegal Schedule I drug, financial institutions risk penalties from federal regulators for serving licensed cannabis retailers in legalized states. This has created a cash-heavy, underbanked industry that is both inherently risky and growth limiting. This also makes it difficult and expensive for a cannabis retailer to find and use solutions that allow them to compliantly accept non-cash forms of payments -- especially when compared to traditional retail. A few solutions exist, but with the boom in both the cannabis and fintech industries, more innovation is coming.

My goal at Weedmaps is to make those innovative compliant solutions accessible and available to cannabis retailers. Purchasing cannabis -- whether it be online, or in your favorite dispensary -- should be just as seamless as buying alcohol, or ordering takeout. It's not there yet but that is where we aim to be.