

Thinking Outside the Bud

Episode 427- Christine De La Rosa

<https://www.thinkingoutsidethebud.com/podcast/cultivating-change-christine-de-la-rosas-journey-in-cannabis>

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

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Bruce Eckfeldt

Welcome, everyone. This is thinking outside the bud. I'm Bruce Eckfeldt. I'm your host. Our guest today is Christine Delarosa. She is CEO and co founder at the People's ecosystem, also a founding member at the People's group. We're going to talk about the world of cannabis. We're going to talk about hemp. We're going to talk about where are we, in terms of development of this industry, we're going to talk a little bit about AI, we're gonna talk about a couple of different things. Christina is a real leader in this space. And they recently named one of the 25 most influential women in cannabis. So excited to have this conversation, learn a little bit more what she's doing, what she's seeing, and where this industry is kind of going. So with all that, Christine, welcome to the program.

Christine De La Rosa

Thank you so much for inviting me, Bruce, I appreciate it.

Bruce Eckfeldt

It's a pleasure. So before we get into all the things you're doing today, we'd love to just recap for folks that don't know you or didn't listen to the previous program that you were on. Give us a little background. How did you get into this space? Like, what was the motivation? What's the kind of place you're coming from in terms of cannabis, and helping with this industry?

Christine De La Rosa

So I got into cannabis because of almost dying, which I know sounds very dramatic, but it's just really the truth. Yeah, I had a major health event in 2010. And I got diagnosed with lupus is not working for about five years and being pretty much homebound and on a lot of really bad medication, that today, people would not even consider it no prescribing for you. Like that's how bad the medication was. And I just got sicker and sicker. And then I decided to try cannabis. And I was like, Oh, let's see if this will work. It's holistic. And guess what? Surprise, surprise, Bruce, it actually worked.

And so I got off all of the medication that they had put me on for five years. This my five highest earning years, and started to do cannabis. And that's how I got in. I was like, well, this can't be a secret for people like me, like Sir people who already had access to medical cannabis. Maybe if you're in California, or you're in Colorado,

but I'm just like an everyday kind of lady. You know what I mean? And so I don't really, I'm not like watching chicken Cheech and Chong movies. I'm not like, you know, dabbing, I needed something. And this didn't exist in 2016. When we started, we're just a regular person who was looking for wellness could go and really see how to find it. There was no YouTube channels, there were no like, you know, female led brands at the time, right? That's eight years ago. And so I was like, Well, I suffered for five years. And I could have only suffered for one month. And I know that cannabis would change my life This dramatically. And so that's how I got into cannabis and why I'm still here, even though it's trying to kill me that's trying to kill me, I survived the pulmonary embolism. But I don't know about this industry.

Bruce Eckfeldt

I know, I know. So tell us a little bit about the people's ecosystem? And how that set up? And what is that really designed to do? And how is that helping you kind of do the work you want to do inside cannabis?

Christine De La Rosa

Well, I think it helps me because we are truly an ecosystem where a group of different types of companies that come together, and the ecosystem owns a part of the companies that it works with. And we're able to really take smaller companies work together to make actually work as a bigger company. I always tell people think of us like a caterpillar where all the little shoes are going the same way. And we allows us to be very nimble and to pivot when we need to pivot without it costing a lot of money to us, or our investors or our consumers. And that's because we have these really deep set partnerships with different groups.

And so because we are able to do that we have a business services group, we have a logistics group, we have a manufacturing group, all of them under the ecosystem, but also owned by other people in the industry, as well as us so that we're sharing resources. And when I go and buy bulk flour, I'm buying it for three manufacturing companies, not just one, not just my own. It just allows us to work in a way that I think is fiscally responsible, but also uplifts more people than just one company. Yeah.

Bruce Eckfeldt

So I know you've been doing a lot of work with diversity, inclusion, side cannabis, I mean, give us a little sense of, I guess why? What is interesting and unique about cannabis in this space? How is it different than the other industries around this topic? Give us a little sense of how this is kind of framed, you know, your approach and the work that you've done and kind of the impact that you want to have on cannabis? Absolutely.

Christine De La Rosa

I think one of the things that was important to us when we started was to honor the people that have been doing this for a long time that risked their lives, their livelihood, their families, their land, to provide this medicine. And you know, a lot of people will be like, oh, you know, it's illegal. It's in the legacy market. And I'm like, Yes, but you wouldn't actually have a market if the legacy market hadn't existed, right? Yeah. And so when we got into this, we're like, well, we don't want to lose that history. Or we don't want to not give homage to the people who actually did that.

So for us, dei wasn't like diversity, equity and inclusion. dei was just what we should be doing to honor the planet and the people who got us to where we are the people who brought it away in jail who died in JL like that was super important to us. And now that the EI is not the rigor anymore, right? If people aren't really going

to get CEI, you're seeing this happening, you know, CRT, there's a huge backlash on that. That doesn't change our mission at all. All it does is it's like, yeah, we do this, you don't have to like what we do. So you don't have to buy from us if you don't want to. But it doesn't hurt anybody to be, you know, respectful of legacy, it doesn't hurt anybody to understand that people of color have had a huge impact on that. And even though we see like sort of this backlash in political space, we don't see that on the ground with people buying cannabis. And so I think we might make it through, I think it'd be okay.

Bruce Eckfeldt

So, tell us a little bit about the things that you've been able to accomplish with the People's group, like, what are some big milestones for you, as you've kind of gotten into the space as the industry evolved? Give us a little story? Well,

Christine De La Rosa

I'll tell you this. I will tell you, I was in Texas in 2020, I had moved back during the pandemic. This is where I'm from, to take care of my parents during the pandemic. And I remember I was in my office and my husband ran into the room and says they are selling cannabis in Texas. And I'm like, that is BS, because Texas was like a no go state. Like, if you have PTSD, could you get a medical card like it was really restrictive. And so he showed me the website and I was like, oh my god, this is cannabis. But it wasn't cannabis. It was hemp cannabis, which is the same thing. It was hemp was a DEA D nine, all of that stuff. And I didn't really understand it. But I remember because I was I had been in California for 15 years, I was super snobby. And I was like, well, that's not cannabis. And so many people, you'll hear that say that. Now, that's not cannabis, it is cannabis, actually, it's just 3% or less.

And what I love about about being the savvy person is that I had to learn what was going on on the hemp space. And there was some incredibly brilliant and creative people in that space. So when you say like, what's the big thing you're doing now? Well, the big thing we're doing now is that we just opened up a three acre facility in Colorado that does only have beverages have whatever. And we have a full distribution center within that space. So we're able to distribute to any state that allows us to distribute, but more importantly, we're able to do direct to consumer shipping. And so one of the things that I have talked about often is how we don't own our consumer. So brands have a very hard time because they don't know their consumer, the dispensaries and the consumer. And we don't have access to that data. So we're gonna see a huge shift. And I'm glad to be on the cutting edge of that a huge shift in brands being able to have some brand power in the space because every major company that's currently in the THC space is now putting together a hemp line.

So they're still going to stay in the THC space where they have to pay 40% tax and they have to pay to 80 E and they have to pay, you know, the dispensaries state lines. Yeah, right. They can't cross state lines. But they're also going to have a hemp the exact same thing but with hemp, where they don't have to pay to add or they have regular eight and a half percent taxes if you're you know, in Texas where they just have sales tax, like when you're in California, and they're gonna be able to own their consumer. So finally, Bruce, finally brands are gonna be able to be like, Oh, Sara, always buys this gummy. When we do a sale for that gummy, we'll be able to write her directly and offer her a coupon, which we absolutely can't do right now on the THC side. Yeah. So I'm super excited. So

Bruce Eckfeldt

I'm kind of curious, like, are these brands getting into him? are they focusing on a Delta eight strategy? Or is this a way to get around the THC restrictions? Or are they just looking at different products that fundamentally have sort of different outcomes or, you know, looking for different markets?

Christine De La Rosa

Yeah, I think what's really cool right now is that you starting to see people like me come into the industry, or we have done a lot of our research so when this started in 2024 years ago, they were just pouring distillate into gummy and you better like it because that's the only way you're gonna get high. And that's you know, anything made with distillate straight up is terrible, but people will eat it because they are so desperate to be able to get medicine or desperate to get, you know, some kind of relief for their, whatever it is. But now that when I'm coming in, we are not putting straight distillate into any of the products that we have, whether it's a beverage a gummy cookie, we're using our emulsion actives that we currently have because again, cannabis and hemp are the same thing, just the level of THC, right?

So we can put the hemp distillate inside of the emotions that are not going to taste like distillate. And so we're starting to see, at least on our side, we're starting to see an elevation of how people are thinking about creating their products. So it's not necessarily a replacement. It's an alternative. Let's just say I'm a soccer mom. I really don't want 33% THC, not my jam, but I'm really cool with like a three to five milligram right. Well three to five milligram is not going to sell in a dispensary ain't nobody going into a dispensary wanting three to five milligrams, but you know who will buy a three to five milligram a mom, a woman, men who don't want to have that high content at a sprouts that will so quickly sprouts.

And so it's a shift, right? It's like a shift into a more mainstream group of people who are looking for an elevated experience that maybe doesn't include alcohol or inhalable, right. Looking for tinctures and gummies don't want to use Ambien would prefer to use a gummy, you know, that doesn't have 33% thc doesn't need to have live rosin or live resin. So I don't think it's a replacement. I think it's an alternative. And it shouldn't be seen as competition. It just should be an addition to already product lines, because there are people that do want 33% THC in their flower, you know, 40% in their gummy, but there's also a huge swath of people that have no need for that, like my husband.

My husband is allergic to THC, he has a very hard time sleeping. So he's always looking for products that are coming out. So what we're seeing is like alternative cannabinoids, like CBN, CBG, THCA, THCV, really started to come into power on the hemp side, because they were looking for alternatives. These are now being added in on the THC side. But it really came out of that grouping that said, hey, When CBN do if we only put CBN in it, yeah, how does that work? And so like I said, I think it's not a replacement at all. I think a lot of people who might never try a cannabis product or hemp product, on the THC on the regulated side are more open when they see it and normalize at an heb or have one of the big chains. I mean, we just saw this happen in California Total Wine is carrying about four or five hemp beverages. And I saw in Wisconsin, a recent article that said one of the big liquor stores, they're saying that their health products are out pacing their wine products. So we're seeing a huge shift. And I'm grateful to be on the cutting edge. Yeah,

Bruce Eckfeldt

I guess do you see this as expanding your market or providing more options for your existing market? I mean, when you look at this, from an audience point of view, how are you strategically looking at it?

Christine De La Rosa

I mean, strategically I'm looking at as an expansion of our product line. So if I have a toasty tree that is live resin on the THC regulated side, I have that same gummy on the hemp side, it doesn't have you know, a huge amount of THC but we can add CBN we can add CBD to it. We can add mushrooms to it, like I don't know, if you see but there's some of these brands that are on the THC side that are now making beverages using mushrooms, right? And not even psychedelic mushrooms but like Chaga Lion's Mane, you know what I mean? And these are all good and healthy things to have in your body. Yeah.

Bruce Eckfeldt

So I guess kind of curious if you see this market kind of bifurcating here where the dispensary the current kind of regulated THC dispensary model really ended up being focusing on those more kind of hardcore cannabis. You know, THC focused users that either want, you know, high potency or really kind of unique strains and almost kind of connoisseur of some of this stuff. And then the hemp world kind of capturing more of the general market for, you know, people that are interested in natural products, natural medicines, and differently and it might be, you know, hemp based Yeah, you might bring in mushrooms, you might bring in other kind of remedies that will enhance the products, I guess, how do you see this market playing out from a structural point of view?

Christine De La Rosa

I really think the restructure we're gonna see a lot of more generalization on the hemp side, people that are not going to go out of their way to go to dispensary because they don't really need the 700 products that are sitting in there. They're going to be at their grocery store, there's going to be an end cap that has like a beverage at the end that says I have beverage THC infused might be like, Oh, it only has three milligrams or something. I'll try this. And then they might love it. And they might, you know, use it over and over again. But they can easily get access to it. And I think that's the most important thing. Like even when you're looking at like, let's say a New York or California, there are huge swaths of cannabis deserts because that particular city or that particular county did not want to have THC in their county.

So even if you're like in the mid of California, you have to drive pretty far to get to a dispensary. Not a lot of people are going to do it but it gives access to them if they can just pick it up at their total wine location which are everywhere, right. And so I don't really think I think you're gonna always have a need for dispensaries and I think a lot of like really great products come out of the regulated market. But I think that to access the general population, which is the largest population, you know, in terms of hemp or cannabis, you will need to be able to be inside of a sprouts to be at a GNC to be at, you know what I'm saying? And so you just are really seeing In an explosion, I mean, we haven't even gotten to a peak yet. Like we're just climbing because we just realized that about, I would say 12 to 18 months ago, we were like, Hmm, like on the THC side. I know, that's what happened. For me. We're like, ah, what if we use all of this great technology, all of this great, you know, active technology that we've been building on the THC side? What if we use it on the hemp side.

And now you're starting to see like Mason bloom, which, you know, full disclosure, I advised them, they put out a hemp product about 18 months ago, and they're doing very, very well. And they are a low dose perfect to be

on a shelf. But they're still doing their THC stuff, they still do have their THC stuff in California, they're not abandoning that, they just understand that there's two different markets, there is that connoisseur market that, you know, prides itself in knowing how this has made the place where it came from. And then you have a general population that has never tried THC and is interested. And so it is up to us as an industry on the hemp side, to make sure that they're getting really good products, meaning that they're being tested.

They're not using like butane. And that has not been the case, I would say in the last three years, I've gone into a lot of hemp dispensaries here in Texas. And it's terrible, like, you know, I'm like, Oh my God, you can smell the butane, you can taste the alcohol, you know, like, it's gross. But that was because they didn't know they were they didn't know. And now we know. And so being able to take the knowledge that we've learned on the THC side and bring it to the hub, make sure and ensures that consumers have the best and most natural products.

Bruce Eckfeldt

Yeah. I'm kind of curious, like when you got into when you kind of had this epiphany and was like, Hey, we should really think about applying sip, like, are the kinds of surprises or challenges that you ran into, you know, getting into that space coming from THC side?

Christine De La Rosa

I think the biggest surprise for me was just how prevalent it was. And I'm going to tell you this really cool story. Um, so I was in Texas at the time, I traveled between California and Texas. And I got invited to a book signing for COURAGING cannabis, one of my employees, Fredricka easily has a post part of that anthology, and they were doing a book signing in San Antonio. And so I was like, Oh, I'm going to be in town that weekend. I'll come up to see it. And so I drove to San Antonio to one of like a really ritzy area of San Antonio. I parked in front of a mansion. I got into there.

And Bruce, when I tell you there were 200 Women in there, smoking, FDA vapes drinking, like infused beverages. And these were women ages 40 to 85, the oldest person I met, there was 85. And I remember sitting next to her as they were doing breakfast, and I said, You know what encouraged you I said, Have you always been a marijuana user says, Oh, no darlin with that big thick accent. Like, I'm not a cannabis user. Because like, I only do him and I was like, Oh, thank you. Like, that's the same thing. I said, Well, have you been? I go? Have you always been like, oh, no, she's like, I was a teacher. I was a teacher, honey, you can't do that. They test you.

It's like what the second I retired. I told my friend what you got. It was in this room of 200. women, women, from all ages, all cultures, women with hair up to Jesus. Women with their hair down like they come from hippies in one room, all smoking and drinking and tinkering, gummy chillin. I was like, oh, hell, this is the next wave of consumer. And that was the day that I changed my mind. I was like, literally on that day, my mind was changed. I was like, oh, there's a whole need here. And I immediately went to work on finding where we could produce products for people. And not only that the biggest issue, which we don't necessarily have on the THC regulated side, is how do we distribute across state lines? Where do I go for that, and I was just very lucky to have met a gentleman who I've known since 2018. We both presented on the RFP stage are both pitching, who has grown an amazing distribution company that has you know, distributes about \$900 million a year in both THC and hemp products. That's amazing. And I called him and I said, Can we do this? Can we come

together and just build this together? Because I don't do distribution, but every one of the brands that we bring in are going to need it. He's like we absolutely can. And so that's what we did.

Bruce Eckfeldt

That's amazing. Now that you're in this space, what are you noticing what have been some of the challenges? I mean, where are we into really, you know, this hemp world has been a little dicey since the farm bill like what's going on today in terms of him?

Christine De La Rosa

I think that the biggest thing is language, right? I think that a lot of Florida for a lot. But the people that I see they're just really like Pooh poohing. Hemp don't really understand what they're poopoo and it could be really helpful for them. I think the biggest thing is that there's a huge push in several states like Florida like Minnesota, to somehow regulate hemp outside of the Farm Bill, and you can't put the cat inside the bag again, because what you're doing is re criminalizing.

So if I say the biggest problem we have, and this is what I'm working on right now is putting together a consortium of people Both on the THC side and on the hemp side to be able to talk to our governments and say you don't understand how this works. And so you cannot actually start to regulate it until you talk to the scientists, because the scientists will tell you they don't care about, you know, MSOs they don't care about the cultivator. They care about the science. And the science is coming out saying, Yeah, this could be a really good thing. The science is like, this is actually the same thing. And one of the things that I there's a bio scientist named Steven fel pot, He's really amazing. And he came out one of our podcasts and he was like, We have to stop calling it intoxicating hemp because people have started to call it like there's him that doesn't intoxicate you, and then there's intoxicating hemp. But the truth of the matter is that hemp, cannabis, marijuana, whatever you want to call it is actually not toxic to the body. The reason alcohol is color intoxicating is actually toxic to your body. It has toxins, hemp and cannabis are not intoxicating. They do not have toxins, they might impair your judgment might be impairing, but it's not intoxicating. And so one of the things that he said very recently that I've found just really good.

He's like, we have to understand words first, and how we talk about things before we try to regulate things. Because if we're regulating intoxicating hemp, we're regulating the wrong thing. Because hemp is non intoxicating. No cannabis plant is intoxicating. And he's right. And so I think that that would be the biggest challenge is really training our governments and our regulators to understand what they're regulating, because the biggest problem we've had on the THC side, is that they regulated without understanding the plant. Yeah. And we have paid for it.

Bruce Eckfeldt

Exactly. Where does this go? I mean, so we've got, you know, the Farm Bill, we've got, you know, THC federally still illegal. We've got states passing these various, you know, ways of legalizing it or quasi legalizing on a state level? Like, how does this all play out for you? Well,

Christine De La Rosa

for me, how it plays out is that the DEA gets off its hands and just rescheduled CHC to give the THC side of our world some relief from to ad E. I am 100% For D scheduling. But I also understand that it's not going to be

scheduled as a government, there has to be a process, right, we have to reschedule it so that we can do research and we can do testing.

And we can confirm that we all know that it's not, you know, an addictive or terrible thing. And then it goes into just regulated or gets D scheduled and becomes a nutraceutical. So that's what I think is going to happen on that side. But I think it's going to take a long time the AAA just came out last week and said they were at odds with Biden's request for what why are you at odds with vines requests, it doesn't make any sense. But I can see that that's a longer road to hoe really, it's going to be forever. But on the hemp side, we have the FarmBot going to be redone. Like they're going to be re certifying it. But when they're going to recertify, who knows might be it really depends on what happens in the election, right? Because they can't even agree the only thing they can agree to as a tick tock ban can agree to nothing.

So you know, so I'm not really concerned on the hemp side, other than the fact that around the farm bill being recertified and something changed in the closed what's considered a loophole. I don't consider it a loophole. I think they were right the first time. But if that happens, like I said, I think there'll be a lot of lawsuits. There'll be like Supreme Court stuff going on. Because you really can't do that. So many people have invested so much money not only on the THC side, but also on the hemp side of the coin. So I think that it would be a thing. But as I know, as you know, the government does not move fast. I'm not too concerned about it. But I do think that we have to organize. I think that we have to lobby our local governments or state governments and then eventually the federal government to not re criminalize something that's already been decriminalized. Yeah, that just seems

Bruce Eckfeldt

that'd be a big step backwards. Yeah. As you get into this space, what else are you kind of seeing in terms of opportunities or kind of seeing in terms of how this world is going to develop from a consumer point of view or from a product point of view?

Christine De La Rosa

Well, let me tell you, Bruce, I saw my first hemp cannabis beverage on tick tock, they have a tick tock shop, they're selling it free and clear because it's hemp derived. And that's where we're gonna go. We're gonna go where people can, I mean, I'm a big tick tock, you know, I watch it all the time. I like to be up to date on what's the trends are, and I saw that almost dropped my phone. I almost dropped my phone because I was like, we haven't been able to direct sell to anyone ever. Not on Facebook marketplace, not on Tik Tok, not on Instagram.

This is a huge breakthrough for us. And so what I see happening is that we're going to see a lot of the hemp side brands, being able to go direct to consumer being able to just have, like our fulfillment location can get your order packet and ship it to that person, and very much an Amazon thing but for him, you know, I really see that being the thing that's coming up next because a lot of people like that convenience and we've never been able to offer that convenience not even our delivery services on the cannabis side. It's so riddled with regulation. That is cheaper? And it's also not easier. Yeah, so I see the hemp space becoming very much easier to get products to the people. Yeah.

Bruce Eckfeldt

I mean, do you think like, just a lot of people are just gonna start going ham because you can actually get products Yeah, have it delivered and things like that. And this current THC dispensary model will really be kind of more of the exclusive or the, you know, people that are really looking for the high potency and for the more of the experience.

Christine De La Rosa

Yeah, people looking for the high potency and the experience, right? Like I was thinking about this, when I think about like Las Vegas, you can go to Circus Circus. But why would you do that? If you want an experience, right. And then on top of that, you can go into a liquor store, because I don't know if you remember before you only could go into a liquor store, you can actually get liquor shipped to you until after 2020. Right? And so they didn't get do away with that, that you can still I can buy a margarita on my DoorDash app. I couldn't do that in 2019. Yeah. And so there is an ease of use to have things shipped to you. But if you want an experience, you're gonna go to the Bellagio, right, you're not going to go to Circus Circus. And so this is where I think dispensaries will sit as the Bellagio, those of the THC side.

But again, not every state is going to go full on legal, they might not go recreational unless it's rescheduled the schedule. And even if it's D scheduled and rescheduled, they still might not allow it like 60% of all spaces in California don't have access to cannabis, you've got to drive more than 60 miles. So I think that they'll always be a need for dispensaries. I think dispensaries are going to do really, really well continue to do really, really well. But I think that the larger group of people who are not necessarily needing 40% vape pens, you know, they're gonna go to their local grocery store, they're going to go online, they're going to go to their Amazon. I don't think Amazon's quite ready for it yet. But I know that that's where it will end up. Yeah. To get their products, especially people that are using it. Like one of the largest segments that we see an age group 35 to 55 is the sleep me the sleep gummy is the thing like that's a huge market. And I don't know of a lot of people that are wanting to go drive 60 miles to a dispensary to go to sleep gummy. Like they really just want to get online.

Bruce Eckfeldt

Yeah, absolutely. I want to add subscription. I just wanted to Yeah, exactly.

Christine De La Rosa

That's exactly. Exactly right. You're

Bruce Eckfeldt

seeing there's been a pleasure if people want to find out more about what you're doing. And the company's products, what's the best way to get all that information? They

Christine De La Rosa

can always find us at the People's ecosystem.com And then the people's ecosystem on all socials.

Bruce Eckfeldt

Great. I'll make sure all the links in the handles and everything are on the show notes so people can get that, Christina it's been a pleasure. Thank you so much for taking the time today.

Christine De La Rosa

Thanks, Bruce.

About Eckfeldt & Associates

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