

The sophistication of canna culture - Q&A with KushKush founder Jo Hope

 By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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After seeing a gap in the South African market for elegantly-marketed and packaged cannabis-related products, Joanne Hope, a fashion and lifestyle entrepreneur, created KushKush - a female-centric cannabis-centred retail and content platform.

Launched in July this year, KushKush aims to offer an informative non-judgemental space for recreational and medicinal users to learn more about canna culture and shop from a carefully-curated collection of cannabis products primarily targeted for women.

We chat to founder Joanne Hope for more insights into the platform as well as the rapidly growing cannabis and CBD oil market.



Joanne Hope

■ ***Can you give us some insights into the contributing factors that inspired KushKush?***

My first experience purchasing cannabis-related products was somewhat alienating: my boyfriend was looking for a particular vaporiser in a local head shop (a shop that sells pothead paraphernalia) and as I stood waiting for him, I felt really uncomfortable.

I didn't see myself reflected in that environment at all – which I was sure would be the same sentiment if I thought about my friends or customers I had built retail concepts around previously.

We created KushKush for vibrant, successful women from all arenas of life – from high-powered corporates and passionate feminists to stay-at-home moms and even beloved grannies. All looking to be part of the green revolution.



Introducing KushKush, SA's new female-centric cannabis platform

22 Oct 2019



What has the response been like since you launched in July?

We've had a wonderful response so far in terms of our customers. Initially, people would comment on our branding, ask questions about the brands we carry but now they are starting to ask more and more about cannabis itself and how it could be incorporated into their day to day lives.

What has been especially refreshing has been the response from the brands and suppliers that we work with. Most of the founders are women and they have been very generous with their time when we've asked for advice or insight into the industry from their perspective.

I've even had a customer support agent (again, women) at Shopify taking a moment to hear more about the business and what we're up to – which is definitely not my usual experience and is quite refreshing actually.

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This little beauty is both a pipe and an incense holder. Just imagine the bliss, scooping your flower into the receptacle and lighting up. 100% Porcelain.

#cannabiscommunity

A post shared by [KushKush \(@kushkushonline\)](#) on Aug 17, 2019 at 12:09am PDT

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❏ **Why the decision to market yourself as a female-centric platform?**

We want to be authentic in our journey and we are most comfortable speaking from our perspective, as women. While it is female-focused, it doesn't mean that men aren't welcome!

It simply means that we primarily take women's perspective into account when exploring topics to discuss or share, products or events.

We absolutely have products that are for men on the website as well (after all what are our gals going to buy for their significant cannabis-loving other if we don't?) and have many male customers who are very supportive.

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Queen Elizabeth I was onto something... The feisty queen fined landowners who *didn't* grow cannabis. Oh, and did we mention she kept flower at the palace for parties, while also praising its medicinal qualities? Can we get a 💎💎 for this woman in weed? #womeninweed

A post shared by [KushKush \(@kushkushonline\)](#) on Oct 15, 2019 at 9:08pm PDT

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❏ **What are some of the stigmas you see working in the cannabis industry and how do you hope to see these**

shifting over the coming years?

We did a survey while launching the business to gauge sentiment, interests and experience with cannabis and found that 60% of respondents felt there was a negative stigma attached to being a cannabis consumer.

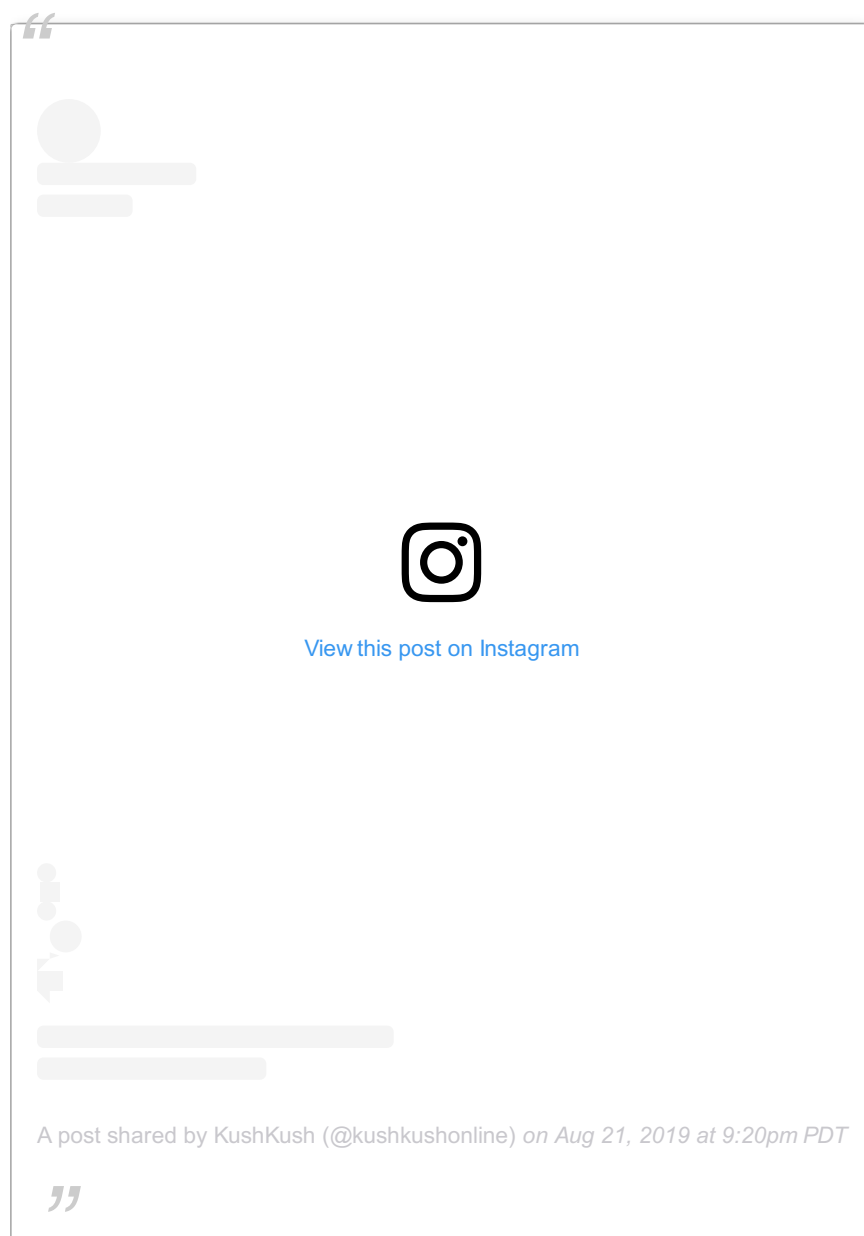
When asked why they did not consume cannabis openly, the top five reasons cited were:

- Legal concerns
- Didn't want usage to define them
- Being labelled a stoner
- Judgement from family
- Didn't want their children knowing

We hope to play a role by normalising this often stigmatised industry, offering a retail experience and judgement-free space for the higher-end female cannabis consumer, whether she's a regular recreational smoker, the medical user or even just canna-curious to learn, enjoy and be part of a like-minded community.

Our survey is ongoing so if readers would like to contribute, they can do so [here](#).

All perspectives are welcome.



A post shared by KushKush (@kushkushonline) on Aug 21, 2019 at 9:20pm PDT

■ You have a postgraduate diploma in sustainable business through the University of Cambridge, can you share some of KushKush's sustainable business practices?

In these very early stages, the focus has been on selecting brands that have a transparent supply chain and use sustainable materials where possible.

We are currently investigating premium sustainable packaging solutions – which is quite a task, especially if you don't want to import. There are interesting mushroom-based solutions and a few closer to home – which is made from mielies believe it or not.

Retail/e-commerce is inherently not a very sustainable industry because of the logistics of imports/deliveries but we're working on how to offset the impact. We'll be able to share more on this in 2020.

Then lastly, we have a role to play in sharing more information about hemp as a fibre and how it can be used in fashion and textiles. It uses substantially less water to grow than the likes of cotton. We will be featuring founders, brands, factories and technology on kushkushonline.com that highlight the inroads being made in this industry.


We live by the motto "You don't need to compromise aesthetics for ethics", so look forward to bringing elegant solutions to our community.


📌 **What are some of the pros and cons of working in such an emerging market?**

Pros include: Emerging markets have a lot of opportunity for entrepreneurs and less competition if you get in early. We have a lot of talent, passion and skill in this country so if you find the right people, you can harness a lot of momentum as a new brand.


Cons include: Access to funding is a challenge for most entrepreneurs I speak to. Especially if you are a startup. Another challenge is access to innovative supply chain solutions, raw materials and production. Our ability to manufacture high-end products locally are limited. Not impossible but brands in developed markets like the US, Canada and Europe have access to much more in terms of product development.

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Beautiful and functional? We'll take one in every colour, please. This odour-proof bag looks like a fashion-savvy clutch but the double Velcro seal and odour-absorbing activated carbon lining means it will cleverly conceal your cannabis essentials. Shop the link in bio. #kushkushcommunity #clevercannabis #accessoriseyourlife

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■ **What advice would you give to fellow entrepreneurs wanting to succeed in the canna market?**

Be curious and do your research. The possibilities are endless when considering how you could apply your particular skillset within the cannabis industry.

I have found the most amazing businesses that range from specialist event planning, specialist matchmaking service for the canna community (yes, it's a thing!), supply chain solutions for dispensaries, packaging, product development, media platforms – the list goes on.

I found two particular podcasts to be really interesting from a business perspective:

[The Dopist](#) | [Maria & Jane](#)

■ **What would you say are the biggest canna trends currently?**

I've listed below the top global three trends revealed in the 2019 Cannabis Trends Report, conducted by Axiswire.

1. **The sophistication of cannabis brands:** Consumers are becoming more sophisticated; they know what they want and they don't mind paying a little bit extra to get it. Simply using cannabis is not enough, consumers want a cannabis product that speaks to their identity and lifestyle. People that appreciate the finer things in life want luxury cannabis products, people that enjoy outdoors want cannabis products that fit within their active lifestyle, and so on.
2. **CBD goes global:** This is the year of CBD. Over the last few years, cannabidiol (CBD) has been slowly gaining in popularity, but as soon as Congress passed the 2018 Farm Bill in the US late last year, the flood gates opened. Investors and entrepreneurs alike have been scrambling to get a piece of the CBD market, creating a flurry of market activity. We have seen the same increase in activity around CBD in South Africa when the rules surrounding CBD were relaxed earlier this year (limited for a year only and then they'll reassess the legalities).
3. **Manufacturing infrastructures are here:** As cannabis consumers become more sophisticated, so too are the products that they use. Cannabis is no longer just about the flower; there's infused food and beverages, vape cartridges and pens, ointments, pre-rolls and much more. Naturally, this has led to a greater need for cannabis manufacturing, and licensed operators have been more than happy to fill that need in countries where it is completely legal to do so. In South Africa, we do not benefit from that just yet but it shows how this industry can expand in South Africa if legislation allows.

■ **What is your biggest seller and what is your favourite cannabis-related product?**

Our biggest seller to date is the wellness range by Kiskanu. They do CBD beauty and wellness products which include CBD infused face oil, skin rub and intimacy oil (the intimacy oil definitely attracts the most interest).



Kiskanu CBD Oil

Kiskanu is a family-owned and operated business with over 20 years of experience in the cannabis industry. This knowledge is reflected in the quality and consistency of their hand-crafted, small-batch beauty and wellness products. They use premium organic whole-plant extracts in a base of cold-pressed, virgin, organic oils and are committed to supporting organic farming methods, sustainable practices, organic ingredients and offer safe, lab-tested products.

It's really difficult to choose a personal favourite (it's like choosing your favourite child) but if I had to single out one item, it would have to be the Charlotte pipe from Laundry Day. Laundry Day is a modern take on 1970s design. This forward-thinking brand aims to offer sophisticated and simultaneously playful smoking alternatives. It is a functional, yet really beautiful piece and has the most exquisite packaging.



Laundry Day Charlotte pipe



■ ***Are there plans to create events/meet-ups or open physical stores?***

Yes, we will be hosting private events in major cities and partnering with existing stores to create shop-in-shop experiences. We are currently at the Africa Your Time is Now store in Rosebank, Johannesburg (until mid-December) and we're starting our private event series in Cape Town. To make sure you get an invite to our next one, sign up to our newsletter at kushkushonline.com.

■ ***Any exciting projects in the works?***

Yes, there is a lot planned for 2020 and beyond, some of which includes plans to further build our community through shared experiences, focusing on our sustainability and treading more lightly on the earth and how we can further support women in the local cannabis industry.

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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