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Ready, set, grow: How to jump start and future-proof your cultivation company

Horticulture lighting expert Jörg Meyer-Brenken, Fluence EMEA's Lead Account Manager for Cannabis, is candid about European market progress. "Everything is moving much slower than we expected when we started," he says. Yet, this lighting engineer "by education and by heart" advises cultivators not to be complacent.

With over 80 EMEA cannabis customers spanning over a dozen of countries, he expects swift market transformation. Now is the time for growers to find knowledgeable partners with proven success so they can hit the ground running and win.

Meyer-Brenken's teammate Franz-Josef Sima, who joined Fluence last year, draws on more than a decade of cannabis cultivation and consulting experience as Fluence EMEA's Horticulture Service Specialist (HSS) for Cannabis. He agrees that diverse, successful project experience establishes a competitive edge.

"You will be able to learn from pioneers and get the best extraction of knowledge from experienced people," Sima explains. "Growers must adapt quickly and understand the challenges of compliance and consistent production cycles, not to mention large-scale related issues that come along."

Cultivators positioned for growth will reap rewards in faster times to market and improved quality, consistency, and yields — which translate to faster return on investment (ROI) and reduced entrepreneurial risk. Now is the time to ask: Why take the chance on something less?

Reassess your market approach

Slow-moving markets provided operators with time to fail and regroup. As legalization breakthroughs happen, that luxury will disappear. Pressure to shorten learning curves and get to market faster and better will force new approaches from established growers and newcomers.

"Many operators thought they could copy-paste growing experience from mastering cucumbers, peppers, herbs and tomatoes, but cannabis is another plant, so that's a mistake," Meyer-Brenken says. "Also, trying to scale underground growing practices won't do the trick."

"We've seen that first-movers can come away for a limited time with less quality and less predictability, but in the end, I'm 100% sure that uniform year-round production and stable supply fulfilling very narrow specifications on the product will be key," he says. "This will be especially true for medical cannabis facilities but we will see it resonate across the whole market."

Tight operating expense (OpEx) control from the start and a Total Cost of Ownership investment perspective are critical, as proven in California, where HPS (high-pressure sodium) growers struggled with their business case when sales prices fell and energy costs rose.

Sima adds that transitioning gray or black market growers often stumble with criteria and compliance: "Usually they rely on people from the cannabis space, where only a few know how to bring all the parts together: pharmaceutical, cultivation, facility designs, and — most importantly — repeatedly produce consistent, quality cannabis that stays within requirements."

Cultivators can avoid mistakes and profit from lessons already learned. "How can people get faster return on investment? Get knowledgeable persons on deck," Sima says.

Profit from experience and research

With foreign companies already in the European market, teams with multiple-market experience deliver major benefits. Fluence is the market leader for LED lighting solutions in the U.S., as well as key EMEA markets, including Israel, Switzerland, South Africa and Portugal. Half of Portugal's licensed producers trust in Fluence solutions and services. In Israel, Fluence market share approaches 85%.

While the Fluence EMEA team speaks 17 languages, they also partner with regional companies that share their vision and mission to be their feet on the ground in areas like the Middle East and Africa. Customers enjoy quick response times, local warehousing, and easily connect with people in their time zone who speak the local language and understand local rules, regulations and culture.

Sima says Fluence is also part of several consortiums, collaborating with leading brands and researchers, with internal Fluence scientists pioneering global cannabis research. From specialists like Sima to account managers and technical teams, indoor and greenhouse cultivators get comprehensive support from seed, clone or tissue culture to flower and post-harvest.

Fluence research is driving improved financials and changing how cultivators grow. With high light intensity and various light spectrum regimes, Meyer-Brenken says operators can increase production without expanding canopy space: "So if you're in Switzerland, where property is crazy expensive, you just grow more per cubic meter instead of having to add another square meter."

Capitalize on comprehensive expertise

Meyer-Brenken explains success takes more than buying LEDs: "We're selling light solutions and services. You have to know how to design the whole thing, then how to use it. Not only the lights but also everything around the grow."

While good growers will eventually find their way, he says it may take them a year or more. "We have seen that, with our help, they can make a jump start. They hit the ground running in half the time, and this is just pure money if you have a sellable batch."

The Fluence team goes into a grow to understand and help with all the customer's needs. This involves lighting, but also standard operating procedures (SOPs) and expert insights into inter-related growing environment conditions crucial to success. That doesn't stop with the sale.

In the HSS, head growers and COOs find a sounding board and ally to run challenges by Fluence experts and share knowledge and expertise through training, workshops and one-on-one. Being part of Signify, a multinational company with more than a century in business, strengthens confidence in Fluence for investors and C-level executives.

Sima explains that by capitalizing on deep, detailed knowledge and comprehensive experience in facility design, construction, cultivation and all facets of the cannabis industry, including EUGMP compliance, customers can get it right from the start.

Leverage industry innovation

Fluence is passionate about sharing knowledge and advancing the cannabis industry. R&D breakthroughs get absorbed by the team, deployed to customers and drive internal innovation in products and techniques. Then the knowledge is published for everyone's use.

"That goes back to the spirit of Fluence. We're so grateful to be able to work in this industry and help patients and users get good and safe product. This is the whole idea, this spirit that we really want to help the industry," Meyer-Brenken says. "We believe this whole industry is still in its infancy and if we don't share, we will block the development and we will not be as fast as we could be if we work all together. We've tried to lead here by example. So what we know, we share."

Sima adds that cannabis cultivation procedures are crystalizing into a handful of best practices representing the fastest, most efficient, most successful path. "If you don't choose that, you're already below the quality you can reach. Best practices for quality and consistency are always the core areas of focus for Fluence," he says.

Whether it's research, new product development, or next-generation innovations, Fluence is always working on the next thing. "Through our open innovation process, we can ensure collectively to our partners and customers that we're already at work on the next important innovation benefitting premium cannabis cultivation," Meyer-Brenken says.

Whether you're an established cultivator or new to the market, you can jump start and future-proof your operation with proven, science-led expertise. As the European market moves forward, will your company be one that leads?

