



Top Shelf Botanicals meticulously follows Industry Best Practices, uses only the Highest Quality Nutrients, and utilizes State of the Art Techniques for all Cultivation and Manufacturing



Dr. Wes Stucki
Chief Executive Officer



Susan Kessler
Chief Financial Officer

Top Shelf Botanicals
www.topshelfbotanicals.com

Contact:
Susan Kessler
270-996-7502
susan@topshelfbotanicals.com

Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Dr. Stucki, what is the vision behind Top Shelf Botanicals. Why do you call yourselves the beneficial alternative?

Dr. Stucki: The vision is to become a leader in cultivation, manufacturing and delivery of alternative medicine to patients who are in need of an alternative to traditional medicine. Our goal is to serve the medicinal cannabis industry by providing patients with access to every kind of remedy they might need to treat their condition. For this reason, we do not limit ourselves to producing only flower; we manufacture many products that do not involve smoking. Our vision also includes continually looking for ways to reduce our carbon footprint and keep our operations environmentally friendly.

CEOCFO: When did you recognize the benefit? You have probably always seen the need.

Dr. Stucki: It was early in 2017 when a loved one of mine experienced tremendous results with CBD oil. She had been suffering with rheumatoid arthritis for about fifteen years and was taking an opioid, a steroid, and a chemo drug daily just to survive. Her fingers were turned in and she was in a lot of pain. I had someone tell me that CBD oil could help with her rheumatoid arthritis. With my background in medicine it sounded to me like snake oil and I was pretty skeptical at first; however, out of desperation, I purchased a bottle for her. She put a drop under her tongue, and she has not needed her prescription medication since. That was 2 ½ years ago. Her fingers have uncurled, her blood markings are normal, and her rheumatologist said it was the first time in thirty-five years of practice that he had ever seen a reversal of rheumatoid arthritis like that.

As you can imagine, I got very interested in the CBD side of cannabis and tried to acquire the company that manufactured the CBD oil she was taking. Unfortunately, I was unable to complete a deal. About that same time, a cousin of mine called to inform me he had some friends in the cannabis industry in Montana who needed funding to expand. Montana had recently implemented new medicinal cannabis laws after being shut down for a couple of years. I flew out there to meet with these friends who I found had a lot of experience and were very skilled in the industry but were lacking funding. That was the beginning. I decided I would fund them. Thinking it would only cost a couple hundred thousand dollars, I have now invested over two million dollars in the Montana market.

CEOCFO: What is different about Top Shelf Botanicals products?

Dr. Stucki: Let me start with what is different about our company. First, I build companies, this is something I have been doing my entire adult life. When I build companies, I start by bringing in quality people. I reached out and found an MBA, our CFO Susan Kessler. I found the person I thought was one of the top manufacturers in the country. I also reached out to see if I could find the best growers in the Country. I believe I have one of the top cultivation experts and manufactures in the industry! Having the proper team in place, allows us to produce Top Shelf products while managing day to day operations efficiently. Our products really are top shelf. I would put them against any other products in the world. We have the best edibles, the best concentrates, and we have very good flower. Therefore, we have the full line of Top Shelf products available for all medicinal needs.

Second, Top Shelf products are all organically grown, and we insist on putting out only safe and clean products. All our products go through stringent third-party testing and our products include these testing results on their labels. When patients purchase our products, they can have confidence they are buying safe and quality Cannabis products in whatever form they choose to consume.

“Our goal is to serve the medicinal cannabis industry by providing patients with access to every kind of remedy they might need to treat their condition.”- Dr. Wes Stucki

CEOCFO: Are buyers becoming more discerning? Are they looking for quality? Do they understand they should be?

Dr. Stucki: Yes. Much of this has to do with patient education. Oftentimes people think cannabis buyers are younger kids who are buying it to get high. In my experience, this is a misconception. Many of our patients are older, with sixty percent being male and forty percent female. Our average patient is a 54-year-old male, and not a bunch of young kids coming in to get high. Our patients are buying products for medicinal reasons. We consult with each of our patients. We offer one on one consultations with them, talking about what they are taking and how it is affecting them and making sure they are taking the appropriate dose. We have them keep a journal and discuss with them what is working and what is not. We help them understand the endocannabinoid system to maintain bodily homeostasis—biological harmony in response to changes in the environment and how that helps them get well or relieve their pain.

We have teamed up with a Dr. Regina Nelson, who is one of the world’s leading authorities on cannabis treatment for patients. Together we are implementing outreach programs and seminars for patients as well as members of the community who do not understand cannabis benefits. We are also utilizing Dr. Nelson to certify our “budtenders”, who we call, “Cannicians”, which is a combination of the words, cannabis and technician. Therefore, we educate our “budtenders,” we educate our patients, and we educate the community at large on the benefits of cannabis.

CEOCFO: You are in Montana and Oklahoma today and you are going into Missouri. Would you tell us where you why these locations?

Dr. Stucki: Top shelf has the platform, the experience, the management team and the funding to fully execute our business plan in Montana, Oklahoma, and Missouri. We have chosen these markets as we believe in Medicinal Cannabis and these markets have close geographic proximity to family and friends and are well poised for vertical integrated models.

We have a 32,750 sq. ft. facility in Conway, Missouri where we plan to do our cultivating and manufacturing. Conway is north of Springfield and about fifteen miles south of Lebanon, Missouri, where I graduated high school and still have a home. We also have a lot of family members who live there, so naturally, we wanted to bring this back to our home community. We’ve also applied for dispensary licenses in St. Joseph, Springfield, Mobley, Lebanon, and Joplin. We did not go after primary large cities such as Kansas City and St Louis, but rather the secondary and tertiary markets. We prefer an impact in smaller communities, helping with the employment and socio-economic side of those communities.

CEOCFO: *What is the challenge in providing education?*

Dr. Stucki: Our greatest challenge is getting patients, or the population at large, to fully understand the medicinal benefits of cannabis. Education is paramount. An additional challenge is to be sustainable while reducing our carbon footprint. We are continuously looking for ways and best practices to do this.

CEOCFO: *How do you get over the reluctance of some people that just view it as pot from way back when?*

Dr. Stucki: Ultimately, it is education. Whether we do it through community outreach or we do it through marketing or advertising, the population, as a whole, needs better educating on the medicinal affects and benefits of cannabis.

Ms. Kessler: We also strive daily to stop the negative stigma of cannabis by providing a professional experience to all our patients. Our dispensaries are very clean and professional, staffed with highly trained professional cannicians, and stocked with only Top Shelf products which surpass stringent third-party testing. We meticulously follow industry best practices, use only the highest quality nutrients, and utilize state of the art techniques for all cultivation and manufacturing, ensuring Top Shelf products. We want all our patients, in all walks of life, the soccer moms, the businessmen, and the grandmothers, to feel comfortable and welcomed in our dispensaries.

CEOCFO: *Do you see the medical community, at least, being more open minded if not onboard or is there still a lot of resistance?*

Dr. Stucki: There is still a lot of resistance out there, but I have seen a huge swing just in the last two years. Since I have been working with cannabis, my colleagues and I are seeing more and more benefits and positive results from patients using cannabis products. We are seeing patient after patient who are having, what we refer to as, miraculous cures from cannabis. What many don't realize is that cannabinoids were in many medicines prior to its prohibition, and at some point, they got pushed into a category and demonized, for lack of a better word. However, I have seen a big swing in the acceptance now, especially with physicians. We have a lot of physicians who refer patients to us. Even oncology clinics have started to understand the benefits of cannabis and how it helps their cancer patients; therefore, many oncologists are now referring their patients for cannabis.

CEOCFO: *I know that in June that you were one of a few people to attend a pro master cannabis course. What did you learn that you did not know up until then?*

Dr. Stucki: The Netherlands are known to be one of the top horticulture places in the world and I was very fortunate to have been invited to attend The Pro Cannabis Master Course there in June of this year. Our group consisted of eleven of the top cultivators in the world, a horticulture supply person who is very active in South Africa Cannabis dealings, two scientists, and myself. Even though I was more of a businessperson, I was very familiar with all aspects of being vertically integrated and understood not just cultivation, but transporting, dispensing, and the manufacturing side of the business, as well as how they all fit together in a vertically integrated model. Top shelves master grower/cultivation expert, who I consider one of the best in the world, also attended this pro-master cannabis course.

I have much respect for this entire group, and we continue to collaborate, often daily. These friends and contacts are invaluable and may in the end be the best thing that came out of the course. Typically, in the Cannabis industry operators don't collaborate. They keep their knowledge to themselves. What a joy it was to see this group openly sharing and continuing to do so.

Over more than two weeks we attended seminars and discussions, visited many of the top horticulture facilities, cultivations, and manufacturers of some of the most technologically advanced equipment. We also visited with researchers and professors at Wageningen University, which is one of the top horticulture universities and research centers in the world. They were new to cannabis in their research and planning stages. They benefited from the interaction with our group. We saw and learned the newest technology in automation. We saw the technology at work and visited many greenhouses, some of over 200,000+ sq. ft. utilizing this technology. They used drones to scout for bugs, state of the art technology to regulate climate, and water and nutrient feeding systems. Since some of this was new to us, we had never envisioned using it. However, our Missouri facility will be a state-of-the-art facility, utilizing much of what we learned for climate control and automation. We are also finishing a 16,000 sq. ft. cultivation facility in Montana, which will be the newest of our three current Montana cultivation facilities. We are implementing some of the technology we gleaned from The Netherlands in that facility as well. All of this coupled together enables us to provide quality Top Shelf medicine to our patients.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about how the low income assistance program is working in Montana? Will it be the same concept for Missouri?*

Dr. Stucki: It will be similar. We will work with patients who cannot afford CBD or Cannabis medicine; we certainly don't want finances to be the reason they cannot obtain the medicine they need. Our patients will be asked to fill out a financial hardship affidavit to show they cannot afford our product and based on this, we work directly with them, helping them obtain the medicine they need. Not only do we work with low income, we also work with veterans and students. Many of our veterans have post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) and desperately need our medicine. We appreciate their service and offer them a discount, making our product more affordable to them. We want to make our product affordable to all of those who cannot afford it. By producing on such a large scale, as we do, we are able to lower our cost of goods sold, so we can afford to give discounts to those that truly need it.

CEOCFO: *What products get the most attention today? What products do people overlook that might really be beneficial for them?*

Dr. Stucki: Patients oftentimes are not familiar with some of the manufactured products that are available such as concentrates, shatter, waxes, and dabs. Because they are concentrated, patients can use much less of a dose of those particular products than they would if they were smoking flower. We also sell many boutique style edibles which our patients enjoy. Typically, when patients are educated, they will migrate off flower and move to more concentrates or edibles to get their THC and CBD.

CEOCFO: *Are you funded for your growth? Are you seeking partnerships or investment as you move forward?*

Dr. Stucki: So far I have primarily funded all operations in Montana, Oklahoma, and Missouri. I brought on a friend/partner for our Missouri expansion and we have set aside five million dollars to fully execute our business plan there. We have access to an additional ten million dollars if needed. Although we have been funding our expansion ourselves, we will always be on the lookout for strategic business partners or the right investors who can share our vision and grow with us.

CEOCFO: *What surprised you as Top Shelf Botanicals has grown and evolved to where you are today?*

Dr. Stucki: My biggest surprise in Montana was the vertical integration structure. This structure requires us to cultivate, manufacture, and dispense all products for our patients. When a patient signs up for a medical card with the state, they have to choose a provider and are then tethered to that provider. We must be everything to everybody and be the best at all aspects from seed to sell. We cannot cultivate, manufacture, or sell wholesale to other dispensaries or patients. Everything stays in house. There is no third-party buying or selling allowed in the state of Montana. Of course, that has some benefits as well as drawbacks.

During this last legislative session, the state voted to untether patients, allowing them to shop at any dispensary. They are currently writing software to allow this to happen and it should go into effect within the next few months; however, the mandated effective date is July 2020. Although patients will be able to go into any dispensary to purchase product, we will still not be allowed to participate in any third-party buying or selling of product, including selling wholesale. We will still have to dispense in our own dispensaries, and we will still have to grow and manufacture our own products. This requires us to have cultivation facilities, a manufacturing lab, a commercial kitchen, and all the dispensaries, making it very expensive and very difficult for start-up companies to enter this market. On the bright side, it gave me a full, broad education of the cannabis industry and how it works. Therefore, in Missouri, we already have the knowledge and experience needed to be vertically integrated, as well as being able to distribute and sale our products wholesale. We have submitted licenses to cultivate, manufacture, and to dispense there. In Oklahoma, we are just cultivating and manufacturing product and selling wholesale to other dispensaries. We are not currently dispensing there, although we are exploring this option. We also have exclusives with the well-known Gorilla Glue (GG) Strains. In Montana, we are the only licensed cultivators of the GG Strains in the state, in Oklahoma we are one of only two growers of the GG Strains, and in Missouri we will be one of a few allowed to grow those strains.

CEOCFO: *Why is Top Shelf Botanicals the real thing?*

Dr. Stucki: We have the platform, the financing, and an experienced management team to fully execute our business model. My years of experience building companies and experience in the public world as Chairman and CEO of a Nasdaq company and involvement in many mergers and acquisitions along with our teams great passion for what we are doing will lead us to continued success.