

CHAMPS SHOW MAGAZINE

ISSUE 84 - AUGUST 2026

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the INDUSTR



NEXT SHOW:

Las Vegas Convention Center
August 26-28th

INSIDE:

A Community Homecoming
in Chicago Pg. 48

COVER STORY:

CHAMPS Las Vegas
August Details Pg. 13

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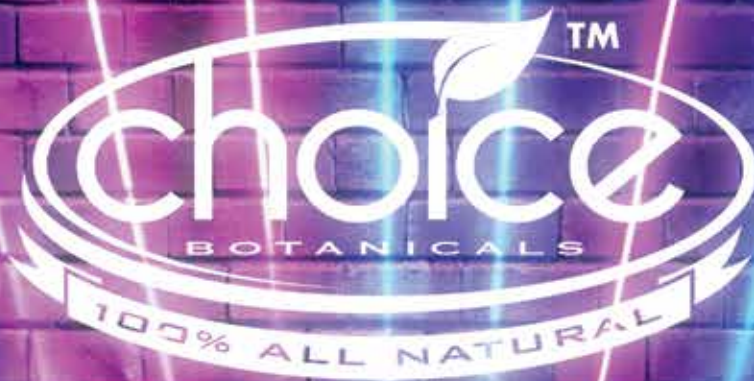
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By CHAMPS Magazine Staff

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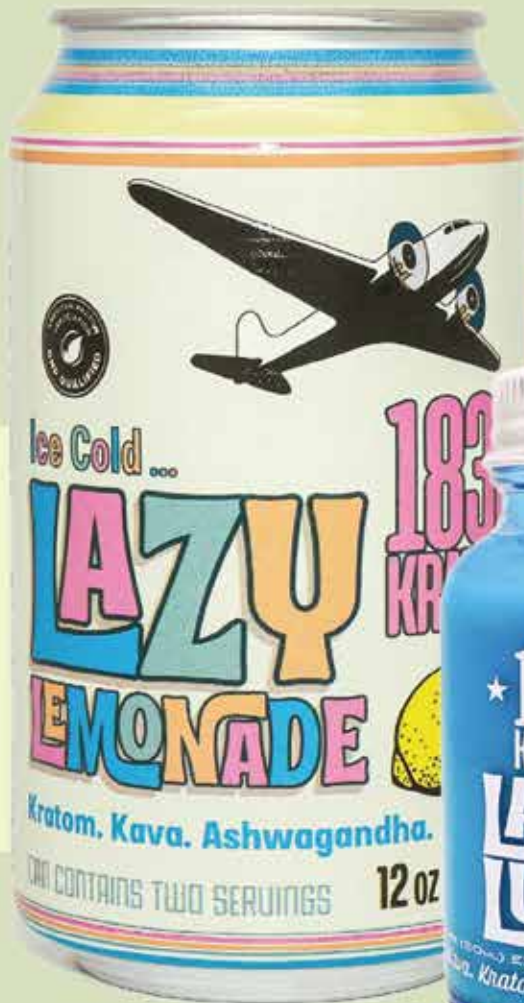
Making Your Store a Cultural Anchor in Retail

By The Editors

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CHAMPS SHOW MAGAZINE

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STREET
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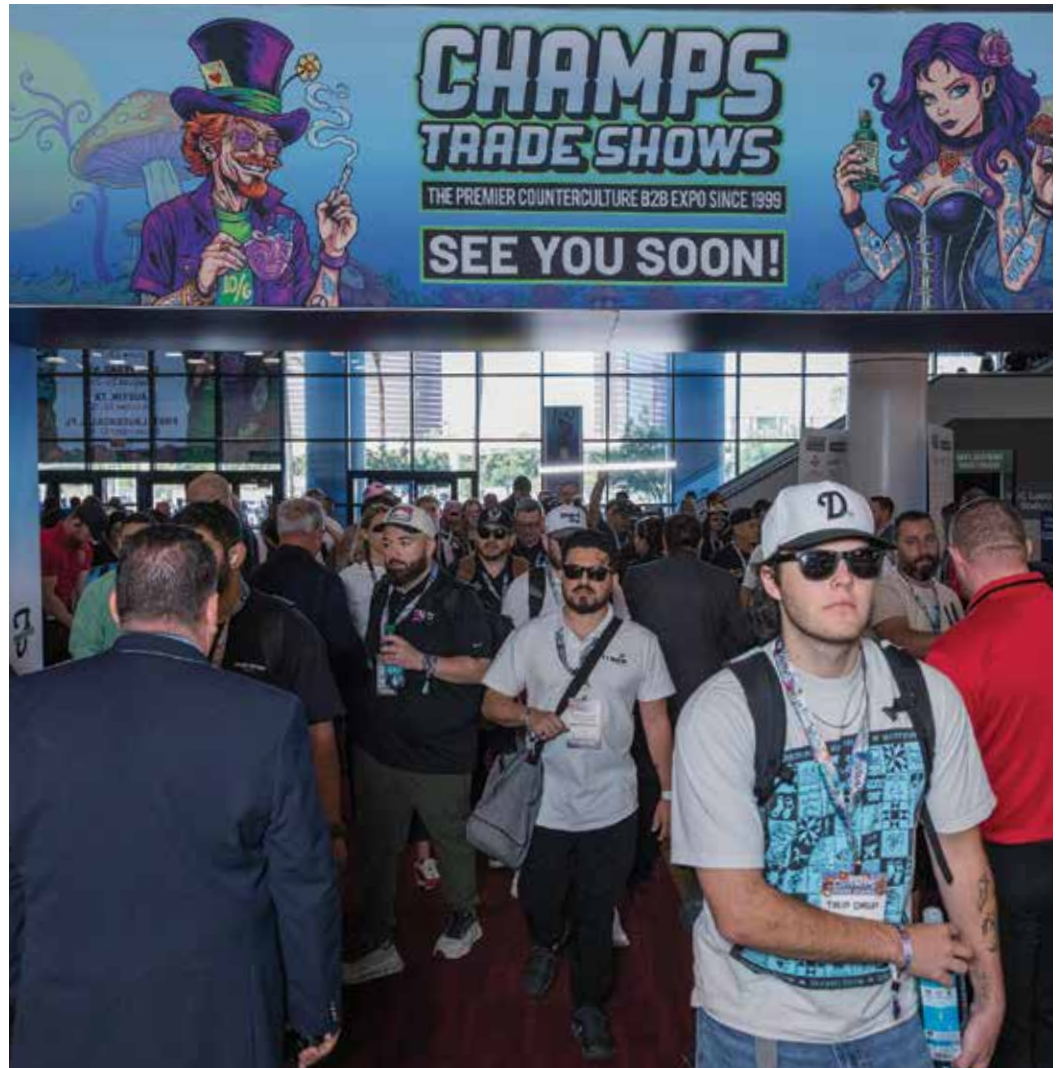
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CHAMPS LAS VEGAS AUGUST DETAILS: INSIDE THE AUGUST SHOW'S NEW SAMPLING EVENT AND SUMMER MASTERS GLASS GAMES

By Kevin Dankman

The modern retail landscape isn't just about buying inventory – it's about experiencing the brands shaping the culture. For decades, CHAMPS Trade Show has secured its reputation as the industry's ultimate proving ground by constantly introducing new concepts that others scramble to follow. As the industry sets its sights on Las Vegas this August 26-29, CHAMPS is leaning heavily into experiential B2B by launching an unprecedented off-site networking format and hosting the definitive arena for functional glass art. Here is your first look inside what makes the August show a non-negotiable stop for serious buyers and brands.

Continues On Page 20



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CHAMPS LAS VEGAS AUGUST DETAILS: INSIDE THE AUGUST SHOW'S NEW SAMPLING EVENT AND SUMMER MASTERS GLASS GAMES

The Industry's Newest After-Hours Experience: The Sampling Event at The INDUSTRIAL

Taking over **The INDUSTRIAL Event Space** — a premier, high-production venue located just off the Las Vegas Strip—the new Sampling Event is designed to keep the momentum going well after the show floor closes on **Day 2**.

Running from **6:30 PM to Midnight**, this massive expansion runs significantly longer than the May Show event. The INDUSTRIAL's flexible indoor/outdoor layout makes it the perfect canvas for the ultimate industry after-party, giving attendees and vendors a dedicated space to connect, unwind, and sample the latest market offerings in a dynamic environment.



Event Highlights Include:

- **Seamless Access:** Complimentary shuttle buses running continuously to and from the event.
- **Vibe & Atmosphere:** A live DJ utilizing the venue's professional sound and lighting to set the tone for the night.
- **Food & Drink:** A curated lineup of local food trucks parked on-site, alongside free water stations to keep everyone hydrated.
- **Consumption Spaces:** A sprawling outdoor smoking lounge built for networking and relaxation under the Vegas sky.
- **Brand Engagement:** Exclusive free samples from top industry innovators.

Continues On Page 38



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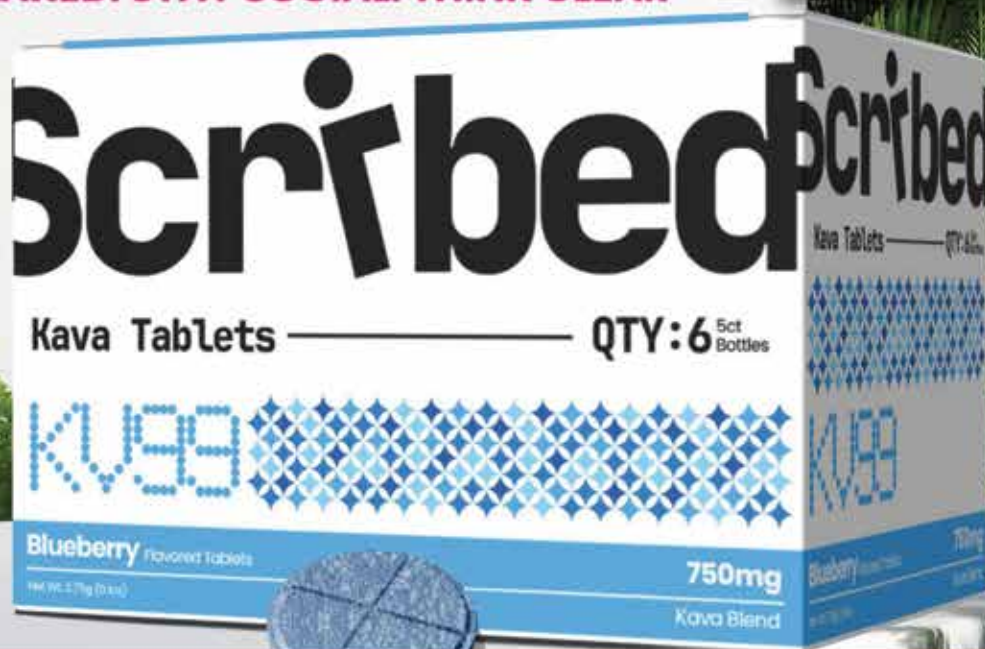
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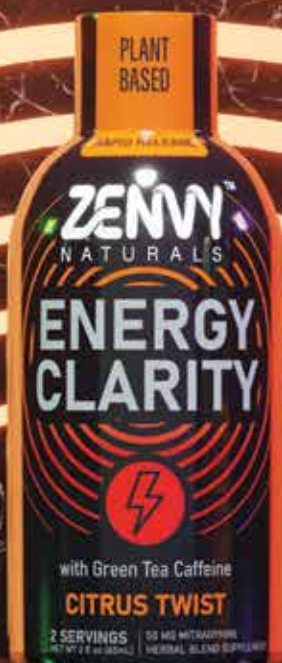
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Hemp-infused drinks are one of the fastest-growing categories on the market right now. From local breweries to massive brands, the competition is stiff — so stiff that racking up five awards for one company is a massive feat. But the folks at Looper have done exactly that, bringing us a lineup of five great-tasting beverages.

Each can packs a solid 50mg of hemp-derived Delta-9 THC, so you are definitely getting your money's worth, and it stays completely within the 0.3 percent THC per package rule.

Down here in Florida, the beaches can stay pretty packed, and we constantly have out-of-town friends rolling in who want a proper beach day. This past weekend was exactly that kind of weekend. I threw one of each Looper flavor into the cooler, put it on ice, and headed out to the secret, quiet place on the sand to relax with a Looper and put my toes in the sand.

After debating the flavor mix, we decided a blind grab from the cooler was the only fair way to go. I ended up pulling the Pineapple! But, since I was officially on review duty, I had to sample the rest. I broke out my trusty 1-ounce shot glass and took a sip of every flavor before polishing off my own can.

Every single one was incredibly refreshing, with a taste very reminiscent of your favorite classic sodas. While the Pineapple hit the spot, my personal favorite actually ended up being the Orange. Bonus points for the packaging, too—it's highly attractive and looks much more modern than most of the competition out there.

As for the effects? It brought on a really nice, relaxing wave. It wasn't too much, and it wasn't too little. One can was the absolute perfect starting spot to make hanging out on the beach feel just a little more fun. If you carry sodas, we highly suggest you carry this one.



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CHAMPS LAS VEGAS AUGUST DETAILS:

GLASS GAMES: Summer Masters Open Qualifiers

Back on the show floor, the flame-working talent returns to the main stage. This August features six distinct competitions, including three premier challenges sponsored by **Dr. Dabber**.

Whether battling the clock or bringing in a masterpiece from home, here is the official breakdown for the Summer Masters Open Qualifiers:

The Dr. Dabber Sponsored Events

- **Dr. Bedazzled (3 Hours):**

Artists are challenged to make an eye-catching, highly functional top for the Dr. Dabber Switch 2 Device. *Standard Prep Rules Apply.*

- **Ghost It (1 Hour):**

A high-pressure sprint. In just 60 minutes, competitors must craft a fancy and functional top for the Dr. Dabber Ghost Device. *Standard Prep Rules Apply.*

- **Bring it in to fit it in (Bring-In Competition):**

No time limit, just pure craftsmanship. Artists must create a top-notch piece for the Dr. Dabber Switch Go Device. Every entry will be function-tested and professionally cleaned before being returned. Pieces must be submitted on Day 1 by the end of the day. **NO COLLABS.**

Continues On Page 43

INSIDE THE AUGUST SHOW'S NEW SAMPLING EVENT AND SUMMER MASTERS GLASS GAMES



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CHAMPS LAS VEGAS AUGUST DETAILS: INSIDE THE AUGUST SHOW'S NEW SAMPLING EVENT AND SUMMER MASTERS GLASS GAMES

The Open Challenges

• **Cryo-Pipe (3 Hours):**

Make a piece to help beat the August heat. Artists can choose any style they like, as long as it delivers a chilled hit. *Standard Prep Rules Apply.*

• **Harington, Cumming, Crapper (3 Hours):**

Google it! Competitors are tasked with creating a pipe that pays homage to plumbing history—a piece as it should be known for many years to come. *Standard Prep Rules Apply.*

• **Our Famous 20-Min Games:**

The fan-favorite elimination game is back. Artists bring their three favorite tools, their glasses, and their creativity. We provide a bag of assorted glass and a theme. Competitors get a few minutes to conceptualize, and exactly 20 minutes to make it happen. It will take surviving multiple intense rounds to take home the win.



Whether you are a retailer looking to stock your shelves with the newest innovations, a brand eager to put your product directly into the hands of key buyers, or an artist ready to make history on the torch, the August show is where the future of the market is written. CHAMPS continues to prove that it is far more than a trade show—it is the beating heart of the counter-culture industry. Mark your calendars for August 26-29, secure your badges, and get ready for a Las Vegas experience that could redefine how you do business.



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A COMMUNITY HOMECOMING IN CHICAGO

By CHAMPS Magazine Staff

As we returned to Chicago for CHAMPS, the overwhelming sentiment was one of "homecoming." The event consistently fosters a tight-knit, welcoming atmosphere — a gathering of industry professionals that feels more like a reunion than a standard trade show. This year, we were prepared for three high-energy days of deal-making, networking, and the exciting "CHAMPS Cash" giveaways. Each day, one pre-registered shop in attendance had the chance to win a \$1,000 prize.

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San Marcos, Texas

Day 2:

Mr. Shop Smoke and Vape –
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Day 3:

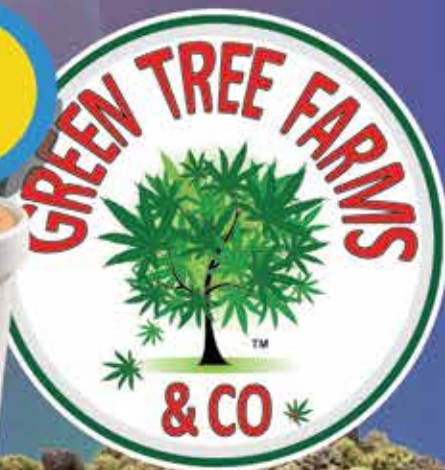
Private Winner
(Wished to remain nameless)

Continues On Page 53



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Chanticleer



Wintrelle

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Chanticleer is a bright apple-pumpkin blend of crisp red apple and creamy white pumpkin, nudged by a little ginger mischief. It settles into tonka woods, sugared praline, and a soft drift of vanilla bean that feels just a bit unruly in the best autumn way.

Wintrelle is a cookie-butter daydream sneaking out of the mixing bowl. As it settles, baked cookie crumbs, vanilla bean, golden caramel, and soft musk wrap the room in a cozy, sugary grin that feels like winter's sweetest secret.

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A COMMUNITY HOMECOMING IN CHICAGO

Market Trends and Strategic Sourcing

The show floor was vibrant, with hundreds of vendors offering ready-to-ship stock and exclusive show specials. It was the ideal environment for buyers to secure inventory and discover emerging trends. We noted a significant expansion in the mushroom and alternative wellness categories, where competition is rapidly intensifying.

Innovation remains the driving force of the market. New products are launching daily to replace legacy items being phased out by shifting state regulations. Chicago served as a vital hub for finding these up-and-coming essentials, and we anticipate even more groundbreaking releases at the upcoming August event in Las Vegas.



Pipe Grab
1st Place
Jeff Heathbar



Pipe Grab
2nd Place
Chad G



Chad G

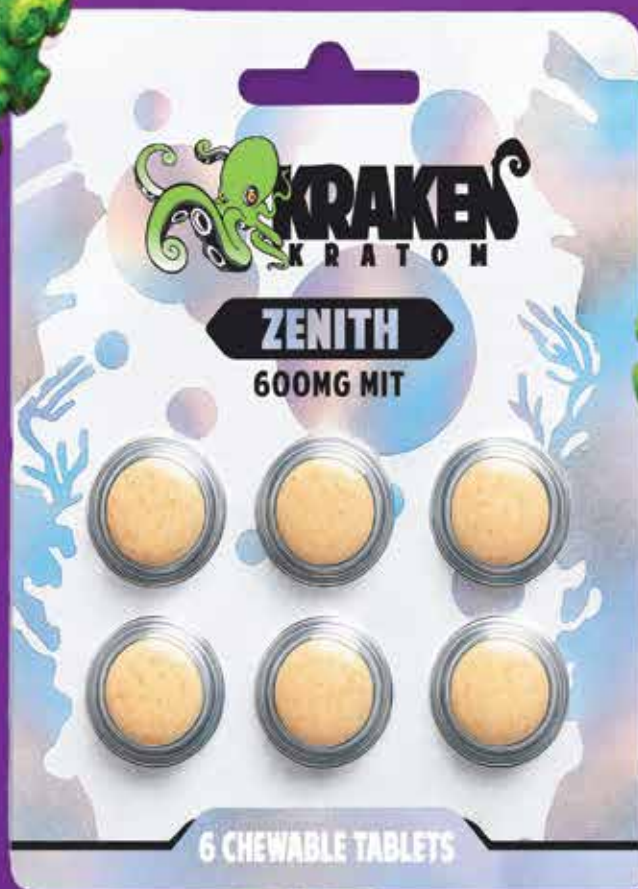
In the glass sector, certain regions have reported a notable uptick in sales, and talented artists were on hand to help shops refill their shelves with high-quality functional art. The Glass Games highlighted this talent with a high-stakes "Pipe Grab" competition. Similar to the acclaimed Goblet Grab in Austin, artists brought their best work to prove their skill. The top ten pieces featured incredible craftsmanship, with values far exceeding the entry price.

Continues On Page 56

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A COMMUNITY HOMECOMING IN CHICAGO

Glass Games Results

1st Place:

Jeff Heathbar

(\$1,000 prize and entry into the Masters Event)

2nd Place:

Chad-G (\$500 prize)

3rd Place:

Sno Glass (\$250 prize)

Jeff Heathbar will now join 23 other elite artists for next year's Masters Event, where they will vie for a share of over \$50,000 in cash prizes.

Of course, no trip to Chicago is complete without enjoying the local culture. The dining experiences were exceptional, particularly the meals at Nonna Silvia's (our team went there twice) and Bub City BBQ. We also made sure to enjoy the quintessential Chicago staples: authentic deep-dish pizza and classic Chicago-style dogs.

Looking Ahead: Join Us in Las Vegas

The energy from our Chicago homecoming is just the beginning. As we turn our sights toward the fall and holiday seasons, we invite you to join us for our next major gathering at the Las Vegas Convention Center from August 26th-28th. This event will serve as the definitive launchpad for your Q3 and Q4 strategies, featuring unparalleled opportunities for inventory sourcing, industry networking, and witnessing the next level of innovation. We look forward to seeing you there as we continue to elevate the industry together.



Pipe Grab
3rd Place
SNO Glass



GATOR BUDZ



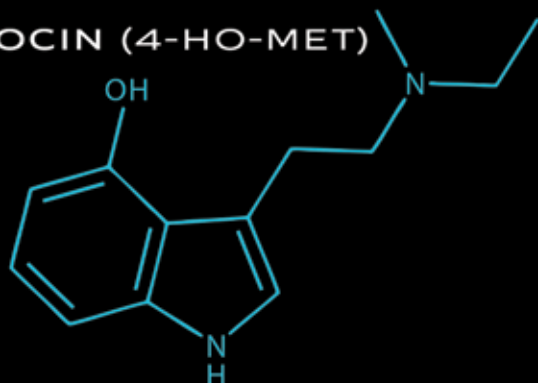
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CHAMPS TRADE SHOWS

THE PREMIER COUNTERCULTURE B2B EXPO SINCE 1999



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By
Mick Burnwell

MAKING YOUR STORE A CULTURAL ANCHOR IN RETAIL

For decades, the lifeblood of the counter-culture industry has pumped through the veins of independent brick-and-mortar shops. But in an era where consumers can restock their hardware and consumables with a few taps on a smartphone, the physical retail space faces an existential ultimatum: evolve from a mere point of purchase into a destination of purpose, or fade into irrelevance.

If the only reason a customer crosses your threshold is to buy a battery or a bottle of e-liquid, you are competing on a playing field of price and convenience — a game the internet will inevitably win. To survive and thrive, a shop must carry the same cultural gravity as the products on its shelves.

Look at the DNA of a core, foundational skate shop. It isn't just a room with wood and urethane for sale; it is the absolute epicenter of the local scene. It's where the community aggregates, where the culture is preserved, and where the next generation is educated. A modern smoke and vape shop holds the exact same potential. It can — and should — become the cultural anchor for its neighborhood.





Transforming a retail floor from a sterile transactional environment into a thriving community hub does not require a massive marketing budget or a Madison Avenue overhaul. It requires a fundamental shift in hospitality, curation, and local engagement.

Here are the top five strategies to transition your shop from a convenience stop into a cornerstone of the community.

1. Dismantle the Transactional Barrier

The physical layout of your store dictates the psychological experience of your customer. The traditional model — a towering glass counter separating the "expert" employee from the "novice" buyer — feels purely transactional. It signals that the relationship ends the moment the receipt is printed.

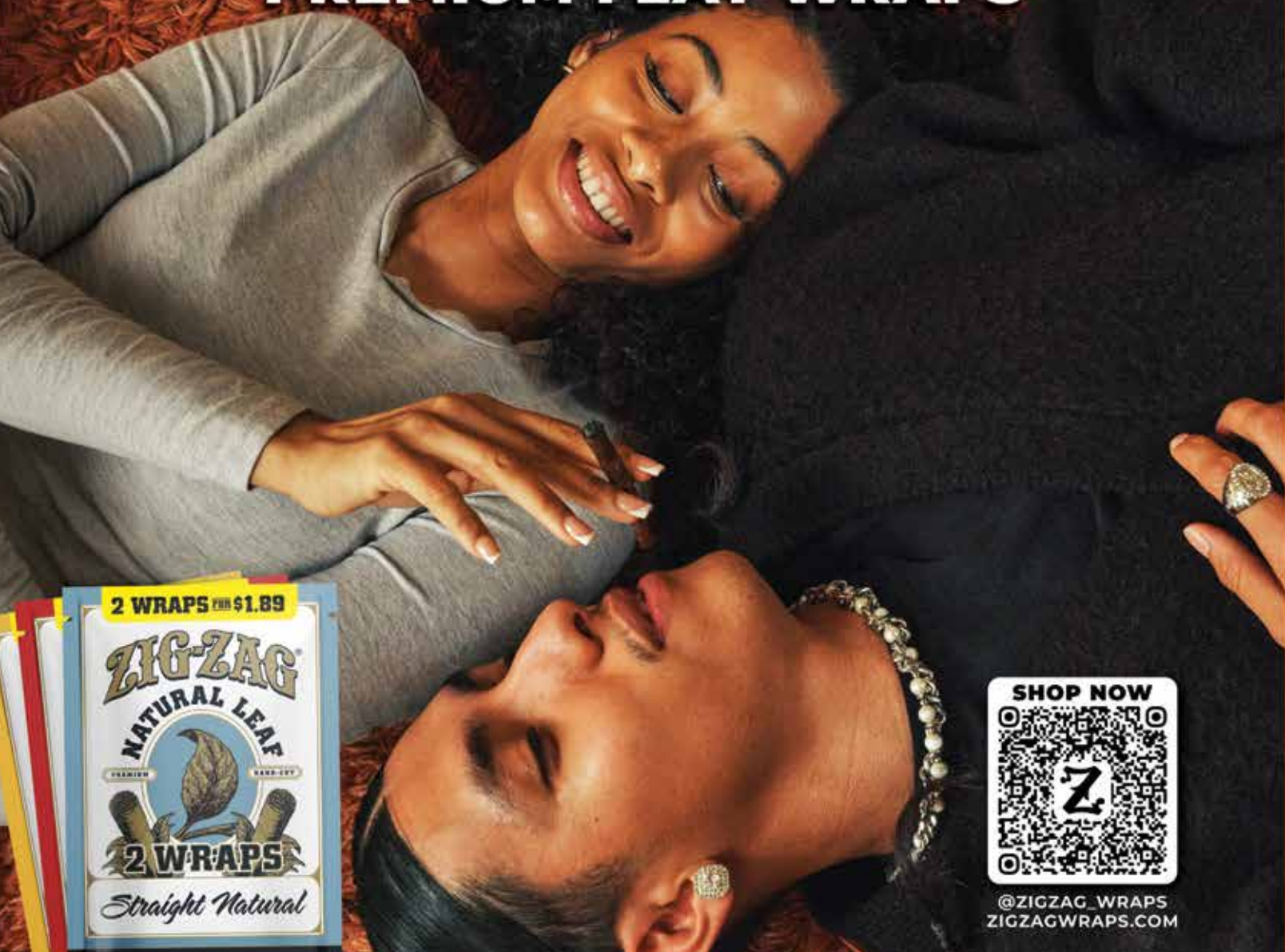
To build a hub, you must build a space designed for dwell time. Break down the physical barriers. If local ordinances permit, carve out a dedicated, comfortable lounge area. Redesign the point-of-sale to mimic the collaborative vibe of a local coffee house or craft brewery tasting room. When you create an environment where customers are invited to linger, try new hardware, and talk shop without the pressure of an immediate upsell, you build fierce loyalty. Your shop stops being a store and starts being a clubhouse.

Continues On Page 70

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By
Mick Burnwell

MAKING YOUR STORE A CULTURAL ANCHOR IN RETAIL

2. Treat the Shop as a Premium Lifestyle Brand

Your shop's identity should hold as much weight as the national brands you stock. Consumers in subculture retail want to feel like they belong to an exclusive club, and they want to represent the places that represent them.

Go beyond the standard, uninspired logo t-shirt. Treat your shop like a premium streetwear label. Collaborate with local artists to design limited-run "drops." Whether it's an exclusive run of custom shop-branded skate decks for the wall, high-end embroidered hoodies, or limited-edition glass collabs, give your regulars something scarce to collect. Treat high-quality, die-cut stickers as the currency of your community; put them in every bag. When your customers proudly tag their gear and vehicles with your logo, they become mobile billboards for your culture.



3. Anchor into the Local Maker and Art Scenes

The counter-culture and underground art worlds have always been inextricably linked. Elevating your retail experience means positioning your shop as an active gallery and patron of local talent, drawing in demographics that overlap perfectly with your core customer base.

Dedicate premium, highly visible real estate specifically for local glassblowers and functional artists. Do not just sell their work—tell their stories. Put up placards detailing the artist's process and background. Utilize empty wall space to feature local painters, zine creators, and illustrators, rotating the installations monthly. Hosting a small, after-hours gallery reception for a local artist brings a wave of fresh, highly targeted foot traffic through your doors, turning strangers into patrons.



Continues On Page 76

4. Host High-Impact, Low-Stakes "Showdowns"

Bring the electric energy of a national trade show directly to your local retail floor. People need a definitive reason to show up on a specific date, and grassroots competitions or skill-shares provide exactly that.

Host localized showdowns that celebrate the hobbyist core of the industry. This could be an intricate coil-building clinic on a Saturday morning, a cloud competition, or even a low-stakes, bring-your-own-console video game tournament in the lounge. You don't need a massive prize pool; a nominal gift card and bragging rights are enough. The return on investment isn't in the entry fees—it's in the hours of foot traffic, the snacks purchased, and the organic, highly shareable social media content generated when your most dedicated customers are given a stage.



5. Establish a Consistent Community Ritual

Novelty events are great for a quick spike in traffic, but consistency is what builds a genuine scene. Pick one community-focused initiative and lock it into the calendar so firmly that your regulars set their watches by it.

Consider a monthly "Glass Clean & Swap Meet" where collectors can safely trade, show off, and maintain their high-end pieces in a professional, compliant environment. Or, host a "First Friday" local brand pop-up, offering free floor space to an independent apparel designer or accessory maker. When you provide the platform, these micro-brands will market the event to their own digital followers, cross-pollinating your audiences. When an event happens reliably every single month, it transitions from a marketing tactic into a community tradition.

The Bottom Line: Community cannot be faked, and it cannot be bought. It is cultivated by providing space, championing local culture, and treating your customers as peers rather than just patrons. When you build the scene, the sales will naturally follow.

CHAMPS TRADE SHOWS

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