

CannaTrade is 20 years old!

CannaTrade – the International Cannabis Expo for Business People and Consumers



A historical summary of 20 years CannaTrade and the history of hemp in Switzerland

The history of CannaTrade began in 2001 when the 'Swiss Hemp Days' became the international CannaTrade exhibition and was held in Bern for the first time. This was during the days of Switzerland's hemp shops, known as 'Duftsäckli', when Switzerland was almost home to more hemp shops than bakeries! The reason for this was a loophole in the narcotics law which only explicitly prohibited hemp when it began to be used for intoxication purposes. For several years, Switzerland was the number one country for cannabis and anyone who was anyone on the scene flocked to this Alpine land to be a part of this green gold rush.



At this time, CannaTrade was one of Europe's three hemp exhibitions alongside 'Cannabusiness'

in Germany and 'Highlife' in Holland and it is the only one of the three to have survived the tough years which followed. The decline in all of the countries was triggered by a shift in the political situation. Germany, still known as taking a repressive approach to cannabis, was the first to slam the brakes on and Cannabusiness disappeared from the scene in 2005. The Highlife trade fair in Holland survived a few years longer but soon had to close its doors too, despite Holland's liberal policy on cannabis. CannaTrade suffered following the end of the legendary 'Duftsäckli' period: but up until 2008, it was still permitted to sell hemp seeds (to sow) and at this time, around 40% of exhibitors at CannaTrade were doing this. However the fun came to an end just three days (!) before the final hemp fair in Bern in spring 2008.

Ben Arn, the organizer of CannaTrade since 2006, still vividly recalls this day: "We were already in the festival hall setting up at the BernExpo in Bern when the notification came from the authorities. There were to be no seeds permitted on the exhibition site and any stands found to be in breach of this ruling would be shut down without delay. I looked around the hall and saw the large logo of the Greenhouse Seed Cooperation which was already hanging from the ceiling and then had to inform all 30 seed banks that they were no longer permitted to sell seeds at the exhibition". The damage was enormous – exhibitors and visi-

tors alike were disappointed and CannaTrade was virtually dead. The seeds business increasingly moved to California and Spain because the laws on cultivating cannabis were being relaxed there at the same time.



Despite the trying circumstances, there were no thoughts of giving up at the CannaTrade offices (yet). In 2009, when the Ice Hockey World Championships were scheduled for the same time period as the trade fair and so all hotel rooms in Bern were booked up over the CannaTrade weekend, in addition to smoking having been banned in Bern, CannaTrade opted to relocate to the Basel, a city on the Rhine between the countries of Switzerland, Germany and France - where smoking had also not yet been made illegal. With the exception of most of the seed banks, it was possible to persuade the exhibitors to come to Basel where they could secure customers from all three countries, thereby retaining the status of the trade fair. However, the departure of the seed banks triggered an inevitable downward spiral which was foreseeable in advance: after all, if you cannot plant anything, you do not need any cultivation tools and CannaTrade could not survive solely from its smoking accessory stands.

Following two trade fairs in Basel which made a financial loss, CannaTrade took a break in 2011 to redefine itself. While Spain permitted Cannabis Social Clubs and various US states authorized cannabis for medical use and subsequently for leisure consumption, this was a time of status quo for drugs policy in Switzerland. The rejected Hemp Initiative of 2008 was still too fresh in the memory for any change to happen soon. Yet it was in this year, unnoticed by many, that the foundations were laid for the current boom in CBD. Switzerland changed the maximum permitted THC value for (industrial) hemp from 0.3% to max. 1%. Without realizing the impact that

this half a percent of THC would have, from 2012 the organizers planned to run CannaTrade every two years as a small yet refined hemp trade fair in Switzerland. A suitable hall was identified in the form of the city hall in Dietikon and a total of three CannaTrade exhibitions were hosted here on the edge of the metropolis of Zurich up until 2016. It was not an international hemp fair but rather a Swiss gathering for the industry, with a few foreign guests reminiscing about the good old days or seeking to retain a foothold in Switzerland. It was fun, despite being voluntary on the part of the organizers.



And this continued until spring 2016 when the CannaTrade telephone rang and a customer by the name of Bio Can AG announced that they wanted to exhibit cannabis flower at CannaTrade 2016. Cannabis flower? Ben Arn recalls the moment as if it were yesterday. "I was getting out of my car when my phone rang and I was told in confidence that a method had been found of selling weed legally at the trade fair. I couldn't believe what I was hearing, I thought it must be a joke and asked to see the official documents. When I received them a short time later, I immediately felt a sense of hope that all the waiting had been worthwhile and the Swiss hemp industry and, with it CannaTrade, would flourish like before..." And so the time came. Not in 2016 but by the fol-

lowing year it was back and with it, the gold rush atmosphere. CannaTrade moved from Dietikon to Hall 622 in Zürich-Oerlikon and the 2018 and 2019 trade fairs quickly sold out. The leisurely Swiss hemp fair was transformed overnight into one of the key meeting places for the European cannabis industry. Customers from over 40 countries attended the trade fair in 2019 and so the next step was clear: time to return to the start, to Bern and Switzerland's largest exhibition center.



The plan was for CannaTrade 2020 to be twice as big as in 2018 and 2019 and even bigger than before. The run-up was (and still is!) intense with work taking place day and night. Up until March 2020, that is. When a small virus paralyzed the whole world and made it impossible for CannaTrade 2020 to go ahead. Everything had to be halted two months before the exhibition date, a financial disaster as Ben Arn explains. "Imagine, after 10 months of intense work, all the partners and services being booked and some already purchased and paid for and then the trade fair had to be cancelled". But the exhibitors did their bit, did not request back their deposit payments and helped to fill the Covid void with a 25% surcharge. And all this in spite of the fact that the trade fair cannot go ahead in 2021 either and has provisionally been postponed until May 2022. Ben Arn explains their loyalty. "On the one hand, it is clear that this relates to the shift in political circumstances. Thanks to pilot projects (experimental items) and the new legislation relating to the cultivation and export of medicinal THC cannabis, Switzerland is back on the international cannabis stage. Add to this the fact that we have a long-standing and often very close and friendly relationship with many of the exhibitors. Both have meant that we were not just left high and dry". So now, in its 20th year, CannaTrade is looking to the future with calm and positivity. The trade fair

is fully booked for 2022 and the Covid-enforced break has been used to launch a new series of events exclusively for business customers. Last September, the first B2B networking event was organized in Zurich under the name of 'CB Club – Cannabis Business Club of Switzerland'. The next event will take place in Montreux, as soon as Covid conditions permit events of 200 people to go ahead again. And in September of this year, the first purely business fair will take place in Zurich under the name of 'CB Expo – Cannabis Business Expo and Conference'. Despite the ongoing lockdown in Europe, the fair is already half booked up and at present, it can be assumed that the fair will go ahead because it is designed to accommodate 500 – max. 1000 guests per day and not 10,000 like the large CannaTrade visitor fair.

CannaTrade aims to celebrate its birthday based on the same motto – with an event for 500 people. On the weekend of 2-4 July 2021, the '20 years CannaTrade – Festival' will take place at the premises of BernExpo where the trade fair originated and will return next year – with 20 trade fair stands and all the established highlights such as the CannaSwissCup awards show, the Joint Roll Contest Swiss Championship and the Hemp Food Festival. Despite everything, Ben Arn is convinced that the CannaTrade ambience will still be present in a smaller setting with some music and a covered chill-out area. "After over a



year without events, without live music and without CannaTrade, I am really looking forward to the weekend – and I am assuming I am not alone! The '20 years CannaTrade' event will be a mix of back-to-the-roots and anticipation of the next big CannaTrade".

All information about CannaTrade and the '20 years CannaTrade Festival' can be found at

www.cannatrade.ch

If you have any questions or require information, CannaTrade can be contacted as follows:

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Facts CannaTrade 2022

Over 250 exhibitors from all over the world will be presenting their tried-and-trusted products, new features and innovations relating to cannabis. Customers can enjoy the unique atmosphere of CannaTrade with an exclusive Business Lounge for business guests, a relaxed chill-out area for visitors, the Hemp Food Festival and many other highlights.

CannaTrade provides information about all aspects of the hemp plant and exhibitors are grouped into the following categories:

CBD, CBG / Seeds, Plants / Vape / Food / Medicine / Grow / Harvesting / Laboratory / Logistics / Services / Paraphernalia / Nature / Media / Institute / Art, Games

All stands are already fully booked for CannaTrade 2022. However, interested companies can be placed on the waiting list.

CannaTrade and its exhibitors are required to adhere to all legal regulations. Admission to CannaTrade is only permitted to visitors aged 18 and over.