



# **LEGALIZING CANNABIS**

## **A CANADIAN ONLINE MEDIA LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS REPORT**

OCTOBER 2018

# OVERVIEW

In October 2018, recreational cannabis consumption will become legal in Canada for the first time in the nation's history. Leading up to this historic event, Canadian online news media has played a key role in sharing the leading stories and opinions related to how this significant decision will impact the lives, policies and financial performance for Canadian businesses, families and policy makers.

This report has been developed based on human interpretation and analysis of over 200,000 online news articles published by Canadian news media outlets between January 1 and September 21, 2018. Through this analysis, our research team has attempted to answer the following questions related to this topic:

- How much online Canadian news content was produced since the start of 2018?
- What brands appeared prominently in that coverage?
- What were the popular topics of discussion related to cannabis legalization?
- What was the tone of the coverage?
- Where, geographically, was content coming from?

This is the first of two cannabis landscape reports Cision will be producing, with the second report to be completed in early 2019. The second report will not only summarize the views and opinions of the Canadian media in the months following cannabis legalization, but also evaluate how the conversation has changed since this initial report was published.

Thank you for your interest in Cision.



# KEY FINDINGS



## **The top demographic producing content related to the legalization of marijuana in Canada was 25 – 34-year-old males**

Just under 50% of all Canadian news media content published from January 1 to September 21, 2018 was created by individuals between 25 and 34 years of age (born between 1984 and 1993), with 65% of all online news content created by men.



## **Ontario was the top content producing province in Canada, where 68% of all mentions related to cannabis legalization originated**

Top contributing Ontario based publications include CBC News, Global News, CTV News, The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star and Yahoo! Canada.



## **June 18 was the top content producing day, when Bill C-45 was passed by the Senate, legalizing the sale and use of marijuana**

In a vote of 52-29, Canada's Senate passed the historic bill, legalizing cannabis on a national level, making Canada the second country to legalize cannabis nationwide, following Uruguay's lead.



## **The LCBO was the most frequently referenced brand in Canadian online media coverage that referenced marijuana legalization**

The LCBO was referenced in over 1,100 Canadian media articles related to cannabis legalization, and included news about the province of Ontario's decision to build new retail outlets for consumer purchases, as well as the decision to have Shopify manage online sales.



## **Between Jan. 1 and Sept. 21, 2018, approximately 771 articles related to cannabis legalization was published online each day**

With more than 200,000 mentions of the legalization of cannabis over the course of 263 days, publications were producing an abundance of coverage to the general public, averaging 5,479 mentions a week and nearly 24,000 mentions each month.



## **Cannabis education, potential health risks and the impact of smoking on brain development were leading themes within Canadian content**

Among the excitement and enthusiasm Canadian's have regarding the legalization of marijuana, online news media outlets also highlighted concerns related to the health benefits, risks and impact that smoking marijuana may have on the body and mind, especially among teens.



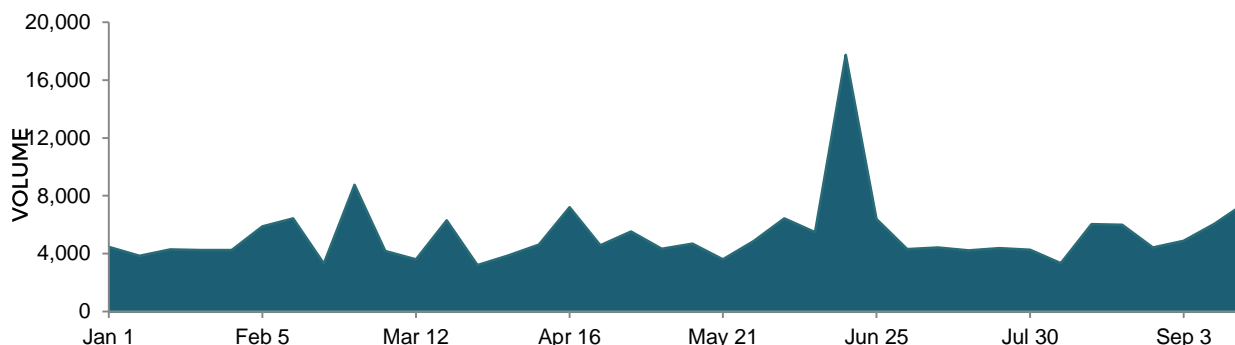
# COVERAGE TRENDS

## Total Canadian Online Articles

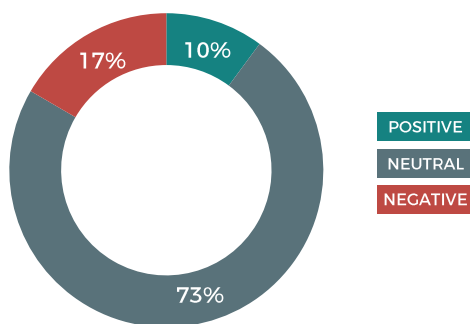
# 202,732

Total Engagement	Avg. Articles / Mo.	Avg. Articles / Wk.	Avg. Articles/Day
3.6 million	22,525	4,826	771

## Daily Coverage Velocity



## Tone of Coverage



## Frequently Found Words



While more general terms such as “Cannabis”, “Marijuana” and “Legal” were most prominent amongst articles related to ‘Cannabis Legalization’, other terms such as “Education”, “Risks”, “Development” and “Growth” provide valuable insights into the discussions within Canadian online news content related to this topic. Many of these terms appear and are discussed in prominent publications including The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star and CBC News. Important dates and details about the legalization of cannabis, while crucial for public knowledge, don’t tell the full story. Mentions of the [health benefits](#) and [risks](#), articles [educating the public](#) on various topics related to cannabis itself, and explanations of the [effects of the legalization](#) account for a significant amount of coverage when looking at content from the first 9 months of the year.

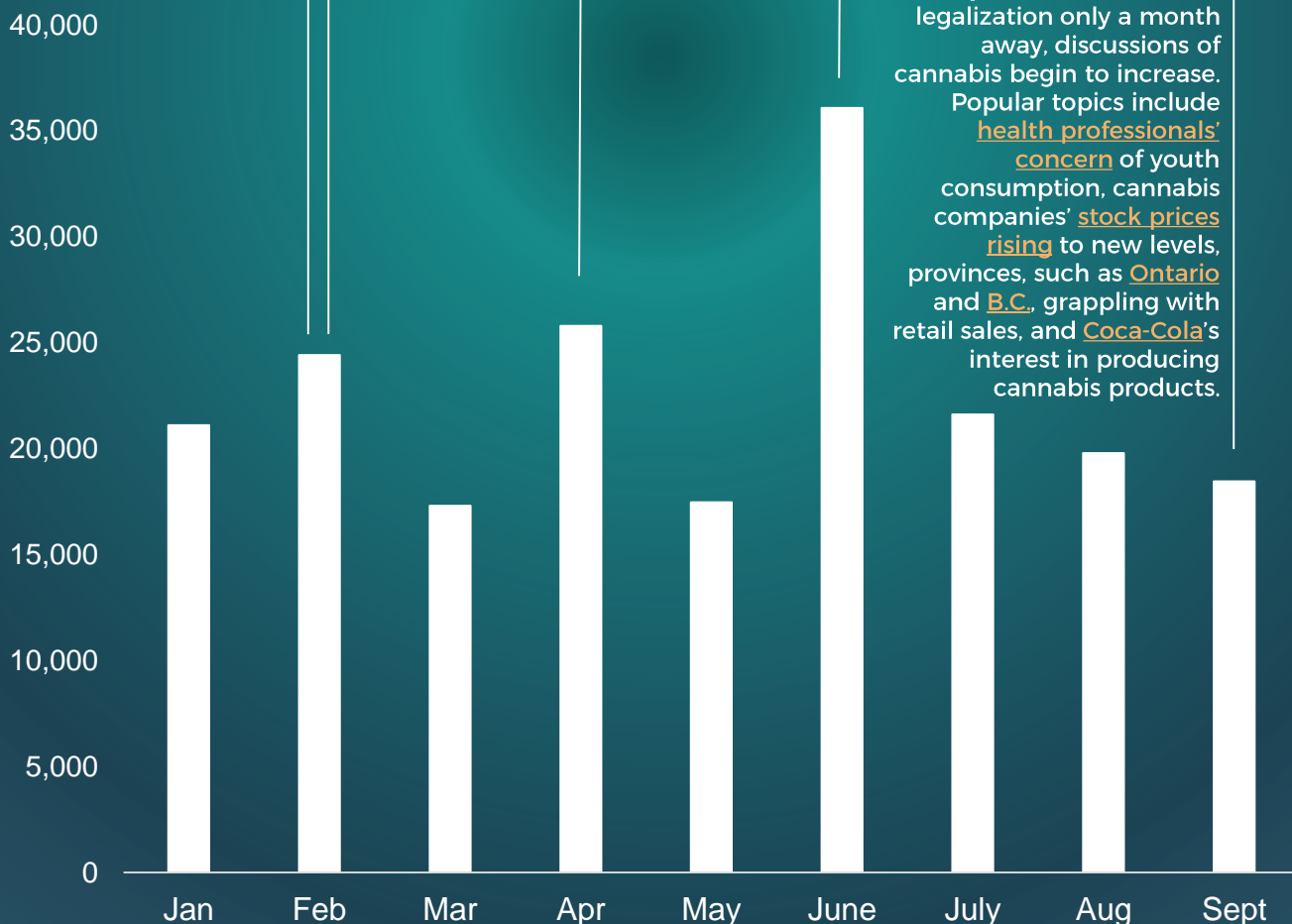
**February 12-16, 2018:** Businesses such as [Sun Life Financial](#) and [Statistics Canada](#) kick off preparations for the legalization of cannabis in Canada, along with [liquor stores](#) and several cannabis companies, like [Aurora Cannabis](#) and [Canopy Growth](#).

**February 28, 2018:** 2019 Federal budget talks focus on a realistic [pharmacare plan](#), including the possibility of tax on cannabis-based pharmaceuticals.

**April 20, 2018:** 4/20 celebrations across the country bring forward discussions of the pending legalization of cannabis in Canada. Trending topics include cannabis industry [predications](#), [preparations](#), and [regulations](#), as well as [education programs](#).

**June 18, 2018:** The Senate passed [Bill C-45](#), legislation recreational marijuana, by a vote of 52-29. In the weeks after the decision, online news media outlets featured stories related to what will come next for legalization.

**September 17-21:** With legalization only a month away, discussions of cannabis begin to increase. Popular topics include [health professionals' concern](#) of youth consumption, cannabis companies' [stock prices rising](#) to new levels, provinces, such as [Ontario](#) and [B.C.](#), grappling with retail sales, and [Coca-Cola's](#) interest in producing cannabis products.



# REGIONAL ANALYSIS



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Published Articles (by Province)

ON	BC	AB	QC	NS	MB	NB	SK	NL	NT	PE	YT	NU
137K	29K	13K	11K	2,621	2,371	1,867	1,699	694	279	270	124	12

With over 130,000 published online news stories related to 'Cannabis Legalization', Ontario dominated all other provinces and territories in content, producing nearly 5 times more articles than the next leading province, British Columbia.

Provincial content didn't exclusively focus on Ontario-centric stories, but rather, included a large volume of articles and posts related to the national cannabis conversation, including provincial breakdowns and analyses. Popular topics of discussion included the Senate passing [Bill C-45](#), the potential [US border ban](#) for individuals who use or are linked to the cannabis industry and Ontario Premier [Doug Ford's](#) continuing impact on the cannabis market in Ontario.

# tone of coverage

The following sentiment analysis is based on a human-curated, statistically relevant content review of all cannabis legalization articles posted between January 1 and September 21, 2018.

**10%**  
POSITIVE

While positive coverage received the lowest amount of coverage, it did provide important insights into the benefits of cannabis legalization. Positive mentions centered around industry and market developments after bill C-45 was passed, including increased [job creation](#) by cannabis companies, the impact medical marijuana may have on certain [insurance plans](#) and new cannabis products, such as cannabis infused drinks by [Molson Coors](#).

**73%**  
NEUTRAL

Overall, cannabis coverage in Canada was overwhelmingly neutral in the first 10 months of 2018. This is somewhat expected when it comes to Canadian news content, which tended to objectively report on key dates associated with legalization, policy and legislative developments and corporate performance. This content was typically presented with facts and figures regarding the progression towards legalization, rather than imposing personal views and opinions.

**17%**  
NEGATIVE

In comparison to positive Canadian coverage, negative online news stories were nearly doubled. This content primarily focused on concerns regarding the [lack of official research](#) related to the health impacts or adverse effects recreational cannabis use might have on recreational users, as well as the potential [border ban](#) on Canadian travelers threatened by the US Customs and Border Protection agency. Concerns regarding marijuana's potential [threat to teens and youth](#), as well as addiction were also prevalent.

# TOP BRANDS

CISION<sup>®</sup>



1,142  
Mentions

Out of the top 5 brands, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) was most consistently mentioned throughout the monitoring period. From January 1, the LCBO was frequently discussed in regard to the sale of cannabis throughout Ontario, while the question of private versus public sale remained unanswered. Various developments throughout the year, including the provinces choice of [Shopify](#) to run online cannabis stores and the news of the new "[Ontario Cannabis Store](#)" significantly increased the frequency of LCBO mentions.



973  
Mentions

The majority of Shopify mentions occurred when the province of Ontario selected the eCommerce platform to run online cannabis sales in February and again later in June when B.C. made the same decision. Coverage of Shopify was generally neutral, with positive stories outweighing negative stories 12 to 1. As an already established business in Canada, positive mentions of Shopify praised the provinces' decision to choose a company that will provide a "reliable and integrated shopping experience" ([The Star](#)).



230  
Mentions

Molson Coors was first to announce their interest and possible involvement in the cannabis industry in July, while Coca-Cola followed suit in September, both in talks to produce cannabis infused drinks. Both companies are partnering with different cannabis companies, Molson Coors with [Hydrophothecary](#) and Coca-Cola with [Aurora Cannabis](#).



120  
Mentions

Mentions of the National Hockey League (NHL) come after now retired NHL player, [Riley Cote](#), suggests the use of cannabis for pro athletes, specifically in regards to recovery after injuries such as concussions. [W. Brett Wilson](#), minority owner of the NHL's Nashville Predators, praised the decision to legalize cannabis in Canada, providing further commentary on the several grey areas of the legalization, including the NHL's stance on cannabis consumption.



80  
Mentions



# TOP NEWS ARTICLES

## BY ENGAGEMENT

	ARTICLE	AUTHOR	DATE	REACH	ENG.
	<a href="#">Canadians who smoke marijuana legally, or work or invest in the industry, will be barred from the U.S.: Customs and Border Protection official</a>	Daniel Dale	Sept. 13, 2018	8.5M	98.6K
	<a href="#">Senate passes pot bill, paving way for legal cannabis in 8 to 12 weeks</a>	Peter Zimonjic	June 19, 2018	23.6M	78.8K
	<a href="#">Trudeau says pot will be legal as of Oct. 17, 2018</a>	John Paul Tasker	June 20, 2018	23.6M	41.8K
	<a href="#">Marijuana legalization Bill C-45 officially passes Senate vote, heading for royal assent</a>	Monique Scotti	June 19, 2018	8.9M	41.1K
	<a href="#">Spike in cannabis overdoses blamed on potent edibles, poor public education</a>	Katie Nicholson	August 28, 2018	23.6M	31K
	<a href="#">Doug Ford wants free market for cannabis in Ontario</a>	-	March 13, 2018	21.2M	29.1K
	<a href="#">Vous pourriez être payé 50\$ de l'heure pour tester du cannabis</a>	-	Sept. 20, 2018	1.2M	19.5K
	<a href="#">Senate passes cannabis legalization bill in final vote</a>	Rachel Aiello	June 19, 2018	6.8M	18.5K
	<a href="#">Coca-Cola reportedly in talks with Aurora Cannabis to make infused drinks</a>	Reuters	Sept. 17, 2018	8.9M	18.2K
	<a href="#">Québec cherche 300 vendeurs de pot</a>	Annabelle Blais	May 16, 2018	1.2M	18K

# NEWS HIGHLIGHTS



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## **Canadians who smoke marijuana legally, or work or invest in the industry, will be barred from the U.S.: Customs and Border Protection official**

*“Canadians will be barred from entering the United States for smoking marijuana legally, for working in Canada's legal marijuana industry and for investing in legal Canadian marijuana companies, a senior U.S. Customs and Border Protection official says.”*

[The Star](#), Daniel Dale – September 13, 2018



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## **Spike in cannabis overdoses blamed on potent edibles, poor public education**

*“Although Health Canada doesn't have plans to make edibles legal for another year, they are already widely available and Szabo said many consumers don't understand how they work. One problem is that people sometimes eat more of a cannabis product when they don't feel an immediate strong effect.”*

[CBC News](#), Katie Nicholson – August 28, 2018



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## **Ontario will rely on private sector to sell recreational cannabis**

*“The move scraps the defeated Liberal government's plan for 150 brick-and-mortar Ontario Cannabis Stores, modelled on LCBO outlets, by 2020. However, until a private retail system is in place, the OCS website will be the only legal source for recreational pot smokers in Ontario after cannabis use is legalized nationwide on Oct. 17.”*

[The Star](#), Rob Ferguson & Mitch Potter – August 13, 2018



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## **Coca-Cola reportedly in talks with Aurora Cannabis to make infused drinks**

*“The discussions over a possible product tie-up, reported by Canadian financial channel BNN Bloomberg, could open a new front in Coke's battle to overcome sluggish demand for its sugar-heavy sodas by diversifying into coffee and health-focused drinks.”*

[Global News](#), Reuters – September 17, 2018



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## **Vous pourriez être payé 50 \$ de l'heure pour tester du cannabis**

*«Les six futures recrues formeront un 'comité de sélection' qui devra 'évaluer ce que les producteurs canadiens ont de mieux à offrir'. La société travaille pour un producteur agréé, Solace Health, dont elle est chargée de promouvoir et distribuer la production [...] Avec la légalisation prochaine du cannabis au Canada, le 17 octobre, 'les Canadiens (allaient) être submergés par un tsunami' de variétés.»*

[TVA Nouvelles](#), Agence France-Presse – September 20, 2018



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## **Shoppers Drug Mart gets medical pot license from Health Canada**

*“As trusted medication experts, we believe pharmacists have an important role to play in the safe and informed use of medical cannabis, and this is the first step in our journey to provide medical cannabis to our patients,” said Loblaw spokesperson Catherine Thomas in an emailed statement.”*

[CBC News](#), The Canadian Press – September 21, 2018

# CISION INSIGHTS

We are a global team of analysts and researchers who leverage Cision's array of tools, data and content streams to measure performance of marketing and communications activities and deliver meaningful, usable insights.

Our services span a range of capabilities and our packaged offerings are built on years of supporting the business measurement, analysis, and insights needs of a wide and varied client base — efficiently, consistently, and in a timely manner.

Our analysts serve as an extension of your team and are here to answer your measurement questions, establish analysis framework and methodology, and synthesize data to deliver actionable insights that inform strategic decision making.

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