

Interview with Mr. X
Owner, NYC Pot Delivery Service

CB: How did you get started?

Mr. X: I was out of work and couldn't find a job. It was a friend-of-a-friend thing. I was already hanging out and doing drugs with them, and they needed people to ride the bikes. They still do it that way with the old fashioned bike-riders.

This was 1995 and then I just kind of worked my way up the ladder from there. Everybody was really lazy. If you had any ambition at all, it was like: if you show up to work the next day, you're the president.

CB: Moving up, did it become a more serious kind of job, more stressful? Was there more risk?

Mr. X: It definitely became less fun. I wouldn't say increased risk. The thing that really scared me was the last time I had ridden a bike in traffic, I got ran over and spent three months in the hospital. But once I decided to take the job, the illegal thing just didn't get to me. Within the first year, after making a deal with myself that this was what I was going to do, I never felt that. My father knew what I was going to do, and in his mind, heroin and marijuana are the same thing. But he was like, you have to get a job, you have to do something.

CB: Is there a "mob" in the cannabis world, or is it something mellower?

Mr. X: You'd be surprised how many people I have to deal with that have guns and let you see that they have guns, and say "nigger" every other word, even though they're just as white as I am. That's a recent thing, within the last five years. There used to be more "hippie" guys, but that has changed.

When we worked downtown, the scary thing was the Dominican gangs. Down in the East Village, the kids that grow up around there, they know what to look for. They look for a guy on a bike, he's going in and out of a house very quickly, wow, isn't that interesting. And then they get 10 guys and they roll him. We had a real problem with that, three times we got hit: this isn't something I was trained for, or the guys in the company.

Finally, after one of our guys was being chased by these Dominicans, a car came up to him, rolled the window down and was like, "You being chased by a bunch of Dominican kids?" And the guy said, "Fuck you," but he's like, "No, don't worry I'm on your side. You being chased by these guys?" Our guy's like, "Yeah, I am." The guy said, "Don't worry everything's going to be handled." And we didn't have any problems after that, So obviously those guys, whatever gang, hit somebody they shouldn't have hit. And it had nothing to do with us.

CB: At what point above you does it gets bigger or more criminal feeling?

Mr. X: One of the big guys who I deal with, it's become obvious to us, is somehow connected to Hells —Angels—who I would never mess with. This is the nicest person in the world, but I

think he's connected to the Angels in Canada. Right now, Canada, is pretty much making 60% of everything you see in New York. But they don't do any of the hydro.

CB: This is hydroponically grown cannabis, grown in water. Where does that come from?

Mr. X: Most of that is done in somebody's space in the Bronx or something. There's somebody in between in all cases, but I do know some growers. One of them is my old partner. He's got a nice place in Brooklyn.

CB: High Times magazine is openly oriented towards the small grower, and there are tons of websites—are there more small growers in your business? People growing for themselves?

Mr. X: I don't see Bathtub Gin coming into effect. There's a lot of people who wouldn't go to that much trouble. But I sometimes get offers. Just yesterday I bought from somebody who's growing in their apartment on the Lower East Side, and it was great. But if I called this woman back up and I said, "That's awesome, give me another one," she couldn't do it.

CB: With how easy it is to grow now, I'd think there would be an attraction to not having to cross the border.

Mr. X: Yeah, but even here, everybody talks a big game but nobody seems to put it together. It's not easy. Every grower I know who had really big designs, they gets bugs or something. It's not that much of an outlay in money, it's just an outlay in gumption and time. I could never do it—you are tied to that room; it's worse than having a kid. With a kid you can have playdates and get out of the house, but if you grow, you have to be in that room every day. To get a nice crop is hard.

A friend gave me a tour of his grow room—he's like an amateur botanist. Maybe 150 feet square, but you'd be surprised how many pounds you can get from a small room. They do make a shitload of money.

CB: How much?

Mr. X: This guy can put out 7 or 8 pounds every 45 days—and that's at 6 or 7 thousand dollars a pound. But they're taking more risk. That's jail time there.

CB: Do you have a sense of your competition? Is there room for everyone?

Mr. X: Back in the day, six of us worked for one guy, and when he went a little crazy, all six of us ran with the business, and we all went toward different kinds of clients. But there is more than enough room for everybody. Pot's the kind of drug where the more it's out there, the more that people want it.

CB: Have you always had the same type of clients?

Mr. X: We used to be downtown, but after we all split up, one guy kept running it out of the apartment, another went with the hip kids and the Lower East Side, the East —Village—that kind of thing. But I didn't want that. Really early on, I saw that I wanted to sell to the guy saying, "Don't let the tie fool you man, I used to tour with the Dead." There are classes of people who do different drugs—like the old British class system. With marijuana you can almost get like a wine-drinker kind of thing.

For them, you're providing a nice clean person who's coming over to a nice apartment, and they're going to pay a premium for it. They are going to get good weed, but they're also going to get a safe experience. They're going to be able to tell their friends about it: this guy comes over and we watch the Simpsons and he's a very nice guy. And because of that, there are customers we've had for ages. The whole thing is about referrals. You refer three of your friends, you're going to get a free one from us. It just keeps growing like that.

CB: So it's not like the drug cliché where somebody's cheating someone, everybody's trying to cut it a little to make a little more money. There's a good equilibrium. They're paying more, but they're getting better stuff than they've ever had in their life.

Mr. X: Exactly. Until I got kicked upstairs, to me, pot was just pot. Now it's like wine. Everyone's more educated. Everything that you put out, now everybody checks out the name on the internet, they check the pedigree. Some of these people are really smart about what they're buying, they know the strains.

CB: When I first noticed strains I thought it was a marketing gimmick, but then I realized they're real; someone's paying attention to the genetics. When did the strains start becoming important?

Mr. X: For us, from the beginning. It was just before 9/11, say '99 or something, when we had to actually mark the strains on the bags, and we couldn't have an idiot selling who didn't know anything about them. Even though the majority of our guys don't smoke pot, they had to be able to talk about it.

New York's kind of funny. Back before, we got big because we had Bubblegum, and that was a New York thing. It's a dead strain now. Whoever did it screwed it up. Anybody that puts out something they call Bubblegum now, it isn't. Now the big thing in New York is Sour Diesel. The strains we see consistently are Sour Diesel, AK, and some kind of Haze. The Haze is popular uptown, 125th Street. We get new strains in all the time. I was selling something called "Lambsbread" a while ago...people liked it, but then we never saw it again.

CB: Do you have any sense of the business changing, or where it's going to go?

Mr. X: Things have evolved very slowly. We went from plastic bags to really dressy plastic cubes with stickers on them. We used to have a landline telephone. Then we went to cell phones. And we're still on cell phones while everybody else is doing text and online. But I figure the way it will change will be in the way that you ask for it, the way it gets delivered to you. It'll be in the communications.

CB: How many people work for you?

Mr. X: We have two people a day working phones, and there are four people who can do the bike or walk. The bikers make \$150 a day, and work three to four days a week. The two people who do the phones are old timers who just don't want to bikeride anymore. They get \$120 a day. Our phones work from 1-8. We used to be a nighttime thing, but that's when we got robbed.

The guy who weighs the pounds and packs it into plastic cubes gets \$2500 a month. He's a specialist, it takes him about 3 hours to break up a pound.

CB: How accurate is the weighing?

Mr. X: We sell 2 grams for \$60. He uses a digital scale, but if it comes out 1.8, that goes in, and if it comes out 2.2 you get that too. But it's got to look good or it won't sell, it's a real art.

CB: And what do you do?

Mr. X: I pretty much oversee now. I get a few pounds. And that's all I have to do with it. I clear 6 or \$7,000 a good month, if it's not slow.

The business has done okay, but not as well as before September 11. We lost about half the business.

CB: Why was that?

Mr. X: Dumb luck, our office and our phones were down there. We didn't have a backup plan. We had three months off. But since 9-11, everyone's business has been off, and the quality has been down, because of the tighter borders with Canada, I would guess.

CB: Do you have an idea of the amount that's coming over, or how they do it?

Mr. X: None at all. But, for example, I saw a big bust on TV—a thousand pounds—and I was actually surprised, but that did affect us. A week or two after that, things dried up for about a week. That was a sign to me that the scale is smaller than I thought.

CB: Does the market rise and fall? Can you tell if more people are smoking and what it's due to?

Mr. X: You get the basic yearly things, like after New Years is a bad time. People make resolutions.

CB: And it's not like, "This year, I am going to smoke more."

Mr. X: I wish there were more people like that! And also, in the summertime people go out of town. But there's no tenor of public dialogue where people start saying, "Maybe I'll stay away from it." I haven't noticed any effect with police actions either. When one of the big services called "Cartoon Network" was shut down it became big news, but that did not affect us in the least bit.

CB: What was that?

Mr. X: They were running out of a different hotel room every day and they had twenty people on the street. And this was a guns type thing: they shot a janitor.

CB: Were you aware of them before?

Mr. X: No. That's also the beauty of this thing; I only know a couple of other businesses, and that's just because of friends.

CB: Are there people who are selling the same stuff but in a "scarier" market?

Mr. X: Yeah, now on Craigslist you'll actually see people like that. How they can do that is just beyond me. I actually saw, "Call 917, etc. and we'll come to your house."

There's also a guy I used to deal with who goes to Hip Hop clubs and hands out cards. That's just something we wouldn't do, especially with that clientele.

Remember like 10 or 15 years ago when you were walking down the street and you just smelled that acrid smell? You could smell the dryness on it. You couldn't sell Mexican in New York anymore. But just the other night, I was coming out of a store with diapers, there's a cop sitting in a squad car, and a guy lights up a joint right in front of him. It had the nastiest street smell. Ahh, reminded me of being a kid again.

CB: So in New York there is some sort of toleration by the powers that be?

Mr. X: Yes, and it all started with Giuliani. It's funny that he was running for President because everyone thinks he's this magnificent guy who stops crime, but no. He basically said crimes just can't happen on the street—they can be anywhere else. It used to be Mickey Cesar would throw out joints and his card during the Halloween parade, but it's not like that anymore. And it's not like that for whores in New York City or anything else. Now it's all on the QT, and the police are okay with that as long as it's not in their face. So there's actually more whorehouses now, there's more services, more drugs, it's absolutely asinine to think it's not there.

CB: But there is something to said for that.

Mr. X: Yeah, definitely, and maybe the Rockefeller laws are finally going down, too. For the average person, and for me definitely, it's worked out. I have friends who are cops, and some of them know what I do and some of them don't. And I've been told, the only reason they'll wind up getting you is if they have a ticket quota or if there's something big in the news—then all of a sudden there's "a task force" assigned to it. New York will never get medical marijuana; it's just not going to happen. And I think that's all a bunch of horseshit, these people who want it legalized. It's pretty close to that right now if a guy has a thing up on Craigslist.

CB: Personally, how do you feel about marijuana, do you think you're doing something illegal?

Mr. X: I don't have any problem with the illegal thing, but I don't smoke pot that much anymore, and I don't want my daughter doing it. Well, I would rather have my daughter smoke pot than drink. I used to be gung-ho about drugs, but I'm not that way now. I'm not as jazzed about it as I used to be. I used to just love the idea that I was saying "fuck you" to the man.

CB: Do you see it as providing a service?

Mr. X: I do see it as a service, but I think a lot of the people who work for us, who don't necessarily smoke pot, see it as absolutely 100% benign, which I don't. I have friends who just can't stop smoking pot. They sit and watch TV or play video games.

You know, Carl Sagan didn't write any of his books when he wasn't high. And I've got musician friends, it's the same thing. But mostly it's not so high minded; it's just guys that work hard, people blowing off steam. It's mostly a white collar base that we have.

Almost all of our phone calls happen between 5 and 7—the people who work their asses off and then just want to relax. Whereas if we went to the Lower East Side, hipsters and those people—it's different, they want to get "FUCKED UP."

CB: Any difference between the older generation of smokers and a younger generation?

Mr. X: When we first started, we would sell to anybody, but now we will not sell to younger people, so I don't have a sense of that.

I have no idea if it means for kids what it did for us. When I was a kid, there were two rites of passage—it really didn't even include booze because everyone did that. It was smoking pot and it was acid. When I was a kid, we didn't take acid to sit and contemplate things—acid was to get fucked up. It was not the cerebral adventure it would've been in the 60's.

But smoking pot did change me. I smoked pot and had some kind of epiphany—that definitely happened to me. I was a little Nazi, and then I smoked pot, became real empathetic, and saw how other people thought...that type of thing.

Older people: we do sell to the nursing homes, actually, and I became quite good friends with an old beatnik; we went to a hockey game. He used to be a speed freak, and he doesn't like the Sour Diesel; he doesn't like to get that high. He's used to what he picked up in the 50's and 60's.

CB: Do you have any stories where something good happened to you that you attribute to good karma associated with cannabis?

Mr. X: I used to ride the bike so much, I couldn't give you any one experience. But you are in a position that people are afraid of you when you come in there, so it's totally up to you how you play it. If you're like, "Hey, how are you, great to see you," if you give to them, they give to you and you meet the nicest people you've ever met. I kind of miss riding the bike, I met some really great people. No one treated me like some peon. Everybody was pretty cool.

CB: Any weird experiences, like going to people's apartments?

Mr. X: I'm probably the one guy that didn't, but I could regale you with other peoples' stories. One guy came to a house and it was obvious that the girl was like 14 or 15 and she's like, "Come into my room." He goes into her room and then all of a sudden he hears her mother coming in, and her mom starts to try to open the door and the daughter locks the door and he's like 25 and she's like, "What are you doing? My daughter's only 15!" And this guy's like, "I'm not screwing your daughter!" (I'm just selling her dope.)

Another time, this guy was working for us and he locked his bike up and went in and when he came out his bike was gone. And there was a guy in a little bus who said, "I just saw the guy who did it! Jump in and I'll chase after the guy." He jumps in and takes a seat and he's in a bus with these retarded kids wearing helmets and the guy just starts flying, he must've been going 70 through town, trying to find this guy, and these kids are going crazy. He had to tell the guy, "Ah... never mind, it's cool," and they never got the bike back.

CB: Do you see yourself staying at this level or do you see yourself moving up?

Mr. X: Actually, I'm getting out, just because of my daughter. Where I am right now it'd be very, very hard to put me in jail. I've got a lawyer, and I think I could get out pretty easily. The one thing that scares me is federal charges. You're not going to get raped in prison, and you can play tennis once in awhile, but there's no parole. If you get four years, you do four years, and that's four years you don't see your kid.