

B.C. BEHIND THE CURVE ON RETAILING RECREATIONAL CANNABIS ON EVE OF LEGALIZATION

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British Columbia will miss an opportunity to start crowding out the black market for marijuana by not having legal retailers open by the Oct. 17 legalization date, according to a couple of experts.

However, for hopeful merchant Fire & Flower, which is working through B.C.'s licensing process, "it's most important to us that it's done right, than done fast," said company executive Trevor Fencott.

And "done right," has to include dealing with existing black-market dispensaries so they don't become unfair competition for retailers going through the vetting process to establish legal sales, said Fencott, CEO of the Edmonton-based Fire & Flower.

B.C., earlier this week, released an update on its readiness for legal sales, which revealed that besides its online retail portal, it could only confirm that one other government-owned retail location in Kamloops would be open by Oct. 17.

"Every province is different," Fencott said. "I think B.C. is dealing with a much more established non-regulated cannabis industry, so to speak, and that has to be transitioned properly."

His company didn't have high expectations for private retail stores to be open by the Oct. 17 deadline either, considering that the province only opened its online portal for retail applications on Aug. 10.

In the meantime, Fencott said his company was satisfied that the province was working as hard as it could to get through the licensing process with the 100 or so applicants, according to the province that have submitted forms for review.

Fire & Flower is aiming for eight locations in B.C., the maximum number allowed under provincial regulations, on top of the 37 stores it is planning to open in Alberta, Fencott said, where authorities got an earlier start on a retail strategy by opening for applications in March.

However, he added that B.C.'s process didn't have to be a lengthy, drawn-out process that puts them further behind other jurisdictions, as long as the province and municipalities manage to coordinate their efforts in

reviewing, zoning and approving locations.

“Again (delays) can be compensated for if the structure is set up in such away that you do get a Sonoma Valley or Napa Valley (craft) industry in the province,” Fencott said, “which it has every chance to be.”

“Everyone knows ‘B.C. bud,’ the question is, how do to transition from a black market to a legitimate market.”

There is also a danger in rushing the process and approving too many retailers too quickly, said lawyer James Munro, a partner in McMillan LLP’s capital markets group in Vancouver with a specialization in the Cannabis market.

“The counterpoint to that argument (that B.C. is moving too slow) is ‘how did you move that fast,’” Munro said.

To read the rest of the article, visit [Vancouver Sun](#).