



ceocfointerviews.com

© All rights reserved

Issue: May 28, 2024

With His Successful Cannabis Brand Donte West by Illicit in 100 Stores in the State of Missouri, Donte West has Dedicated His Time, Energy and Money to Help Inmates Incarcerated for Marijuana across the US



Donte West

Donte West by Illicit

**Interview conducted by:
Bud Wayne, Editorial Executive
CEOCFO Magazine**

"I started Donte West by Illicit once I was exonerated and released from prison in 2021... At that time, I had the opportunity to go back and help those who were incarcerated for marijuana, and since Illicit Gardens was in that industry, I joined the company and decided to start my own brand, Donte West by Illicit." Donte West

CEOCFO: *Mr. West, you attended Rutgers Law School in cannabis law and business. What attracted you to the area of cannabis and why did you start your Donte West by Illicit cannabis brand?*

Mr. West: I started Donte West by Illicit once I was exonerated and released from prison in 2021. I then met someone who became a friend named Nate Ruby, who is the President of Illicit Gardens, a large cultivator of medical marijuana in the Kansas City area. At that time, I had the opportunity to go back and help those who were incarcerated for marijuana, and since Illicit Gardens was in that industry, I joined the company and decided to start my own brand, Donte West by Illicit. Through that brand, I give a percentage of the proceeds to those locked up for cannabis in the Midwest and southern states, as well as through the US. The proceeds go for things like hygiene and debit phone time.

CEOCFO: *Tell us about the products that you sell?*

Mr. West: I currently have 2 SKUs (Stock Keeping Units), and in 2023 I had over \$1 million in sales.

CEOCFO: *How are you sourcing your products and what sets them apart from other cannabis products out there?*

Mr. West: I have a licensing deal with Illicit Gardens and they provide the products.

CEOCFO: *Where and how are you selling your products? Is it online or through retailers?*

Mr. West: I sell my products through retail cannabis stores throughout the state of Missouri. My products are sold in Columbus, St. Louis, Kansas City, and currently are in close to 100 stores.

CEOCFO: *How are you getting your products into the stores? Is it just you reaching out or do you have a team?*

Mr. West: I do have a great team that helps me through Illicit Gardens, but I'm the one who develops the relationships with the stores and gets my Donte West by Illicit brand in there. Illicit also does a great job of pitching their own criminal justice brand, as well as the West brand because it's all under the same roof.

CEOCFO: *Are you involved with any cannabis legalization projects?*

Mr. West: Yes, I currently work for the Last Prisoner Project, as an Advocacy Associate. I work with the legal department on different ways we can help people in the Midwest and southern states. There are people in these states who have been greatly impacted by the war on drugs.

CEOCFO: *US President Joe Biden is looking to decriminalize marijuana nationwide. Would you tell us how that will impact your efforts?*

Mr. West: Hopefully, this impacts what I am doing to the point where governors would act with President Joe Biden and say, "Maybe I need to look into my own state where I am incarcerating individuals, and they are paying tremendous amounts of tax dollars, approximately \$32,000 a year to house an inmate." Therefore, the hope is that they will look at it from a financial perspective to save tax dollars, but also from a humanity perspective for those sitting in prison for years.

CEOCFO: *In 2023, you were honored by Kansas City. What did that mean for you?*

Mr. West: It meant a great deal to me to be honored by Kansas City. I live here, so to be honored by the Mayor of Kansas City was amazing, because the mayor is a voice for how cannabis should be viewed. It also says a great deal about this city, especially being from Stockton, California, but they welcomed me with open arms.

CEOCFO: *Are there any case studies that you can share with us about the mission you are on?*

Mr. West: Someone I would like to mention is Kevin Allen, who is serving a life sentence for 2 grams of marijuana. He never committed a violent offense. He was caught with cannabis three times, small amounts, and on the third time they said he was a habitual offender.

If you look at the state of Louisiana, and the current view on cannabis, in the university (Louisiana State University) they are growing it and their students are researching it, it's incredible. However, I just hope they do not forget about the people who are serving time that does not fit the crime.

I was recently working on a case where the sentence got commuted because the Supreme Court said that it was an unjust sentence. Kevin's sentence was commuted to 35 years, but Kevin has already been in prison for nearly 12 years now for possession of 2 grams of marijuana. I just hope the state sees the humanity issue for someone like Kevin.

CEOCFO: *The impact on families is also important?*

Mr. West: Yes, people are missing their daughter's birthdays, or seeing their mothers pass away. That is real.

CEOCFO: *I would encourage our readers to read your story and also when they are in stores in Missouri to look for you brand. What is the brand name they should look for?*

Mr. West: The brand name is Donte West by Illicit. In the state of Missouri, Illicit has sold over \$100 million worth of marijuana. The industry has grossed over a couple of billion dollars already and it has only been legal since December 8, 2022. This is one of the top states in America to have a business in cannabis.

CEOCFO: *What are your goals and objectives? What will future growth look like for you?*

Mr. West: Having attended Rutgers Law School, my next goal is to become an attorney, so that I can be even more involved in helping those incarcerated. I am starting a program in California, where in a couple of years I will be able to take the California bar exam.

I am thankful to Illicit Gardens for giving me the opportunity to be the Chief of Business Development and to be an executive. Their company has over 350 employees, and being one of the first three employees is an amazing feeling. I am lucky to be with people who really care.