

# Cannabis Questions

**PROFILE:** Jacqueline Rosales tells how her market research firm focuses on marijuana and COVID.

By **MARK R. MADLER** Staff Reporter

In January **Jacqueline Rosales** became president of **ISA Group**, a Van Nuys market research firm, where she had previously headed up one of its online divisions, MySoapBox. The company was founded in 1982 and specializes in giving insights into customer behavior for its clients, which include **IBM Corp.**, **Autodesk Inc.**, **Whole Foods**, **Los Angeles County** and **USC**. ISA has developed a reputation for fast tactical research. "That has been where our biggest evolution is and continuing to be able to connect with consumers through technology where they are at in a very convenient way," Rosales said. "People do not want to answer questions for 40 minutes on a telephone anymore." Rosales spoke to the Business Journal about why ISA started doing market research into cannabis, what people are buying post pandemic and why she admires quarterback **Tom Brady**.

## Question: Where are consumers coming from post-pandemic?

**Answer:** They are more focused on self-sufficiency tools. How am I going to do things at home? People are really focused on transparency and authenticity with companies. We work with brands and they are used to behavioral patterns. But peoples' days and day parts are so different. It's not a routine where you get up and take your kid to pre-school and go to work. It became a real shift for consumers when they suddenly didn't have their daily routines. I feel that some of the big shifts are around self care. There is more acceptance for things like cannabis. They want to work with brands that are being authentic. We are seeing a fluidity in the consumer. Cooking at home, beauty care at home have all shifted. The way that people want to be advertised to is also very different. It is about connecting with that consumer and making that consumer really want to feel you and who you are.

## Are there products or categories that people are buying more of?

Oh, yes. I was talking about a change in routine and in one of our polls 90 percent of people noticed a change in their grocery routine. We are seeing 59 percent of people are washing their hands more, which means that bar and liquid soap (purchases) are up 65 percent, hand sanitizer is up 838 percent. Some things that you may think about are athletic clothes – you know comfy style clothes. Any type of consumer video technology. People are buying gym equipment. Things like that is what we are starting to see.

## Why get into cannabis market research?

We work with a lot of consumer packaged goods clients, entertainment clients and beauty and beverage clients. My job is to find out what is going to happen in the future. We saw the cannabis (market) really starting to evolve. We were one of the first to start doing consumer research on cannabis. Then we had legalization in additional states. ... We saw a huge, huge opportunity to be part of an emerging industry that we believe will have an impact. We started to explore the questions. We have two years worth of data where we talked to 1,000 folks every two weeks about cannabis and their usage.

## How did you start using cannabis?

In 2015, my family and I were in a horrific car accident. I have had many surgeries and I have multiple still pending. I have a brain injury and a disease called CRPS and I have had back surgery, two shoulders, knees and legs. I was out for quite a while. My team was



Surveyor:  
**Jacqueline Rosales** of  
**ISA Group.**

amazing and kept things going. As a result of that accident, the first thing the doctors wanted to do was assign a lot of narcotics, a lot of prescription medication. I was very adverse to taking exceeding amounts of opiates and benzodiazepines. Through a very good health care team we were able to explore cannabis. We weren't able to fully eliminate my medicine. But cannabis has been able to help me.

## Do you have any insights into the cannabis market?

Oh, yes, I have tons. We just released some very interesting information about usage in the workplace and usage at home. My favorite group is our boomerang group. It is folks that we study really closely that maybe in the 60s and 70s used cannabis and then stopped and now that they're older are having aches and pains and coming back into the market. I find that group so fascinating. Along with the spend, we are finding there are certain things people like about dispensaries.

## How do you find the people to respond to surveys?

We own multiple online communities. We own one called MySoapBox and people join the site and answer surveys and get all kinds of rewards. Secondly, we own Green Time, a community of cannabis consumers. Right now consumers are anxious to answer questions as more people are at home. We are getting upwards to 15,000 a day that are joining and saying they want to participate and earn gift cards.

## What advice would you give to someone looking to start a business?

Number one, hire people who are smarter than you. Two, you cannot get anywhere without the people. I feel that if we have the greatest team that we can do anything. ... I think you should also take risks. Fail often. If you think you only want to get it right, you'll have a real struggle as an entrepreneur. You have to be nimble and ready to pivot. The pandemic was a great example. But as you are launching a business, that's just the way it goes. And finally, think about what society needs in the future.

## How did you prepare for the top job at ISA?

I have done all of the things in this industry.

I was an interviewer, a supervisor, I've gone through all of the stages. So I understand what we do at all levels.

## What is your favorite story about running the business?

**Michael Halberstam**, former chairman, and **Anthony Kretzmer**, former president, were very casual gentlemen and they were known for wearing Converse Chuck Taylor sneakers every day to work. During the pandemic after their retirement, I received a package that was "the passing of the Chucks." They bought me white Converse sneakers that represented their passing of the Chucks to me and they wrote very funny things on them.

## What motivates you?

People. I am one of those people that could run a pencil factory as long as I get the opportunity to work with the people, grow the people. In our business that we have here we are working with consumers directly to get answers to questions; we are working with our clients, some of the biggest brands in the world; and then we have our staff. So the thing that motivates me is really building a real cool culture and a place for people to come work. I have people who have worked for me for 16 years, 20 years, who follow me wherever I go. That for me is the biggest motivation.

## What do you like least about your job?

Dressing up. (Laughs). That's a tough one. I like the challenge, I think right now what I like least is as I get less involved in the day-to-day, it becomes more a struggle for me because I really enjoyed that part. I would say that right now it is I make that shift into president, it's the separating from folks you worked with for so long. It is a transition.

## What's the biggest challenge?

Right now leading a company during a global pandemic when there was also such civil unrest. It becomes very difficult with how you navigate fiscal responsibilities with humanitarianism. ... The biggest challenge for me is trying to combine being empathetic with the fiscal responsibilities with the humanitarianism with following California labor laws, which in itself is not always very easy.



## JACQUELINE ROSALES

**POSITION:** President

**COMPANY:** ISA Group

**EDUCATION:** University of Oregon, Bachelor of Science in advertising

**MOST ADMIRE PERSON:** Tom Brady

**PERSONAL:** Married for 17 years to husband Marco; one daughter, Antonella, who is a sophomore in high school; two dogs and one cat.

**INTERESTS:** Athletics, hiking, sailing, music.

## So how did you deal with COVID?

Everybody that we could we moved to work from home. Things came to a standstill. We have another office in Sherman Oaks that is all face-to-face business. Suddenly you have a big unit of business that could no longer operate. Everything was closed. ... We pivoted and focused on COVID and cannabis. That was the way we still did well in 2020.

## How about coming back to the office?

We are still feeling the effects. We were originally going to open up again on July 7. Then we had a Sept. 13 date. Now we have a Jan. 16 date. The most important thing is you have to be fluid right now. ... Let's not focus on what we are losing but focus on what we can maybe pick up.

## Who is the person you most admire?

(Former New England Patriots quarterback) Tom Brady. I am sucker for an underdog. I am not a football fanatic by any means. I watch the draft every year. I don't watch football games, I like to watch the draft. For someone who was picked last, and nobody wants this person and grows to be one of the most amazing athletes of all time and now 20 something years later at 40 something years old is still winning the championships, I love the idea of going from last to best.