Basic business sense dictates it is better to sell more, yet that is not entirely true in the case of coffeeshops. This is because the government limits the amount a coffeeshop can sell to a single customer in a day. In Emir’s words: ‘The maximum is 5 grams. Sometimes people come in and ask [for more], and we tell them, “It is not possible. It is 5 grams [maximum]”.’ This limit is of little concern to most customers, but a source of conflict with some. ‘One time with some English guys’, recalled Kamila, ‘they wanted to buy a lot from the coffeeshop. I just said I couldn’t do it. And then one of them started: “But for you it is good business selling one time big, rather than selling the small packages.” I told him, “No!” I think I was a little bit abrupt.’ Rather than drop the issue, the customer repeated: “Do it! Do it!” It really was not nice. That was out of the question, what he asked me to do.’

Personnel restrict their sales because, as Luca explained, ‘The police can just stop anybody and check your pocket here. That is allowed, and we have obvious [plastic] bags [that we put the sales into, revealing the cannabis is from us]. Five is five, not more. It’s not worth it.’ In other words, the extra profit does not outweigh the risk of punishment. To quote Guus: ‘That’s the rule. It’s a risk, so I sell [only up to] 5. You have to keep on the rules.’ Dean put it this way: ‘We don’t like to do that because if you do just one mistake like that, we have to close the shop.’ And James declared: ‘I know certain places do [sell more than 5 grams], but there is no point jeopardising the business for something silly like that. You play the game by the rules, and it makes it easier for you.’

To James’s observation, the 5 grams limit does get exceeded. Mike described an experience in which ‘this guy came around 10:30 [am] and he buys 5 grams, then he goes away, comes back at 11 [am] and buys another 5 grams, and then again at tea time buying 5 grams. I saw it all these times, like every half an hour he comes and buys 5 grams’.
According to personnel, coffeeshops violate the 5 grams rule more than any other rule (see Table 0.5). Examples are presented in the next section. First, I should note that some participants claim that they obey the rule, but are unsure of their colleagues’ activities. When Claire was asked about selling more than 5 grams to a customer in a day, she responded: ‘Me, no. The others, I don’t know. I can’t be sure.’ To the same question, Anna responded, ‘No, I don’t do that’ was Anna’s reply to the same question, but of her colleagues she was less confident: ‘I am afraid that sometimes they do, but I always tell them not to do it. It is not necessary. It can ruin their job.’ Because of this, and other issues mentioned later, coffeeshops probably do break the 5 grams rule more often than reported.

Ignorance-based violations stem from misunderstanding the rule. The ban is on selling more than 5 grams per person per day, but some personnel think it only prohibits selling more than 5 grams at a time. Stijn is an example of this. He explained: ‘I am not going to sell you more than 5 grams. I tell you to come back. The rule is you can go out and come back in and buy 5 grams again.’ Knowing that is not true, I questioned him further. ‘I thought it was in one day?’ He answered adamantly: ‘No, no, no. You can go to your hotel, then come back. It is a possession thing.’ Presumably Stijn arrived at this idea by conflating the coffeeshop rule with the Dutch policy on personal possession. It more or less stipulates that the police will take no action against persons found with 5 grams or less.1

The ban is also violated by personnel who do understand it properly. Despite wanting to obey the rule, they mess up due to ignorance of colleagues’ actions. Lizzie alluded to how it happens: ‘It is possible that someone [a customer] comes in during the morning shift or comes in late at night, so that it is two different staff [that they buy from]. It is possible, but it is two different shifts.’ What may occur is that a customer comes in during the first shift (e.g. 9 am to 4 pm) and buys, say, 3 grams of cannabis, then returns during the next shift (e.g. 4 pm to 11 pm) and purchases the same amount again. This is a violation of the rule, although the dealers are not aware of it. To try and prevent this from happening, coffeeshop menus spell out, ‘Maximum 5 grams per Customer’, ‘Maximum 5 grams a day a person’ and ‘We are only allowed to sell 5 grams per person per day’.

At any given coffeeshop, multiple factors explain why the rule is broken. When I discussed the issue with Gwen, she denied knowledge of a violation – but subsequently stipulated that she does not know whether workers break the rule, then admitted she would break the rule if a customer came back at multiple points in the day, and that this may happen without her realising it. Referring to the 5 grams rule, she initially
stated: ‘We are very strict on that because we get punished for that really bad, so absolutely not. We really try to stick to the rules with basically everything.’ Then she clarified this: ‘If I say “No” [what I really mean is] it is not [broken] to my knowledge, because I can never be certain, of course.’ At that point I posed a hypothetical question. What would she do if I came in and ordered 6 grams? She thought about it and hypothesised: ‘I would give you 5 grams now and maybe would say if you come back in four or five hours [then I’ll sell you more]. But, of course, some people may come in here four times a day and I can’t tell.’

**Big single purchases**

Personnel cannot always blame violations on ignorance. Some do make sales despite knowing the sum exceeds the daily allowance.\(^2\) Asked if this happened at Alike All Over, Jack admitted that ‘it has been known to occur’, but refused to disclose further details. Asked the same question, Ruben simply commented ‘Sure’. I followed up by asking him what was the largest amount that he would sell to a customer. He smiled and said simply, ‘I would rather not say’. Again such evasions are revealing, as they show that personnel worry about being sanctioned for violations.

It is doubtful that any coffeeshop fully complies with the 5 grams rule. I watched violations unfold while sitting near the dealer counter, especially on busy days at busy coffeeshops. This mostly happens when customers order a few grams of ‘this’ and a few grams of ‘that’, the total exceeding 5 grams. I never observed a dealer refuse, though sometimes I saw their facial expression change while fulfilling such orders. They had the look of someone thinking harder than they should be in this situation. Perhaps this is because they were not only weighing the cannabis, but also evaluating the risk. Sometimes dealers looked as though everything was normal – perhaps because they were too busy to think about it, better at acting or reckoned the prospect of being caught was too low to worry about.

By far the largest sales I heard about involved Man in the Bottle. When I asked Selma for the weight of their biggest sale, her reply was ‘a kilo’. Then she described the largest exchange of which she had been a part: ‘Me, personally, I did 400 grams’ – about €4,000 worth. ‘He [my boss] told me: “OK, you go get the stuff.” You don’t meet in the coffeeshop, you meet by McDonald’s. It is like 200 metres away from here, so I walked to this [place] and there we exchanged [the cannabis and money]. I felt like a very wrong dealer! Half a criminal.’
Man in the Bottle is also the place of the largest sale I saw. I was sitting at the counter talking with Selma, her colleague Alex and their boss. A young white guy walked into the coffeeshop. Apparently a trade had been planned with him; I heard talk of 200 grams and all the personnel were aware of what was going on. Alex gathered the cannabis into a small black rubbish bag, then handed it over to the customer in exchange for cash. For some reason he wanted to pay in part with a US$100 bill. Not sure what that was worth in euros, a discussion about the current exchange rate ensued. They arrived at $1 for €0.64, until Amber pointed out that an exchange fee would be required, making the rate $1 for €0.60. The personnel were annoyed about the American money; before he walked out they told the customer to bring only euros in the future.

Unfortunately I learned only a little about the proverbial ‘backstage’ of coffeeshop sales. I have no idea what percentage of coffeeshops make large sales, as Man in the Bottle does, nor how often, nor in what amounts. What I do know, however, is such sales rarely occur on the ‘frontstage’; that is, in full view of the public. When the 5 grams rule is broken at the dealer counter, it is almost always by small amounts. Hanna unabashedly acknowledged the fact: ‘More than 5 grams? Yes, of course. The most I sell, 10 grams.’ Emma admitted that the most she sold was ‘about 10 to 15 grams. The bags are already made; [for example] if they want some hash, that is a gram and a half. So, if somebody buys 10 bags that is 15 grams’.

Perhaps coffeeshops would visibly break the 5 grams rule more often, and in more egregious amounts, if there was greater demand. But there is little reason for locals to stock up in a city where every adult user can buy what they want for personal use daily, from many coffeeshops. The lack of desire to stockpile applies also to most customers visiting Amsterdam for a limited period. For this reason Imran did not perceive compliance with the 5 grams rule to be an issue:

It is not even a question, it is not happening, because we do not have locals. The tourists don’t buy 5 grams. It is, usually, only 1 or 2 grams. We have tourists, and they just come and try one gram here and one gram there. They will not buy a lot at one time. They are here, on average, for two or three days. How much can you smoke? Five grams is too much. So what they will do, they will buy 1 or 2 grams, try another coffeeshop and [buy more from there].

You could read into these words that if anyone is buying more than 5 grams at a time, it is locals. Yet for even the heaviest smokers, 5 grams
is enough to last a few days. The quality is high, so a user does not have to consume much to get that way. In jurisdictions that prohibit cannabis possession entirely, it may be rational for a user to buy larger quantities. First, this means they can make fewer purchases; second, they spend less time travelling with it, which in theory reduces apprehension risk. However, that is irrelevant in Amsterdam because users do not fear being caught by police. They do not risk trouble as long as they have no more than 5 grams on their person – a further reason not to buy more than that at a coffeeshop.

Those issues reduce the demand for large purchases, although other factors promote them, which I shall examine shortly. First, however, I should add that even if buyers are interested in acquiring relatively large amounts of cannabis, success does not hinge on enticing coffeeshops to break the 5 grams rule. Customers can easily sidestep the government-set limit by buying the maximum amount at multiple coffeeshops. ‘If they want more than 5 grams’, remarked Finn, ‘they just step across the street, buy 5 grams, step around the corner, buy 5 grams more.’ All of this is to say that coffeeshops are not under much pressure from purchasers to sell more than 5 grams.

Two groups are known to order larger quantities than permitted. One consists of people living in a nearby country, such as Belgium, France or Germany. I observed these tourists make prohibitively large purchases at Man in the Bottle. By train, a trip between Amsterdam and Paris or Brussels takes five or three hours respectively. I mention that because French-speaking persons wearing train uniforms (resembling those worn by airline attendants) came into the coffeeshop, stocked up on their favorite cannabis varieties, put it in their bags and headed back to Central Station for their trip home. Though I have no direct knowledge of this, it is easy to imagine that Europeans living outside the Netherlands travel to Amsterdam and buy relatively large quantities of cannabis; they then resell it upon returning home. That possibility is indeed why the 5 grams rule exists in the first place. Years before, the limit was 30 grams, but, over time, that was deemed to be too high. Past and present, this international problem is much more associated with Dutch border cities than Amsterdam, located in the heart of the country.

Undercover police are the other group suspected of requesting more than 5 grams from coffeeshops. ‘You never know who it is’, reflected Adam. ‘Some people are very paranoid about it, and think there is someone spying on the coffeeshop.’ Though Stijn misunderstood the rule, he said of selling more than 5 grams at a time: ‘It doesn’t happen because most of the time here, we are very strict. The police come in every once
in a while, and we have a good name. You would be very stupid if you do that, because sometimes the police send people to buy it, to buy more than 5 grams. They just check it.’ There is a belief that undercover police observe coffeeshops before conducting the formal check. This was mentioned after the police check on At Last (see Chapter 1); I overheard the owner tell Maud that he was convinced undercover officers had been inside the night before.

Personnel may worry about undercover policing, but it is clearly not an absolute deterrent. This is because they believe they can use social cues to distinguish undercover officers from normal customers. Maud confessed to breaking the 5 grams rule, distributing ‘6 or 7 [grams], not more than that’. She thought it is harmless: ‘Yeah, I have done it, but I don’t take risks. I know they are not from the cops.’ The type of customer cast as a potential undercover cop is white, male, middle-aged or older, with a native Dutch accent. Thinking this, Selma sold large quantities to anyone except them (and, as discussed in Chapter 1, she hesitated to take samples from them). When I asked Hanna if she sells more than allowed to anyone, she responded in similar vein: ‘Depends [what] the people are like. People who are Dutch, I wouldn’t do it. Maybe they are from the police or something or they go to police.’ I asked what about if I asked for more than 5 grams. ‘Yes’, she answered, ‘I would give you.’

Discounts and freebies

Related to how much customers purchase is how much they pay. Chapter 2 details the range and normal cost of coffeeshop products. Another issue is variation between customers in how much they are asked to pay for any given product, such as a particular strain of marijuana, at a given coffeeshop. Most people pay the advertised amount, but some are given discounts and freebies. I learned of three circumstances in which discounts are given.

One scenario is standard business practice: charging less when a customer purchases more. ‘The more you buy’, said Luuk, ‘the cheaper it is.’ Hassan told me: ‘I give deals on 5 gram bags. If you buy 5 grams, you get a deal on it: 50 cents discount per gram. Normally a gram is €8. If you take 5 grams, you are going to get €7.50 [per] gram.’ Selma admitted that Man in the Bottle sells cannabis at 50 per cent discount when people buy 100 grams or more. For instance, a gram of Jack Herer is listed as €12 on their menu, but sold at €6 if a person purchases the requisite amount. Her coffeeshop also gave a discount for customers that ‘take
5 grams. It says a discount on the menu [for that amount]. Selma went on to say: ‘But then when people take more like 15 or 20 grams, we can make even a nicer price. Then it is really cheap because instead of €70, it is going to be €60 because the normal price is €7 a gram. So if you buy 10 grams it is [usually] €70; we give it to you for €65 and we make this extra discount for €60.’

As Selma mentioned, quantity discounts are advertised on cannabis menus, such as one that reads, ‘Special at 5 grams. 10% Discount’. Other coffeeshop menus offer White Widow at €8 for 1 gram or €38 for 5 grams (a saving of €2 per gram) and Juicy Fruit at €12 for a gram or €55 for 5 grams (a saving of €5 per gram). Quantity discounts start lower than 5 grams in some establishments, such as one selling Vanilla Kush, among other products, at €15 for one gram or €43 for 3 grams (a saving of €2). The menu at another coffeeshop listed the amount of grams given in exchange for €10, €20, €40 or €50. For example, a customer there can buy a gram of Northern Lights for €8.50 or get 1.3 grams for €10. They can also get 3 grams for €20; 6.4 grams for €40; and 8.5 grams for €50.

That sliding scale raises the question of how coffeeshops are able to advertise selling more than 5 grams. A menu communicates the answer: ‘We are only allowed to sell 5 grams per customer per day. Larger deals are for groups only.’ They openly sell more than 5 grams to a person, if that customer is with someone else. Personnel calculate they can sell up to 10 grams to two customers, 15 grams to three and so on. When Charlotte asserted ‘It is written clearly on the menu that you can buy more than 5 grams, but then it says in little letters’ – I interrupted to comment, ‘If you have more than one person’ – and she responded, ‘Yes, that is the trick’.

The trick is within the rules, but it does lead to violations. A person who wishes to buy more than 5 grams can simply walk in with a bunch of friends who, in fact, have nothing to do with the purchase. Or customers can lie about being with a large group of people to see if the dealer calls their bluff. Stijn said of such deceit: ‘If people are with more people, then you can sell them more. Some of them lie, and say they are with 20 people upstairs, trying to buy whatever he wants.’

The other two discount scenarios are more social (than simply economic) and interrelated: coffeeshops offer cheaper prices to employees, some of whom, in turn, offer ‘their discount’ to their friends, workers from the area or neighbourhood residents. In addition to quantity-based discounts, Selma gave better bargains to ‘the locals – they get some extra discount. I can make, instead of €14 for the bag, I can make it €12 for the bag. I can just make it myself a bit how I think the person is. I write it down just as discount. I make a line around it [on the accounting sheet,]
and sometimes I write down if I know who it is or I say [it is] a neighbour.’ James described his employee discount and how he passes it on to others, partially rationalising his social altruism in economic terms:

We get 5 per cent discount as staff and, yeah, I give my staff discount to some of my friends. Five per cent is not a huge amount. I mean certainly [I give it] for all the other dealers [who work at other coffeeshops] because I’ve drunk and socialised in most of these places. If I am giving the dealers from Doomsday and Whole Truth their weed [for personal use], and [in return] someone [who] comes in and asks them where they buy their weed, they haven’t got any qualms about saying ‘No Return’. I mean, you have to promote your own coffeeshop. We have 18 or 19 weeds, whereas most places have only got like 6 or 7. So if the dealers are buying at your coffeeshop then obviously they are going to send more business when people ask for something different. So I give them a discount because it is worth it for the business, I think.

Perhaps it seems odd that personnel should buy their cannabis from coffeeshops other than the one(s) they work at. But the market is sufficiently varied in the price and quality of available products to motivate employees to buy their marijuana and hash from competitors. Probably more would do so were it not for receiving discounts from their place of work. Selma and Alex told me that without their ‘special price’, they would not buy from Man in the Bottle; its normal prices were too high.

Not all coffeeshops offer discounts. When I asked Wouter if any of Live Long’s clients get a better bargain, he denied it. ‘No, everybody gets the same. Even if they are my best friend, they get the same amount.’ Maud agreed. ‘No, because I have to pay it [full price] myself. Even if people are nice, I just give them the normal weight.’ Gijs gave a similar response: ‘No, we never do that. Everybody is equal, everybody gets the same price. There is no discount for anybody. If people say, “If I buy 5 grams can I get a discount?” the answer is “No, everybody [already] gets [a] discount. Go to the other shops, compare the prices from them with our prices, and you will see that everybody is a winner”.’

Personnel can charge less for purchases, but not give more weight. This is due to the two ways in which coffeeshops sell loose cannabis: the pre-weigh and free-weigh systems (p. 30). For example, Emma, who dealt with the pre-weigh system, said of discounts, ‘It is impossible [to give extra cannabis], everything is already counted. The bags are counted and I just have to come up with the money. I can’t give any discounts’. The
other way coffeeshops sell loose cannabis is to ‘weigh it up in front of the customer, on the counter on a scale’, as Hassan did at Shrine. These scales are accurate to tenths or hundredths of a gram, and personnel are accountable for every little bit. Referring to giving extra weight, Thomas observed, ‘I can’t do that because everything is in the system and is very specific, to 0.1 gram. So I can’t do that for anyone’.

While some coffeeshops give everyone the same price, offering non-cannabis freebies is common practice among them. ‘Everybody pays the normal thing’, remarked Mara, though she added, ‘When people come every time and they sit here and drink, they get coffee for free sometimes. They sit here, they take 4 coffees they pay for 2. But we don’t make different prices for different people.’ Gijs mentioned that his workers do something similar, except it comes out of their on-the-job drink allowance: ‘They can give away drinks. Everybody who works on the floor has €15 to spend in his shift on drinks, coffee or whatever is available in the shop. This is hard to spend in a day. You are not going to drink eight bottles of coke. You don’t do that, so you can give away some to customers. This is only with the drinks.’ He also told a funny story about a promotional cannabis item that they gave away, until it got out of hand:

We had this rule that if it is somebody’s birthday you can give him a pre-rolled joint, ‘Happy Birthday it’s for you’. You put it in the computer as ‘given away as a pre-rolled joint’, but I stopped that yesterday because it was getting out of hand. I had a feeling that some of the staff working there were like, ‘Oh it’s my birthday today’. So that’s why I put a stop to it yesterday, and that’s going to be for a few weeks yet.

Rip-offs

Whereas some buyers pay a lower price per gram, others are defrauded or ‘ripped off’. To be clear, I am not referring to cases in which customers’ experiences fall short of their expectations about quality. An example is a reviewer on Coffeeshop Directory who complained: ‘My husband ate half a piece of hash cake and I ate only one bonbon. After waiting an hour to two hours, we felt NOTHING! Next day we ate a whole piece of cake and, again, nothing! Were we ripped off because we were Americans?’ Another reviewer posted: ‘I was ripped off with five grams of Caramello. When burned, it bubbled, smelt really bad; no stone whatsoever, just a sore throat and headache. Will never darken their door again.’ Though
quality complaints might be legitimate, they could also be due to unreasonable expectations or inexperience in getting high.\textsuperscript{13}

In this context a ‘rip-off’ or ‘fraud’ strictly refers to cannabis/money transfers in which the advertised price per unit does not match the amount received. Examples of this also appear on \textit{ Coffeeshop Directory}.\textsuperscript{14} A customer wrote: ‘He definitely under-weighed us. Their scales have been tampered with. Beware. We went in, then went out. Crap.’ Another protested: ‘He [a friend] purchased a gram of Maco Haze, but didn’t actually see the budtender weigh it. When my mate went to roll up, he commented on the size of the deal and I must admit it looked well lightweight.’ Whether customers are suspicious or certain of being ripped off depends on their ability to check the weight on a scale. ‘I’m convinced’, one reviewer moaned, ‘the bags weren’t quite the size they were meant to be. I mean we didn’t have scales on us, but from my previous experience in Amsterdam that day I thought 3 grams would have been bigger.’

In contradiction to those accounts, personnel were adamant that everyone gets at least a fair deal. When I asked Hassan and Mara about defrauding customers, he and she asserted, respectively, ‘No, no, I don’t have the need to do that’ and ‘No, we don’t do that’. Only one dealer, Claire, confessed to (barely) ripping off a customer:

We weigh it. Sometimes I have customers, like before I had French people who were a real pain in the ass because they are too lazy to talk English. They talk French to me. They are very arrogant, and sometimes they think they can do everything here. They still talk French to me and then they have big attitude and I just give them 0.9 instead of 1 gram. I hate you because you don’t treat me like a normal person, so I give you just 0.9! It is the wrong thing to do, but [I did it].

As with giving discounts, the manner in which coffeeshops sell loose cannabis affects opportunity to defraud clients. When questioned about giving better or worse deals, Luuk just answered, ‘No, it’s already in the bag’, indicating that this precludes the choice. Yet depending on how long the marijuana has been bagged, and how long it is dried beforehand, pre-weighed bags can lose weight and thereby falsely advertise the purchase price. I asked Luca if this ever happens. ‘They are dry when you buy them’, he confidently replied. ‘People don’t want to buy wet weed. Why would you want to buy wet weed, man? It needs to be dry.’ However, customers complain of this problem, which they prove valid by weighing purchases with their own scales. ‘I took a scale with me’, shared one reviewer.
'Got Silverhaze for €15 for 2.8 grams, but it was 2.1 plus 0.7 packaging.'

‘They are selling the weed in pre-weighted bags and they try to fool you’, wrote another reviewer. ‘I bought some Orange Bud and some K2. Every weed in there is 3 grams. I bought two bags, didn’t smoke anything. Back at home my scale showed me exactly 2 grams (Orange Bud) and 2.1 grams (K2) without the bags. With my friends’ bags it was the same. Shame on them!’

Rather than weigh it themselves, customers ask personnel to do so in front of them. ‘Many customers ask me “Can you just weigh it for me?”’ said Kamila. ‘If you don’t weigh it out in front of the customer, they can ask you to weigh it for you. Some German people [for example] came in and asked to check, and I said, “Yes, let them check it”. Also, we have to put one [empty] package [on the scale to see what it weighs, too]. It is about zero, but sometimes it is a bit more.’ I asked her why she agrees to such requests, to which she simply said: ‘You should do. It is good for your business.’

Customers do the same at free-weigh establishments. I saw this at Man in the Bottle. Shortly after opening, three young French guys came in and ordered 5 grams. Selma weighed that amount, bagged it and handed it over. For whatever reason, the customer requested that she weigh it again. She put it back on the scale and invited him to have a look at the reading, but he declined. Selma re-bagged it and told him: ‘If you pay for 5 grams, you get 5 grams.’ He took the marijuana and left with his friends, at which point Selma turned to me and commented that it was stupid for him to have the cannabis re-weighed, but not to look at the scale.

Compared to the pre-weigh system, the free-weigh system seems less likely to result, intentionally or not, in ripping off customers. After all, the weight literally reads off at the point of sale, which eliminates the opportunity for losing weight (due to the drying process) or mislabeling bags. This openness should protect against fraud by making the amount clearly visible to anyone. Yet the free-weigh system has its own problems. Some dealers are cheeky enough to test customers. This happened to one reviewer, who wrote: ‘The dealer with the baseball cap ripped me at 0.2 grams on a 5 gram deal. Even as I told him that was not enough, he just gave me a smile!’

More often, rip-offs spring from the difficulty of weighing cannabis to precise amounts, such as 1.00 gram. Exactness matters because giving even a tenth of a gram too much is bad for the bottom line, but giving too little can cause conflict with customers, which is bad for business too. Getting the weight right takes meticulousness and time. Typically
the dealer starts the process by placing on the scale whatever amount of cannabis is obviously needed to get near the ordered amount, but no more. It is better to go up in weight than down because the former is less likely to annoy customers. From there, the dealer will add pinches of cannabis until the gram count is on the dot. If it is not quite there, the dealer places tiny amounts on the scale until the reading bumps up a tenth of a gram.

If a computer-based scale is used, the dealer continues that last step until satisfied with the amount, then presses a button that logs it. Sometimes a dealer jumps the gun by pressing the button too soon – from the customer’s perspective. On one occasion I was near a customer who requested a gram of marijuana from the dealer. The worker proceeded to free-weigh the weed, but the highest the scale got to was 0.99 gram. Rather than keep working to get the perfect amount, the dealer simply pressed the button. He handed the bag over to the buyer, who paid for it without mentioning its low weight.

Such discrepancies rarely, if ever, work in the customer’s favour. If the total is not exactly what it should be, it is almost always less. Yet at what point does a discrepancy become defined as fraud? That depends on who you ask. I suspect that many stoners frown at a dime bag weighing 0.9 gram, though this is only off by 10 per cent and practically too small to see. And most may agree that 0.99 gram is close enough. If the price per gram is €10, that is equivalent to throwing away 10 cents. Some buyers, then, will want the purchase to be no less than 0.999, which leaves a single cent on the table; even that may be wanted back.

The point here is less about transactions involving money and cannabis than the principle of fairness.\textsuperscript{16} Still, losing a few cents may seem trivial. It is not to staff, however, as they understand that small differences add up. Gijs and I discussed this issue, a conversation that began when I asked if Escape Clause ever rips off its customers.

\textbf{Gijs:} You don’t want to do that. We don’t do that, and we can’t do that because we have a computer screen standing there that is linked to the scale, so the customer can see exactly what he gets. Everybody gets what he pays for. It’s such an accurate system. If you want to weigh a gram [for example], I always tell people [dealers to] start from 0.8 or 0.9. If you start breaking off from higher than a gram [1.2 for example], there is always the chance it could go to 1.1 gram, and if that happens with a 100 customers you are going to miss out 0.1 gram 100 times.
Me: So how accurate do you feel a coffeeshop should be? At what point is the customer getting ripped off? I mean, maybe 0.99 isn’t a rip-off, but is 0.98 or 0.97?

Gijs: You are talking about 10 cents. That can happen. Some customers, they see that and they go, ‘Hey man, that’s not €10, that’s €9.90’. You say ‘Oh fuck, sorry, here is 10 cents’. Next time he won’t ask for that any more.

Me: So that actually happens?

Gijs: That has happened, yes, that has happened. So you go, ‘Sorry man, here’s 10 cents or would you like this little crumb of weed with it?’ Then they are like, ‘Oh fuck’ and they feel embarrassed, like ‘Why did I ask for 10 cents?’

Me: The customer could argue it both ways.

Gijs: They can, they can. In the old days, like I say I’ve smoked 30 years, if it was a little bit over a gram, I’d leave it. But you can’t afford that if you have a shop like Escape Clause. I mean there are a lot of customers coming in. If you keep giving away to every customer, at the end of the line – because we have computer printouts of the shift – you can see exactly that you gave away too much.

Notes

1. See Verdurmen, Ketelaars and van Laar 2005.
2. For additional evidence of coffeeshops breaking this rule, see Hazekamp 2006.
3. For information on the frontstage versus backstage of social life, see Goffman 1959.
4. But see Becker 2015.
5. See Jacques and Wright 2015.
6. See Verdurmen, Ketelaars and van Laar 2005. In other sorts of retail cannabis purchases (i.e. outside coffeeshops), it is typical for buyers to limit the amount purchased (Davenport and Caulkins 2016).
7. See MHWS 2003.
8. See Advisory Committee on Drugs Policy 2009.
9. For information on drug dealers’ ability to discredit supposed buyers as undercover officers, see Jacobs 1993, 1996. On discrediting stigmatised individuals generally, see Goffman 1963.
10. For information on drug dealers giving discounts and gifts to users, see Coomber 2006; Jacobs 1999; Jacobs and Wright 2015.
11. For information on quantity discounts with respect to illicit drugs, see Pacula and Lundberg 2014.
13. See Becker 2015.
14. For additional evidence of coffeeshops defrauding customers, see Hazekamp 2006.
15. For information on demonstrating one’s self as not having a stigmatised trait, see Goffman 1963.
16. For information on the psychology of pricing, see Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler 1986.