

marketing matters



tina caputo

Growers Need Marketing, Too

When people in the wine industry talk about marketing, they're usually applying the term to finished bottles of wine. But vintners aren't the only ones who need to worry about marketing—it's essential for growers, too.

A good marketing strategy can help a vineyard owner build a reputation among potential clients, and even consumers—resulting in greater demand and higher grape prices. The idea is not simply to sell each year's crop for the greatest possible profit, but to sell it to buyers who reflect or enhance your brand image.

While some growers are happy selling their fruit to high-volume wineries, many are now looking for ways to target boutiques that produce high-end, vineyard-designated wines. In

HIGHLIGHTS

- ☛ Vintners aren't the only ones who need to worry about marketing—it's essential for growers too.
- ☛ A good marketing strategy can help growers build a reputation among potential clients, and even consumers—resulting in greater demand and higher grape prices.
- ☛ Getting out into the industry on a regular basis to tell the story of your vineyard is an essential element of a good vineyard-marketing program.

either case, developing a good marketing plan is the key to success.

"Marketing is definitely what growers are thinking about everywhere in the state," says Karen Ross, president of the California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG). "That's why our board

chairman is determined to raise money for marketing programs."

Earlier this year CAWG held a series of "Smart Marketer" workshops across the state that offered tips for developing a vineyard-marketing plan.

Aptos, Calif.-based agricultural consultant Rodger Wasson, who

Promoting Your Vineyard Brand

Agricultural consultant Rodger Wasson offers the following marketing tips, based on his conversations with growers and grape buyers:

- **You are a brand.** This starts with production practices but extends to the way you treat people: customers, community and employees.
- **Your vineyard is a brand.** It should be attractive and project the image that is consistent with the wine brands you supply. Desirable brands should want to designate your vineyard on their labels.
- **Be curious.** Constantly research the evolving trends in consumer tastes and in the wine business. Especially be curious about developments with your customers, as well as potential customers.
- **Know the market.** Be aware of prices, specifications and conditions, locally and globally.
- **Create trust.** Price matters but an open-book relationship between you and your customers is the basis for a long-term relationship.
- **Communicate regularly.** Stay in contact with your customers' representatives and become acquainted with others in their organizations.
- **Identify and cultivate future buyers.** Business is uncertain. Agriculture is a game of musical chairs; you want a chair when the music stops. Every year have a couple viable customer options.
- **Show off your vineyard.** Bring in buyers and others (including media).
- **Offer a taste.** Have some wine made from your grapes and extend some "market research" hospitality.
- **Develop alternatives.** Continually work through scenarios, including vertical expansion to your own wine label, bulk sales, exports, consulting services, agri-tourism, etc.
- **Be selective.** There will be wine brands that are truly not good for your image. You will be judged by the bottles you fill.
- **Create a positive buzz about your vineyard.** A positive story or experience related to your vineyard will cause some customers to seek out wines that include your grapes and those of growers like you.
- **Network.** You simply must attend industry events and work the crowds. If you can't do this sort of thing, you must designate someone who can.
- **Carry the story.** A business card with all the pertinent contact information is a must. Additionally you might carry a card that has key production information or accomplishments. Farm manager, production practices, soil type, climate, varieties and customers are all helpful in a pocket reference.
- **Write your plan.** A marketing plan can be short and simple or long and involved, but it should be written annually. Start with an honest look at where you are today as a grower/vineyard and where you want to be. In between these two points is the "gap" that your plan will fill. If you Google "marketing plan," you will find dozens of formats that might suit you.

(Rodger Wasson is president of the consulting firm, Rodger Wasson & Assoc. For more information, e-mail him at rw@wassonideafarming.com.)

T.C.



“Being a good marketer is not optional. If you are not a good marketer, you are out of business or soon will be.”

—Roger Wasson,
agricultural consultant

Wasson says. “But today, with literally the whole world competing for customers, being a good marketer is not optional. If you are not a good marketer, you are out of business, or soon will be.”

Having a compelling story to tell potential clients—whether it’s about innovative techniques, a unique vineyard site or sustainable farming practices—is the foundation of an effective marketing program.

“More and more consumers want to know the stories behind their food and wine,” Wasson says.

spoke at the CAWG workshops, believes that brand development is crucial for growers in today’s competitive market.

“Growing up, you learned the old saw that farmers are not marketers,”

In addition to telling their individual stories, Wasson recommends working with local associations to come up with new marketing angles. “Growers and small to mid-size wineries should find ways to merge their marketing efforts,” he says. “A special relationship can be established with a desirable boutique winery if the grower has ‘a good story,’ or better yet, a ‘known story.’”

Promotion Through Education

Grower Andy Beckstoffer, who came to the wine business as part of a major marketing company, has long understood the importance of vineyard marketing.

“Marketing means education more than promotion,” he says. “Why is the vintner going to buy from any particular grower? Because he sees something special in it! The grower needs to educate the vintner and the public about that specialness.”

Beckstoffer Vineyards is the largest family, noncorporate vineyard owner

Moving the Industry Forward

AMERICAN VINEYARD
FOUNDATION

Research for the Future

American Vineyard Foundation

P.O. Box 5779, Napa, CA 94581
707 252-6911 FAX: 707 252-7672

Visit our Web site at www.avf.org for information on funding and current research projects.



in Napa Valley, and owns more than 1,000 acres in the AVA—most notably the Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard. The company also owns thousands of vineyard acres in Mendocino County and Lake County, and is the largest seller of premium winegrapes in California's North Coast region. The Beckstoffer name appears on the labels of more than 20 high-end, vineyard-designated wines, including those of Paul Hobbs, Schrader Cellars and Realm Cellars.

Even in the early '70s, when Beckstoffer started his business, he knew he would need a strategy to make his fruit stand out.

"Our company's vision from the beginning was to improve the quality of our grapes and differentiate them by developing and implementing the most modern new viticultural technologies," Beckstoffer says. "We would then market them not so much as a fungible agricultural commodity but as unique, high-quality, special products."

Public relations plays an important role in Beckstoffer's marketing strategy. Like Wasson, Beckstoffer stresses the importance of a good story.

"Public relations is about the only public medium that the grower can afford, and it can be seen as more honest and objective than anything 'slick,'" he says. "The grower's story is an important one when it comes to selling wine. Vintners want to buy from growers who can help them sell their wine. And the media wants stories that are sexy, interesting, believable and easy to understand."

"Get out to the wineries and the public and tell them what you are doing to make the grapes better," Beckstoffer adds. "Let the press help you. The nonwinery grower needs to be seen as an integral part of the industry. He needs to be seen as more than just a producer of an agricultural commodity. He needs to be seen as someone interested in high quality, not just tonnage. He needs to be seen as responsible to the land, his community and his farmworkers."

"Marketing means education more than promotion...The grower's story is an important one when it comes to selling wine."

—Andy Beckstoffer, grower

That said, Beckstoffer recommends keeping promotional efforts on the low-key side. "A major promotion by a grower probably would not be seen favorably," he says. "The work must be done in the trenches every day, and whenever the opportunity to tell your story presents itself. It becomes as much a part of the day as working in the field."

Know Your Strengths, Market Accordingly

According to James Ontiveros, director of sales and marketing for Bien Nacido Vineyards, the key to success is in understanding a vineyard's strengths and finding the people who appreciate those qualities. "I think every growing region, and to some degree every type of producer, has that capability," he says.

In addition to farming 800 acres of grapevines in the Central Coast's Santa Maria AVA, Bien Nacido Vineyards has cultivated a reputation as one of California's top growers. As a specialist in high-end winegrapes, "Bien Nacido Vineyard" is designated on more than 25 different wine labels, including those of Qupé, the Ojai Vineyard, Au Bon Climat and Lane Tanner.

Finding the right clients for your vineyard does not necessarily mean going through wine magazines and targeting the top-scoring wineries, Ontiveros says, because those producers may be the wrong fit for your vineyard and farming methods. Instead, he recommends getting out into the industry and making connections.

A complete, integrated, winery software solution.

VinNOW is software created by a winery for wineries.

VinNOW features real-time Wine Club Management, tasting room sales, purchase history, customer contact information, accounts receivable & inventory management. VinNOW provides the tools to grow your business and reduce marketing costs.

VinNOW is one integrated system, one database, one program. Seamless credit card processing, UPS Online Tools, QuickBooks, and VerticalResponse management allow you to focus on your customers – and your profits.



VinNOW
www.vinnow.com
707-744-1895

Exclusively for wineries

“We are actively, 100%, in the wine industry,” he says. “We’re at all the events, and we host a lot of events. We’re constantly learning about the business that we’re in, and frankly, we take it very seriously.”

Ontiveros notes that many growers are now starting to target high-end wineries in a quest for greater profits. “I would say that we have more competition at the high-end of farming than we’ve ever had,” he says. “A handful of producers from the growing side have figured out that there’s a market for high-end grapes if they’re done well.”

Growers who want to sell their fruit to boutique wineries should make sure they have the fruit quality to justify their marketing strategy, Ontiveros adds. “I think today far too many people have looked at businesses like Bien Nacido and said, ‘We just have to raise our prices and say we’re going after the high end, and that makes us part of the market.’ That’s not what’s differentiated us over time, it’s how we actually perform.”

Ontiveros suggests that growers regularly review their farming methods and get involved with local organizations like the Central Coast Vineyard Team. In addition to helping to improve quality, it can boost a grower’s reputation with potential clients.

“It’s a good idea to offer your time into that membership so you can associate yourself with people who are doing good things,” he says. “Some wineries, almost as a prerequisite, want to know if you’re a member of your local associations and if you’re doing the quality workshops for your region. I think that’s really smart.”

In the end, Ontiveros says, your marketing message is only as good as the grapes behind it. “The truth of the matter is, there’s no way to market a vineyard beyond what it is. If you don’t have a good site, you can market it all you want and the product is not going to perform beyond what it’s capable of.” ■

DECEMBER 2006

Ongoing through January—Museo Italo-Americano special exhibit, *Planting Roots, Reaping the Harvest: Italian Immigrants, Their Descendants and the Wine Industry in Napa and Sonoma*, San Francisco, Calif. For more information, visit museoitaloamericano.org.

JANUARY 2007

January 13-14—Hermann Wine Trail “Wine 101,” Hermann, Mo. For more information, visit hermannwinetrail.com.

January 23-25—Unified Grape and Wine Symposium, Sacramento, Calif. For details, visit unifiedsymposium.org.

January 24-27—16th Annual Zinfandel Advocates & Producers (ZAP) Festival, San Francisco, Calif. For details, visit zinfandel.org.

January 24-27—Ecological Farming Conference, Pacific Grove, Calif. For information, visit eco-farm.org.

January 27—Sixth Annual “A Celebration of Washington Wines” auction to benefit WSU viticulture and enology program, Woodinville, Wash. For details, visit cahealumni.wsu.edu/wineauction/.

January 27-March 31—14th Annual Napa Valley Mustard Festival, Napa Valley, Calif. For schedule of events, visit mustardfestival.org.

January 29-30—Wine Evolution 2007 New Strategies Forum, Paris, France. For details and registration, visit winevolution.org.

January 30-31—Advanced Tasting Room Strategies conference and tasting room buying show, Rohnert Park, Calif. For details and reservations, visit wineprofits.com.

January 30-February 1—NAW Executive Summit: Facing the Forces of Change 2007, Washington, D.C. For details, visit nawd.org.

January 30-February 2—UPAKOVKA 2007 International Trade Fair for the Manufacturing of Packaging, Packaging Machinery, Packaging Aids and Logistics, Moscow, Russia. For details, visit mdna.com.

FEBRUARY 2007

February 3-4—Anderson Valley Winegrowers Association’s second International Alsace Varietals Festival, Anderson Valley, Calif. For information, visit avwines.com.

February 6-9—36th Wine Industry Workshop and Viticulture Symposium

2007, symposium and trade show, Rochester, N.Y. For details, visit viticulture2007.org.

February 7-9

Washington Association of Wine Grape Growers Annual Meeting and Trade Show, Kennewick, Wash. For information and registration, visit wawgg.org.

February 9-10—Fifth

International Mead Festival, Boulder, Colo. For details, visit meadfest.com.

February 10-11—Boston

Wine Expo, Boston, Mass. For details, visit wineexpoboston.com.

February 12—Return to *Terroir* fourth American organic/biodynamic tasting, Los Angeles, Calif. For more information, visit carbonniercommunications.com/biodynamics/index.htm.

February 14-17—Fourth International Wine and Heart Health Summit, Napa Valley, Calif. For details, visit winesummit.com.

February 16-17—Minnesota Grape Growers Association’s third annual Cold Climate Grape and Wine Conference, Bloomington, Minn. For details, visit mngrapes.org.

February 17-18—Hermann Wine Trail’s Chocolate Wine Trail, Hermann, Mo. For details, visit hermannwinetrail.com.

February 22-23—10th Annual Central Coast Viticulture and Enology Issue Conference on Grape and Wine Color Development and Management, San Luis Obispo, Calif. For registration, visit cast.csufresno.edu/ve.

February 23-24—31st Annual Conference of the Texas Wine and Grape Grower’s Association, Houston, Texas. For information, visit txwine.org.

February 27-March 3—Classic Wines Auction events to benefit local children and family charities, Portland, Ore. For schedule, visit classicwinesauction.com.

Do You Want to List Your Event in the Wines & Vines Calendar?

We want that too! For your event to be considered, we must receive all information at least three months in advance (i.e., if your event is in July, we should receive your release no later than the first week of April).