

The ABC's of Marketing Local Wines

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The main thing I have learned since I have planned and opened my winery is that although my brainstorming and brilliant ideas seem the work of a genius, when I get others involved, even only one person, the ideas start to flow. So it is a good idea to gather as many people together as possible, as often as you can, and pick their brains. You will be amazed at their ability to come up with clever ideas even though they don't have a marketing background. The backbone of marketing is to know what appeals to your customer. What better way to discover this than to invite them to your marketing sessions? With that said, let's look at the ABC's of marketing our wineries. Be prepared, for we are going brainstorming.

(A) Identify Your Market

(1) Geography – If you are selling only out of your winery and tasting room, consider a survey on how far your customers would drive to taste and purchase your wines. How far would you drive? If you are located on a major highway, I would guess the majority of your customers might be tourists and passersby. Brochures in travel stops and ads in travel magazines might be advantageous. If you are located in the middle of a big city, then you will have to market your wine differently. Offering special deals to local businesses and corporations might be the answer.

(2) Gender – Statistics show that women purchase more than 75 percent of all wine sold, so in your marketing I would suggest targeting them with the majority of your ads. One idea is to contact women's organizations and volunteer to put on a class or free winetasting. They are

usually very happy to have you as a guest speaker. What ideas can you come up with for organizations to present your wines to? Don't limit it to women's organizations. Try the Lion's, Elks', and other prominent organizations. It is an excellent way to spread the word.

(3) AGE — What age groups consume the most wine? Statistics show it to be the middle age group. Your marketing should be directed there, but always look for new age groups to broaden your sales. The younger age group has mainly been beer drinkers, but increasing numbers are now consuming wine. The older age group has found health benefits in red wine for the antioxidants they contain. The latest research has found health benefits in white wine for destroying the free radicals that damage lungs. Consider contacting educational institutes where you might give a class on the health benefits of wine. What are some other places you might speak to? Let's brainstorm again!

(B) Identify Your Product

(1) People – Tell stories about yourself, how you got started, your successes and failures, history, anything that will help people relate to you. I like to tell the story about my grandpa, who only had one arm. Ask me about it.

(2) Place – When you market your wine or winery, tell what there is to do there besides drink wine. Be creative – picnics, festivals, birthday parties, anniversaries, weddings, divorces—well, maybe not that creative. Make it sound like a fun place to visit. How about fun things to do for children so it can be a family outing? At our festivals we have had magicians, face painting, and grape stomps. The

About Richard Kennedy

"I started school at Munson Viticulture Center in Denison, Texas, in 1996 to study viticulture and enology. I had been a home winemaker for several years but had no grapes available. I planted 3,000 vines in 1997 to keep me busy in my retirement years and to provide grapes for my winemaking.

"While at school I met two other Okies with similar interests. After much discussion, we decided to incorporate and open a winery where we could process our own grapes. We opened May 1, 1999, and were the third winery to do so.

"Our opening was successful and our first wine festival was held in October 1999. We expected 300-500 people, but about 4,000 attended. We ran out of food and wine by 5 p.m. We knew then that the industry was about to blossom. Now there

are thirteen wineries and more waiting for their licenses.

"Thousands of grapevines are being planted annually all over Oklahoma. We have a state association of grape growers and winemakers, OGGWA. I was president of this association three years ago and membership grew from 25 members to 200 and is still growing."

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grandmas got in with the grandkids and stomped grapes. Got any ideas? Write them down so you will remember.

(3) Product – There are more than 3,000 wines on the market. What is unique about yours? Our Anniversary Red Reserve wine is unique in that it is a red wine that can be enjoyed for your health and also an easy-drinking smooth wine you can enjoy with friends around the fireplace. We called it our fireplace wine until one of our customers said, "No, this is my hot tub wine." We tell that story often, and the one-time fireplace wine has become our hot tub wine. Our customers always remember to ask for it.

Also refer to any awards such as gold medals you have won in winetasting events. Let me add at this point that it is ethical to be honest on this point, as some turmoil exists today because of misleading statements made by a new winery in Oklahoma. They named themselves winery of the year in their own publication. They printed posters to that effect and gained sales on this misleading information, leading to alienation from the rest of the industry.

(C) Get the Word Out

Jim Buratti of Discover Oklahoma recently told of touring Oklahoma and finding a unique town with exciting things to do. He commented to the townspeople about this, and they said they were the "best-kept secret" in Oklahoma. That should not be our goal. We want to be the best-known secret in Oklahoma. How do we do this?

(1) Ask your customers to tell others about your wine.

They will love to tell about new places they have found. Have them ask for Oklahoma wines whenever they go out to eat, and if none are available, they should ask, "Why aren't Oklahoma wines on your wine list?"

(2) Brochures – Good marketing tools can be passed around. Put one in each bag you sell. Ask customers to take extras to hand out.

(3) Public Service Announcements (PSA's)–Newspapers and periodicals are always looking for fillers. Send out news releases and information about new wines, products, events, and other promotions. You can get information on whom to contact and fax numbers or email addresses off the Internet.

(4) Tastings/Trade Shows – These are time-consuming and costly but necessary. A chance to show your product and direct contact with the consumer.

(5) Advertising – Some say any advertising you pay for is not a good investment. Search for ways to get free advertising. Talk shows, TV specials, many more. Brainstorm!

(6) Website – A proper website can be a valuable source of information but must be properly maintained to be effective.

We invite you to visit our winery and vineyards and take a tour to see how we produce our fine wines. We also offer free tastings and have a beautiful deck overlooking the vineyard where you can have a picnic or party. Please ask for our wines when you visit your local wine shop or restaurant.