

PERSPECTIVES

Although more countries are producing wine than ever before, and Asian consumers are embracing wine, wine drinking among consumers in much of the world is either flat or headed downwards. What can the trade do to enthuse consumers? Is more wine education the answer? We surveyed a range of people who are grappling with this very question to see what they think the wine trade should do.



Canadian **RICHARD SAGALA** is a sommelier and butler, who teaches wine courses for the Liquor Control Board of Quebec. For his Wine MBA, he conducted research into the value of wine education.

The value of wine education has not been researched to any extent, but customer education in general has been [researched], and it's clear that skill acquisition is the key to unlocking value. In the UK, they've all undercut each other and so you have this big consumer segment that just buys whatever's cheap on the shelf. They need to restore value and the trade believes they can only rebuild it now through education. The best example is Apple: I own one and go to an Apple store in Montreal where I can book as many courses as I want. This builds loyalty. Customer empowerment is also conducive to exploration.

But not education as the WSET do it. Consumers who enter wine courses are obviously more involved than ones who just want to buy a good bottle of wine. Yet one thing I found in the literature review, and

through my own experience, is that an academic wine curriculum to regular consumers (and not aspiring wine scholars) is not worth a lot. It's all information you will forget immediately. The key issue is that wine education has to be a subjective, aesthetic and enthralling experience to stick. If customers want to know a fact, they'll look it up on their iPhone. You have to give them tools that will help them feel safe and convey the message that, "you are not going to be disappointed by this bottle of wine". That's the value question to solve in store. This can be done in all sorts of creative ways, but what's important is that there is somebody there to extend a hand. There's just too much wine to arbitrage: in the Liquor Board (in Quebec) there are 11,000 references. People are lost.

People who get involved in the category through 'edutainment' increase their frequency of consumption but not the intensity, which is what I like about it. It creates value for the retailer and the customer, but society benefits as well because alcohol, needless to say, is not a benign product.



PANCHO CAMPO MW is a wine educator and organiser of events including Wine-Future and the World Conference on Climate Change. He is the founder of the Wine Academy of Spain.

The wine industry is not exciting new consumers. For most European countries, wine is losing the fun and the next generation is not engaging with wine. I think it's completely the fault of the industry. The way we communicate is only understood by wine people. More than 90% of people who write or blog about wine look at the wines that are above €25.00 (\$34.40). What makes the industry tick is the bottom of the pyramid, the wines below €7.00, but we pay no respect to those wines or the people who drink them.

I am totally against, "we need to educate the consumer". You don't need a course to enjoy wine. If I go to a restaurant, I don't want to take a course to understand the cheese. I want a hedonistic experience. In America [where wine sales are growing], there are only one or two trade fairs - 95% of what they do is consumer events. So what they do is create more and more demand. I would strongly suggest to most European wineries and wine regions that they should look more at motivating the consumer. We have totally neglected the consumer in Europe.



Irish wine writer and judge **JEAN SMULLEN** manages PR and events for her clients, who include Wines of Chile and the Italian Trade Commission, among others.

Wine is entertainment! Every time you pull a cork or chuck a screw cap you have a story to tell. You have to make it interesting, but not in a technical or geeky way. The trade have to weave the magic in a story format that can be remembered, so that the next time the customer is having a dinner party they can wax lyrical and impress their friends!

Seanchaí (pronounced shan-a-key) is the Irish word for storyteller. Storytellers have played an important role in Irish society from

the days in which they told tales to kings and noblemen right up until the mid-twentieth century. Today that tradition is alive and well, but in a much different format. The wine merchant, wine educator and wine seller are now doing that job. During the winter and spring months, bottles in hand, we traverse the country telling our story about what is in the bottle. From the back room of a pub to the five-star hotels, we travel sometimes alone and sometimes with the help of a visiting winemaker or vineyard owner.

What stories they are... the magic of it means that the stories are not about rootstock, SO2, or *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* – the geeks and anoraks can scan the web for that sort of minutiae. No, the story we tell involves the history of the region where the grapes were grown. The geography of the area, the climate, the people, what they eat, who they vote for. We talk about the families who own the wineries, where they came from, what their history was and then... we open the bottle! We've already told the story, created the image, built an affinity... after that we taste. The magic is there in the bottle but it doesn't need complex chemistry to explain itself. It simply needs a story, told well.

The novice consumer's knowledge is very limited. Most are scared of wine. The trade are immersed in wine knowledge, but we forget the average Joe isn't. Sometimes we all lose sight of that in our search for more technical knowledge. I often wonder who we are trying to impress? Keep it simple, engage the consumer and most of all, give them snippets of information that they will remember, stories they can pass on. That is the key to dealing with the customer who is buying your wine. That will build you a loyal following. Keep it simple, tell a story and you will sell your wine.

Professor **LARRY LOCKSHIN** is Head of the School of Marketing and Director of the Wine Marketing Group at the University of South Australia. He is also the President of the Academy for Wine Business Research.

The first point I make is that you have to define consumers. Oftentimes the industry talks to all consumers as if they know something and they care, and oftentimes they don't. Tell me it's good, tell me what it goes with, tell me why I should buy this bottle and then move on, because I'm going to spend 40 seconds on that decision. People fill wine ads with details no one cares about, technical details. The best way to talk to a consumer is to provide the right amount of information when the consumer needs it to make the decision. I think that is the beauty of this whole social media and multimedia world we're living in. Those consumers who are interested enough to have an app or use Cellartracker can find the information they're interested in – is this vintage the right one to buy? Is this a wine that will go with my food? That's the great unique thing that's possible now that was never possible before – but you can't assume that most people care.



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