



Meet the ideal marketer

Larry Lockshin

The Australian wine sector has been full of news and editorials about the need for marketing to reduce the surplus of grapes and put Australia back on the path to profitability. I want to address two aspects of this issue from a more basic level: What does marketing do? and, What type of training should universities provide for those involved in wine marketing?

Like growing grapes or making wine, marketing is a multi-faceted set of processes, but the key aim is to act as the bridge between production and the buyers. Marketing has a foot in both camps: it has to understand the abilities of the organisation to provide products and

services and at the same time understand the existing and potential demand for those products and services by style and location.

Marketing then assists in the product design, but manages all the processes to take the wine to the final buyer. Some of this management is direct and some is done through working with partner organisations, such as distributors, retailers and restaurants. In a small winery the winemaker/owner may have direct responsibility for face to face interaction with the various levels in the market, but then may hire someone to do much of the day to day administration, such as a marketing assistant.

In larger companies the brand or marketing manager may focus on a single line or a single geographical region, or

manage the brand managers depending on how the company organises its tasks. In reality, the role of marketing is to manage the physical aspects of bringing wine into the market and at the same time create awareness among potential buyers and nudge their propensity to purchase.

Marketing and its focus on communication cannot 'make' people buy, but only create the opportunity and improve the possibility. The focus is on both physically getting the product where potential consumers make their purchases and awareness building among the same consumers to enhance their probability of purchase. So, what skills are needed?

Marketing, like all management, is based on problem solving, so skills in identifying the underlying issues, what effects these

issues have on the problem, and how to go about solving the problem is important.

The generic skills marketers need:

- Literacy—able to read and understand quickly, and to write clearly and concisely;
- Numeracy—able to understand and manipulate numbers for a variety of tasks including budgets, financial reports and cost-benefit analysis;
- People skills—able to interact thoughtfully with a wide range of people, understand their motives and respond in a planned manner to their requests;
- Negotiation—able to ascertain the views and positions of both parties and develop plans to achieve the company's goals; and
- Planning—able to develop long term plans for the business and at the same time manage multiple projects and one's own time efficiently.

It is difficult to teach these generic skills in a university or other training environment, because too often we focus on specific skills, rather than these more generic ones. More universities, and certainly the University of South Australia, are focusing on the development of generic skills and dedicate specific planning resources to ensure the range of abilities is developed within a total degree. We focus on the differing levels of the following skills in each subject and plan to achieve high levels of them across all the subjects within a degree: *Body of knowledge, lifelong learning, effective problem solvers, work alone and in teams, ethical action, communicate effectively and*

international perspective.

What key specific marketing skills should universities aim to impart? We have been debating and reworking our marketing degree and these are the current required areas:

- Understanding buyer (consumer and business buyer) behaviour;
- Quantitative measurement and modelling of marketing activities, such as buyer behaviour, advertising, market demographics etc.;
- Market research by being able to write a brief, choose an agency, oversee the process and interpret the results;
- Financial and cost accounting;
- Branding and brand management;
- Advertising and communication;
- Researching and developing a marketing plan;
- Selling and sales management; and
- Integrating these skills in a dynamic market environment.

Of course there is a range of other topic areas available as there would be in any marketing degree. One question many would have is how much understanding of the wine sector is important? My opinion is that someone with good marketing skills can learn the wine-related factors relatively quickly. I think there has been an over-emphasis on knowledge of wines and the wine industry with a consequential lack of development in the more generic skills.

Of course, ideally, a wine marketing specialist would have both generic skills and specialist knowledge, but this combination is rare. Specialised wine

marketing degrees often focus too deeply on the wine side of things and leave key marketing and business skills undeveloped.

A university degree is only three years long. Universities prepare people for careers by teaching them how to gain knowledge throughout their life and by imparting a range of generic skills, which form the base for lifelong learning. Specialised degrees sometimes err too far on very detailed knowledge to the detriment of the generic abilities listed previously.

Marketing is just starting to be accepted in the Australian wine sector as a legitimate set of skills equal to those in oenology and viticulture. Just as there are some excellent grapegrowers and winemakers without formal training, there are some very successful intuitive marketers. However, we did not build the modern Australian grape and wine sector on intuitive grapegrowing and winemaking; we certainly can't develop our hundreds of independent wine businesses through back-of-the-envelope marketing either.

We need to take trained marketers, teach them about the wine sector, and let them help us, company by company, take our wines to market. The solution for one company may be very different from another. Generic and even regional based marketing strategies can only take the Australian wine sector so far.

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