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## Can Social Media Help a Rookie Winemaker?



Posted on September 27, 2011 by Jennifer to Social Media

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As online media is taking the modern business owner's world by storm, more and more small business owners are looking to [social media to help market their business](#). Some, who are more heavily engaged than others, undoubtedly stand to benefit from this emerging media outlet. While we've seen a lot of changes in recent years (and even more so this year), the landscape of social media offers an array of tools for small business owners to reach out to their target audience. Not too long ago, one would have had a much more difficult time reaching their potential customers. You would have to have a retail storefront with good foot traffic, or pay for expensive print advertising. Nowadays, it's conceivable that one can go without a website and simply use a Facebook business page to market themselves. (For the record, I recommend all business have a website!)



In an effort to expose some of the trials and tribulations of a small business owner and to see how social media can offer up some help, I've had the pleasure of interviewing Ryan Moreland, a rookie winemaker in Napa Valley. He offers some valuable insight into the fusion of social media and winemaking, and if he thinks social media will be valuable to him.

**Q: We need a little background first... Why was developing your own label and becoming a wine maker important to you?**

**A:** I grew up in San Jose, one of the largest suburbs in Northern California. It's a place where it is all too easy to feel detached—like a number in a sea of people. When I moved to Napa Valley I found a community of people who were willing to go out of their way to support others. I often say that you could go anywhere you want in San Jose and not know anyone, even in your own neighborhood; but that in Napa you can't go anywhere without seeing a smiling face. I really enjoyed becoming a part of the Napa community.



Concurrently I was learning about the history of farming in Napa Valley and the pioneers who came here with a vision of nurturing the land to its fullest potential. I was moved by their stories, and by the community of Napa, and so I started my label so that I could share their story. [Corvalle](#) is derived from the Latin for *soul of the valley*, and I really think that the pioneering farmers who came to Napa and developed it as both a world-class wine growing region and a wonderful community are the true heart and soul of Napa Valley. This story was very moving to me and I felt it needed to be shared.

**Q: When you were developing your marketing strategy, how important did you think social media**

would be as a part of the mix?

**A:** I actually took a class in wine marketing at the Napa Valley College before launching my brand. The professor, Paul Wagner, was the CEO of a local wine marketing firm named Balzac. It's amazing how industry leaders can be some of the greatest teachers; I feel that they really have their finger on the pulse and give it to you straight. Their knowledge is up-to-date and very insightful, and as a result we talked a bit about social media as a component of a marketing strategy.

On top of this Napa tends to be on the forefront of new trends in the wine industry, so there have been many wineries experimenting with social media since I moved here in 2008. All of this helped me realize that it would be an important way to develop relationships with my audience and supporters. And in the end what I realized in that marketing class is that a purchasing decision is founded upon a relationship. You have to find a way to connect with your consumer to get them to buy from you.



**Q: Did you ever think that a winemaker would need Facebook and Twitter?**

**A:** Growing up in the Silicon Valley I have always been tied into computers as a part of my daily life. I remember writing webpages in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and hosting them on a server in my basement. I will admit that I tended to use the Internet as more of an encyclopedia—a way to gather and sift through vast amounts of information. I tended not to use the Internet to communicate with people, instead opting for face-to-face contact. When it comes to important conversations, I still find that I am most successful face-to-face, and prefer this over the phone or Internet.

But all of these modes of communication fit into a complete strategy, and without them all, you will have gaps in your communication. In the end you have to kind of tailor your strategy to your audience, and it is quite clear that people are using social media a lot. After all, Facebook is the number one most used site for Americans (in terms of time spent online).

**Q: How do you allocate your time and budget for marketing towards social media? Do you consider your social media efforts to be time-consuming?**

**A:** All of my social media is done by me. I run a one-man show, and outsource as little as possible to keep costs low. There are a lot of pressures on small businesses right now with the economy down, especially in the wine industry and even more so in regions with high cost inputs like Napa. It is very expensive to do business, and there is a lot of competition, so unfortunately few wineries can afford to spend a lot on social media. I know of a lot of 20-30 employee wineries that won't devote the resources to a full-time social media person. And the ones that do tend to let them go after six months because they can't see immediate returns and their budget is too tight.

**Q: Do you think social media provides you an advantage over other winemakers who may not be as heavily connected?**

**A:** It's kind of like a garden, you have to plant your seeds, water them, come back and pull out the dead ones, replant, etc. Point being, if you aren't consistently putting time into it then whatever audience you've built up will drift away. I regularly have this problem because of the cyclical nature of the time inputs in running a winery. Whenever harvest, or bottling, or some seasonal project comes up I usually have to neglect my social media stuff. This is a common problem for agricultural companies which have a very cyclical nature to their business. Also, whenever there is something interesting to write about there isn't any time to share it.

**Q: Has social media increased your sales?**

**A:** It may be supporting them, but I haven't had any sales yet just from someone who knows me through Twitter or Facebook and hasn't met me in person. A lot of the people I interact with on Facebook/Twitter are actually in my industry and are not buyers.

That's a major issue that we waste time talking to each other and can't seem to find a way to engage consumers.

**Q: Are you using traditional marketing?**

**A:** We do an email blast every few months, to keep in touch with supporters and remind them we're here and working hard to make more amazing wines.

**Q: What is the biggest challenge facing your industry?**

**A:** Competition from imports.

**Q: What is the secret to your social media success?**

**A:** Consistently sticking with it, finding a mode of communication, a type of content, and remaining consistent. I use Klout as a kind of analytics tool for gauging my success and understanding my style.

**Q: So then you're familiar with things like Klout? How do you place in that arena?**

**A:** I'm sure my Klout score is way down. It was mid 40s for awhile, but I've been sucked into the black hole that is harvest.

**Q: Lastly, congratulations on your label and the launch of your first vintage! Any last words or advice for new business owners and young entrepreneurs?**

**A:** Do lots of planning and lots of financial projections; no matter how thorough you are expect it to cost twice as much and take twice as long. I'm lucky enough to have two savvy entrepreneurs for parents; they have helped me with lots of guidance and feedback, but even still it is a constant struggle. So if I could impress one single point, it would be that you have to find something you're truly passionate about. That should be your business. Don't do something just for the money, because when the going gets tough it's your passion that will see you



through.

This was a lot of great advice from Mr. Moreland, and insight into how one winemaker and possibly others feel about the integration of social media into their overall marketing strategy. While social media, as Mr. Moreland points out, is "...kind of like a garden, you have to plant your seeds, water them, come back and pull out the dead ones, replant... if you aren't consistently putting time into it then whatever audience you've built up will drift away," perhaps many winemakers may forego heavy social media marketing efforts and simply focus on their love and passion for winemaking, at least during the beloved harvest season. It will be interesting to track the use of social media in the wine industry; in particular, how it is used by winemakers to promote and sell their brand.

While I believe it will remain an integral part of any overall marketing strategy, let alone a winemaker's, I believe that as more in the industry adopt this media outlet, we will see more wine labels succeed online. Social media will help winemakers connect with the audience that is here locally and even nationally—giving them the upper hand over imported brands.

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**Jade**

September 28, 2011 at 2:19 pm

Great information, I enjoyed reading your post Jennifer.

*Reply*



**Posicionamiento de web**

September 30, 2011 at 7:32 am

I think especialy for starting businesses social media can be great. Its a cheap way to promote your product and when done right very profitable. Great article enjoyd reading it.

*Reply*



**Sherry Martin**

February 16, 2012 at 1:12 pm

I too use social media for the promotion of our winery, Karlo Estates, in Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada The lucky think in our case is Richard makes the wine and I sell it, so I have more time to be consistently on Twitter and Facebook. We have gotten notice from wine writers and foodies alike, which has resulted in sales so it does work, I think the key is to talk to your target and expand from there: winos, sommeliers, restaurants, chefs, foodies & travelers are good groups to start with. We're lucky there are some many in the hospitality industry on Twitter, Cheers!

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