Part One: Establishing a presence in social media – Facebook

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In the following three-part series, Steve Goodman and Cullen Habel explore commonsense ways to get amongst the ‘Facebook Generation’ with your brands and your people. They argue that these days, having a presence in the world of social networking is as important as having a sign off the main road that points to your cellar door. Over the next few issues of Grapegrower & Winemaker, methods for Facebook, Twitter and Google Maps/Foursquare will be explored. It’s not that hard – and the chances are some of your younger employees would LOVE to set it up for you.

Once it was the Piazza – now it’s Facebook, the PC and the iPhone

First, let’s recognise the similarities. People love to hang out – watch each other, share their opinions and advice, and sometimes argue. A hundred years ago, one would walk out to the Piazza – or the market square – just sit, chat, and watch the world go by. It happens now, but it happens on a bus, on a train, walking up the street, sometimes at home, and often at work. Rather than a market square, there’s a place called Facebook. Rather than walking or driving, a person will flick on their web-enabled phone or open up a browser window on their computer. If you were allowed to put up a sign in the market square – at no charge – wouldn’t you consider it? You can put such a sign up in the virtual Piazza, and it’s not hard. Many Australian and global wine companies already have, but not that many, leaving a space you can begin to see benefits from your activity.

So how does it work? Facebook – for one – lets anybody in. All you need is an email address (a Hotmail one will do), fill in a few online forms, and you’re in. You can do a quick search for people you know, hit the ‘add friend’ button, and once they do the same you’re away. Before you know it, you’ll have ‘friend requests’ from all areas of your past life – for better or worse. On average, people seem to have about 150 friends.
Most people take a few months to get used to the world of Facebook, and many never bother — they simply let it sit there. Even that’s a plus — at least then you own that Facebook identity. Increasingly in the world of social media identities, the term ‘You snooze, you lose’ applies. Ask Penny Wong, Bronwyn Bishop and Andrew Bolt – all of whom have been beaten in the race to snap up their names (in this case on Twitter, which we will discuss next issue).

From there, Facebook has an array of communication methods: a wall, notes, messaging, chat, and status updates. People use these to communicate as privately or as publicly as they like.

**So as a business, what’s Facebook mean to me?**

If one simply wants to advertise — in the old sense — then Facebook can help. Most users list their likes and dislikes; if you say you like golf then the banner ads you see will be all about golf gear. As a marketer, you pay your money, get your ads and — often — get them ignored. But that’s the small side of social networking — we’re here to meet the customer in their own space.

**Winery personalities**

No, not the personality of your winery, but of the people within it. Think of Kevin Rudd’s hugely successful 2007 campaign — his personal friends list topped out at 5000 friends two weeks after it was opened. Many people choose to restrict their friends list to only close friends, but others — some politicians and university lecturers — allow it to be public.

The winemaker can be the face of the winery — look at Rebecca and Lucy Willson of Bremerton, or Chester Osborne of d’Arenberg. Winemakers are often urged to make connections — out in the press, at functions, events, tastings and general goings on in the region and, of course, overseas trips. Facebook could help here — and increase your reach. In simple terms, your winemaker, viticulturist or even character cellar door manager opens up a Facebook account — it’s easy.

As a winery personality, it’s important to keep content ‘on message’ rather than one’s own personal trivia. Imagine:

- “been in the vineyard and noticed the first budburst down near the creek…”
- “just been in the winery hand-plunging — looks inky”
- “opened up a bottle of the 1995 for some visiting overseas journalists yesterday — they were impressed, I was blown away”
- “had the Cab Sauv last night with slow roasted lamb shanks. Wow! — recipe and photo attached here.”

With an approach like this, the winery can have one-on-one communication with literally thousands of people. It’s like sitting in the Piazza in the 1860s and swapping stories, especially when those ‘friends’ (customers) are then posting notes back to let you know what and where they enjoyed your wine and what they had with it. Market research, relationships and customer feedback — for a nominal cost of about a few hours each week.

**What to do**

Get your winemaker, owner, cellar door manager or someone else you trust to use their profile expressly for the purpose of business use. Allow them to become the face of the winery. Use it at least weekly as an interactive journal — vineyard goings on, winemaking, tasting, food they’ve enjoyed, etc … not too much, not the same day every week, but regular and on-message. It’s your first foray into social media.

**A winery page and forum (wall)**

You may not find someone who wishes to be the face of your winery — no bother. Your winery can have its own page. You can build the personality of the winery there — many people prefer to.

Everyone that ‘likes’ your winery can click a simple tab to say they ‘like’ you, which is then broadcast into the Facebook world and spreads throughout their network, working like direct mail to bring customers to your winery Facebook page, and then spread your brand. On that, people can make a posting on ‘your wall’ — similar to graffiti but usually it’s welcomed! If they’ve enjoyed one of your wines with a food type, they can let the world know (if they’re your friend) — you’d be amazed at how much time some people will put into this activity — with photos of food and places, recipes and the like. A little bit of effort, prodding and your winery site can come to life — and it is friends (customers) that effectively do 99% of the work.

Duplin Winery of North Carolina has more than 11,000 fans. On this winery page, the company can very simply (and quickly) upload photos, update on the vineyard, talk about recent tastings — any number of things. Every one of those 11,000-plus fans will have Duplin’s announcements in their daily feed.

**Facebook**

Duplin Winery uses Facebook to post updates about their winery, events, and other related content. The page is interactive, allowing users to like, share, and comment on posts. The winery uses this platform to engage with customers and promote their products. The page features images of their vineyards, information about their wines, and updates on events and promotions.

**Facebook and Wine Marketing**

Using Facebook for wine marketing allows wineries to connect with their customers on a more personal level. It provides an opportunity to share stories, photos, and videos that showcase their winery, wines, and the people behind them. This can help build brand loyalty and increase customer engagement.

**Facebook for Wine Education**

Facebook can also be used to educate customers about wine. Wineries can share information about wine pairing, tasting notes, and wine-making techniques. This can help customers better understand and appreciate the wines they are enjoying.

**Facebook and Customer Feedback**

Facebook provides a platform for customers to share their feedback, experiences, and recommendations. This can be valuable for wineries looking to improve their products and services. It also helps build a community of wine enthusiasts who can support each other and share their love for wine.
Set this up for yourself and suddenly your winery springs to life. It takes on a shape of its own – people are interacting with it, photos are seen and commented on, etc. You have become a part of your customer’s daily life. Again, this may cost possibly an hour a week.

There is a chance it will be a small to moderate success, but there is also the chance that with the right effort in the right areas it could spread virally. This can bring people to visit your physical cellar door as well as choosing your wines in a bottle shop or restaurant. Having friends on Facebook is great, but getting talked about, shared and commented on is what will really assist. Keep that in mind when you are establishing your objectives.

What to do

Get on Facebook and establish a page for your winery. Sit down and think about what you might like to achieve with it. Look at some other business pages, then look again at your own objectives. Start putting comments, photos and the like to your site, and let people know it is there. Get it onto your website, letterheads, labels, etc. – maybe even onto a tear-off on your back wine label.

Winery events

The wine-loving loves events – for the aesthetic beauty of the surroundings, the opportunity to learn about wine, or even the plain old-fashioned reason of having a few drinks and a good day out. Before Facebook, a winery would need to promote their event using their own databases, direct mail and advertising. These days, your existing events promotions can be supplemented with a Facebook feed – at no charge.

A Maryland (United States) winery – Terrapin – is shown above with three events in its listing. As soon as the company ‘publishes’ the event, a notification will appear in the news feed of all its fans – and the page includes photos, comments and the like. Even better, when a fan chooses to RSVP, all of their friends are made aware of it. The word of your event can spread virally and suddenly that ‘little’ new release tasting complete with tapas you had planned has a life of its own.

If your 250-strong fan list has had 25% RSVP, it’s likely that 10,000 people will have had the chance to see your event on Facebook. What did it cost you to advertise and promote this event? Probably about 30 minutes.
What to do

Think of something that would give people the incentive to come to your cellar door – tasting of the new vintage, museum stock, budburst, or maybe even a restaurant ‘cellar door’ dinner in the metropolitan area. Build it as an event on Facebook, share it, even RSVP yourself. Let people know the event is there, and give it a lead time to allow for planning and sharing of the information. Take some photos and upload them after ... and use them to promote your next event.

Applications

People spend an amazing amount of time on Facebook, and it’s not always just talking to each other. Any number of games and activities have made their way onto Facebook – people play Scrabble, Texas Hold ‘em, plus a whole new range of games such as Farmville and Cafe World. In Facebook world, these are referred to as ‘applications’ and they can be used to do more than simply play games.

Wine-related applications include Wine word of the Day, Wine logs from Logabottle, and My Vineyard – yes, a game where people build virtual vineyards.

Building applications is beyond the abilities of many of us, but your web designer can help you with this. The opportunities for this are endless – a regional cellar door finder, regional tasting notes, competitions or games. This probably won’t come free of charge, but it’s well within your reach.

Get in the game

So if you have a sign out the front of your winery, our challenge to you is: why don’t you at least have a presence on Facebook?

There are huge demands on the time of winemakers and wine marketers. Exporting winemakers are urged to get on a plane and visit distributors around the world. Winery staff are pulled in all directions. It’s not surprising then that the complaint is that “I simply don’t have time for another thing”, but done right, it can make you more efficient. If maintaining a Facebook presence can save one overseas trip, fill one 120-person function or create an unexpected cult following for one of your brands, isn’t it worth that few hours a week for someone in your business to do it?

Your young staff members live in this world – they set up fan pages and events every day of their lives, on their PCs and mobile phones. Ask them to set up an event for you and they can have it done before they leave work today, or alternatively, you can do it yourself.

Over the coming months, we will discuss how you might use Twitter (a broadcast micro-blog) and Foursquare (a location-based social network) to further engage with your customers and meet them in their place.

About a year ago, a guy in California started running a blog that gives a great ‘how to’ guide for even the newest new user. Visit http://fb4wineries.wordpress.com/ for a more comprehensive guide.

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