

Wine Directories: The First Step to Promoting Your New Website

A new group of wine store websites are hitting the Internet superhighway for the first time this spring. As these sites start to make their first tentative steps into ecommerce they will be looking for ways to promote their products online and attract their first web customers.

Earlier this year, JPMorgan's Internet analyst Imran Khan released a bullish report on the growth of the top Internet companies. This report includes a projection that online ad spending in the U.S. will increase by almost 32% in 2008 to pass \$15.5 billion. Considering the anxiety about the general health of the U.S. economy, this prediction signals continued opportunity for growth online.

Of this online ad budget, Search advertising is one of the biggest components of this figure and without a doubt Google's Adwords, Yahoo! Search Marketing and MSN adCenter campaigns can be very effective in drawing traffic to your new site. Google continues to dominate this space, but strong returns are available to marketers who can find traffic from other search engines.

While everyone uses the search engines to some extent, savvy wine drinkers have come to rely on the specialized wine directory sites to search for products at hundreds of stores, comparing what they find by price and store location. If you are launching a new site, posting your inventory on these wine directory sites is the first step to generating some steady business. Several of these sites will list your products for free and often update your listing twice per week.

- **Wine-Searcher** was the early mover in this category and over the years has been the primary source of non-search engine referrals for many specialty retailers. Wine-Searcher has a Sponsorship program where stores pay for preferred placement. If you carry the same product as a Sponsor store, your

product will not show on Wine-Searcher's free listings until you pay to become a Sponsor too. There are now sufficient Sponsors that most referrals to stores with free listings come from the 3% of Wine-Searcher's visitors who pay \$30 per year to access to all retailers' listings.

- The second highest referrer of traffic for most stores is **WineZap**, an offshoot from the peer-to-peer auction site **WineCommune**. WineZap requires that retailers have a website to be listed, but will display all products on their free listings. Their Featured Retailer program acts like a Search Engine pay-per-click (PPC) advertising program. Retailers bid for prominent placement in the search results, and pay only for clicks to their websites.

- With the redesign of Robert Parker's website a year ago, **Wine Alert** has become a more promising source of traffic linked directly to the reviews. While still a little hard for shoppers to find, retailer listings are now available to both Parker's subscribers and non-subscribers.

- More recently, a set of "Web 2.0" sites have entered this space with an interesting combination of features. **Snooth** for instance combines user-generated reviews with Facebook-style friend linking. Others in this space include **Vinquire**, **Vinorati**, **Wine Fetch** and **Classic Wines** which offer various combinations of user reviews, blogs and bulletin boards to attract visitors. Some of these sites are still beta testing while others have introduced a PPC pricing model for referrals.

Finding a good match between a wine directory and your website can stimulate a solid base of sales for a new website. As a nice by-product, you will find your listings on these sites will also create a base for your ranking with the search engines.

To learn more about how the Beverage Media can help with a website for your retail store, contact Ian Griffith at ian@bevmedia.com, (617)864-1677, or visit www.bevnetwork.com/retailweb.