

New Directions in Wine Writing

It is sad to watch the demise of prominent local newspapers as they struggle to respond to the threat of the Internet. With newsstand sales and subscriptions way down, Rupert Murdoch announced plans to generate revenue by charging for online access to his newspapers, effectively hiding his content from search engines. In a similar move the Associated Press has recently suggested that any website that displays an article title and link to one of their stories should have a licensing agreement with them. In contrast, Reuters has emerged as a champion of the “link economy” and is encouraging aggregators to link to their stories.

Reuters seems to understand, and the AP and Newcorp have not grasped, that linking makes their content valuable online. Indeed, there is a significant shift underway in the newspaper business as information becomes more widely available than ever before. As a result there are very few sources of content that can draw an audience by themselves. It is only when a story has been linked by bloggers and news aggregators that an audience arrives.

The Influence of Blogging

A version of this paradigm shift is also playing out in the wine press. After briefly attempting a subscription model, a promising online publication is calling it quits. Appellation America couldn't support the cost of paying writers to generate reference material about wine regions.

When Robert Parker started *The Wine Advocate* in 1978, a print newsletter was the platform an independent enthusiast used to find a following for his opinions. In the age of the Internet, the new generation of enthusiasts can start a blog with much less effort and investment. Wine writing has become democratized and there are now legions of bloggers who review and recommend wines. Whereas critics depend on subscribers to pay for unique content, bloggers list their reviews for free and generate a modest income from ad sales. Vintank's social

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media report estimates that the top 20 wine bloggers have a larger audience than the *Wine Spectator* online. This represents a significant audience and shows the potential that the best bloggers have to influence the purchase of wines.

The role of retailers has been to promote the ratings of prominent critics to sell their wines online yet publications that think in terms of limiting access to their content have been reluctant to support the maintenance of these ratings against a retailer's inventory. As the influence of bloggers continues to grow, it may soon become feasible for retailers to reference blogger reviews against their inventory online. By making their reviews more readily accessible to retailers, bloggers have an opportunity to take further market share from the established critics.

A retailer's content includes its product listings and prices, but more valuable for generating links are unique wine reviews and stories about wine. In the same way bloggers comment on each others' posts, retailers need to leverage their content by broadcasting it online using blogs, Facebook and Twitter. These links will drive an audience to your website that will lift your online business. Established critics still drive a reliable volume of sales for online wine stores, but retailers who seek out new content partners will stand out from the crowd and find a loyal following online.

To learn more about how the Beverage Media can help with a website for your store, contact Ian Griffith at 212-571-3232, twitter.com/griffiti, openwineconsortium.org/profile/lanGriffith or visit www.bevnet-work.com/retailweb.