

Stefan MATEI,
Doctoral School of Economics and Business Administration,
“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iasi

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE WINE PRODUCTS ON FOREIGN MARKETS THROUGH THE NETWORK DISTRIBUTION OF GOODS

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Abstract

Distribution of goods has evolved in two main directions that seem contradictory : on the one hand, the mass distribution was fully developed in terms of distribution facilities, logistics, comfort, and standardization of goods and services, on the other hand, the increased competition and customer loyalty has prompted the development of marketing techniques based on developing long-term relationships between the company and customers. Often this relationship is created and maintained through personalized offers, a unique combination of services and through direct contact with customers.

These contradictory trends are reproduced in the distribution and consumption of wine. It is considered to be more than a physical product. From one point of view, the wine is not regarded as a simply physical product. The value of wine increases due to its tradition, trademark, country and region of origin, processing method, as well as the consumer's knowledge and sensitivity. On the other side, the wine is one of the world's most popular alcoholic beverages.

GENERAL GUIDELINES OF THESIS AND AREA OF FOCUS

Our national campaigns within agriculture sector are often inefficiently managed by out-of-date managers applying obsolete strategies specific to the communism mentality. The most of the contractors within agriculture industry do not have a solid base of education (specialty studies) and their actions depend on „experience gained over time”. Generally the agricultural enterprises do not have their own marketing department and the correspondent responsibilities are assumed by the general manager (within small companies) or by untrained individuals assigned to sell the company’s products. Due to the above-mentioned issues I consider my research brings value both to the winegrowing campaigns and to the field of study.

The Romanian independent producers will encounter important competitive pressure from stronger competitors with higher financial power. The important progress of the distribution sector confirms the major difficulties the local wine producers encounter as their contribution is marginal within the new international context increasingly dominated by campaigns oriented to the commercial profit and economic efficiency because of the mass production strategies which do not give credit to the time-honoured winegrowing traditions.

Romania has been a winegrowing country and member of OIV (International organization of Vine and Wine) since 1927, holding important areas cultivated with vines that are the subject of the Common Market Organization for wine sector. The national wine-producing area is divided in 8 growing regions of vineyards which are under the national legislation up to the level of territorial administration laws. This is the only area the vineyards setting up is permitted

During the last 20 years, the products distribution has known progress in two main directions that are apparently contradictory regarding their intended use: on one hand, the large-scale distribution has developed as regards distribution areas, logistics, convenience, and standardization of products and services; on the other hand, the enhanced competition and the

ways to build customers’ loyalty have developed marketing techniques based on long-term relations between the company and clients.

These inconsistent tendencies can also be found within wine distribution and consumption. From one point of view, the wine is not regarded as a simply physical product. The value of wine increases due to its tradition, trademark, country and region of origin, processing method, as well as the consumer’s knowledge and sensitivity. On the other side, the wine is one of the world’s most popular alcoholic beverages: global wine sales have reached approximately 87.8 billion Euros in 2010 (Wine China, 2007). Frequently, the wines are commercialized in supermarkets and hypermarkets and some of these commercial units develop their own wine brands. The wine offer within supermarkets has consistently contributed to making the wine become democratic, more accessible for a larger group of population (Wine Australia, 2006). The price levelling has a wide range as the cheap wines can be purchased for less than 5 Euro, while the well-known brands are priced for more than 100 euro per bottle.

This range of diversity documents the fact that, in the present time, there are different marketing channels to be used in order to improve the profitability of the mentioned activity. Therefore, the wine producers are facing complex choices regarding the manner to commercialize their wine production and must consider the problems related to the volume of sales, the price sensitivity and the general perception on the brand. Considering these conditions, it is extremely important for the wine producers to understand all available distribution options, as well as the implications and opportunities each sales channel can provide. (Wine Australia, 2006). This paper intends to investigate the advertising methods based on the relation between the direct and indirect marketing channels of the Romanian wine producers and to identify the main significant elements which can provide successful direct distribution strategies.

In spite of the raised concern regarding the prospecting of different distribution channels used in the wine selling sector, there are few studies assessing the relation between the direct

and indirect distribution channels in the view of the specific features of wine producers. This thesis focuses on the strategies of advertising by means of the distribution channels used by the Romanian wine producers, particularly on the specific elements and strategical approaches which can enhance the success of the direct marketing techniques. To this intent I consider the present paper focuses on the following research objectives:

1. Investigation of the direct and indirect distribution channels used by a various range of Romanian wine producers.

2. Assessment of the conditions under which the direct channel marketing efficiency can be improved.

3. Research of the direct distribution strategies of Romanian wine producers, particularly the interaction between different direct channels.

The direct methods of distribution considered within the present paper are as follows:

- wine selling in vinery and wine cellars;
- direct selling on product markets;
- wine sales during shows and wine expos;
- mail-order sales;
- internet marketing;
- direct marketing by means of producers' associations.

The assessed indirect channels of distribution are:

- small shops selling;
- specialized shops sales;
- supermarket sales;
- restaurants selling;
- exports

STUDIES OF THE WINEGROWING SECTOR LITERATURE

During the last 20 years, academic and professional studies on direct wine selling activities have considerably developed both in number of specific paper works and level of complexity, proving the concern of the researchers, producers, and consumers for the direct marketing strategies. Simultaneously, the quantity of wine purchased by means of direct distribution channels has known an important

raising [Wine Business Centre, 2004]. For example, according to the wine quantity sold directly to US consumers, the total value has reached 1 billion dollars. [Heald and Heald, 2007]. The specialists indicated various advantages such as: „using a direct marketing program, a wine production facility can obtain control over its own trademark identification system and is provided with a raised flexibility of the pricing strategy” [Coppla, 2000].

The size of the company, the price levelling, and the marketing philosophy are the main factors that should have impact on the route to market [Wine Australia, 2006]. The direct marketing methods are the best strategies for developing long-term relation with loyal clients instead of providing one transaction only. This strategy improves continuity and stability of the flux of incomes and, when is correctly applied, it can progressively raise the profitability and reputation [Olsen et al., 2004]. Moreover, the direct marketing methods have significantly enhanced word-of-mouth advertising impact. [Mitchell and Hall, 2004]. Generally, the wines are chosen according to the information received from friends, relatives or followed models. It is said that “people drink other people’s wine” [Mitchell and Hall, 2004].

The wine merchandising is considered to be the based on the richness of information [Stricker et al., 2007]. This is why the development of electronic commercial technologies [Quinton and Harridge, March, 2003] together with the global wine consumption [Bernetti et al., 2006] lead not only to local or regional opportunities, but also to international perspectives for the wine production facilities which decide to use direct marketing channels such as Internet [Bruwer and Wood, 2005; Giraud-Héraud et al, 2001; McNeill, 2007], e-mail selling, or specialised clubs marketing [Frochot, 2001]. Used in a creative manner, these direct marketing methods can complete and support each other improving the value of the wine offer and the international reputation of the wine producer.

Nevertheless, in spite of the above mentioned advantages, the wine direct marketing can also raise difficult problems. First of all, the development and maintenance of a

customized relation with the clients imply considerable costs. Also, successful implementation of the direct marketing techniques requires knowledge, intuition, and field experience. Even though the direct selling training is quite simple and suitable for small-scale wine companies, a desired success and raise of the clients' number require additional resources and a flexible adjustment of the strategy [Beverland, 2000; and Güngör Güngör, 2004]. Secondly, there is a series of factors that could limit or delay the market development of the direct marketing strategy companies. Such factors are transportation costs, conditions, geographical area wine production facilities, knowledge of foreign languages, the capacity to elaborate and manage a good advertising, to build a website, and even to be aware of the valid legislation of some countries that might limit the producers' rights of direct selling at cross-border level as it is the case in some US countries [Heald and Heald, 2007]. Moreover, a company deciding to apply direct marketing techniques must solve any type of marketing channel conflicts which might send inconsistent messages about the product, brand, and pricing policy [Stricker et al., 2007].

The winegrowing sector literature analyzed the wine direct marketing in terms of small-size wine production facilities [Mitchell and Hall, 2004; Mowle and Merrilees, 2005]. These studies indicate the importance of developing intangible aspects of the product, as well as the particular communication methods [Reidet Al., 2001]. On the other side, the wine direct marketing is sometimes associated with other activities such as ethnographic sightseeing tour [Alant and Bruwer, 2004; Carlsen, 2004; Frochot, 2000, 2001, Simpson and Bretherton, 2004; Sumner et al., 2001].

CHANNELS OF DISTRIBUTION ON INTERNATIONAL MARKET

The core element of every distribution process is the **channel of distribution**. The winegrowing literature [Pasco-Berho, Le Ster - Beaumevielle, 2007, p. 243] identifies two distinguishable elements which are generally

used for the same meaning: distribution channel and distribution network.

The channel of distribution is the path through which the ownership title is transferred and the product travels from the producer to the consumer, to the final user. In the case of international distribution, the product transfer starts from the domestic producer from one country towards the final user from another country. The international distribution channel is particular due to its three-dimension identification feature:

- Length of the channel – given by the number of links and products transfers (property transfers) performed between the two ends of the channel;

- Width of the channel – given by the number of intermediaries involved in providing distribution;

- Depth of the channel – given by the closeness between the last intermediary and product final user.

The distribution system represents the multitude of channels used in delivering a product on foreign markets. The intermediaries providing the product delivery in a distribution channel are responsible for two capital functions:

- Technical functions: transportation, storage, acceptance, and preservation of products;

- Economical functions: prospecting and gathering of market data to be used for the producer, negotiation, selling, advertising, services offer, warranties, product returns.

The multitude of distribution channels used within international marketing can be structured depending on [Berndt, Fantapie-Altobelli, Sander, 2010]:

- number of intermediaries involved in the distribution process;

- number of the various distribution channels comprised by the distribution system of a country;

- length of the distribution channel (one-level or multi-level distribution);

- distribution activities performed individually or in collaboration with independent local partners (single distribution/ collaborative distribution).

The international distribution can be performed by means of direct channels, without intermediaries. In this case the producer sets the relations with his foreign beneficiaries and is involved in the performance of import – export activities (including product advertising) by means of some indirect channels due to the distribution intermediaries. The selection of direct or indirect selling on international markets is decided according to the external commitment of the producer exporting own products. For example, if the commitment of a certain foreign product market is limited, the marketing decision is made based on the possibilities of direct and indirect export activities.

The selection of an international distribution channel implies close attention to the following goals:

- obtaining certain selling volume and profit;
- a set level of foreign market entry by means of exported products;
- acquiring a reliable partner to provide selling, support, and advertising activities on the target market.

Furthermore, the selection of a distribution channel is closely related to fulfilling a series of criteria such as target market, product, local legal regulations, financial costs, and the commercial apparatus existent on the target market.

The network of product distribution on international market

The distribution network is an economical apparatus comprising the chain of economic agents, operational units, and specialized companies related in order to provide transfer of products from the producer to the final user abroad [Popa, 1997, p.136].

Depending on the position within the distribution network territory, it can be divided in two classifying groups:

- The network providing products distribution on foreign market – the network of distribution between countries;
- The network ensuring that products are delivered to the final user on the target market – international market distribution (exclusive distributor, wholesale dealer, etc.)

The first group is related to the wide meaning of the international distribution concept and consists of a specific component of international marketing. The second group relates to the closed meaning of international distribution and comprises chains of agents, institutions, and similar operational units which can be either of the same type or different from the distribution structures of the internal market of the country exporting the products. The network of distribution on the international market is complex and cannot be easily structured. This classification in two groups fulfils the practical function of indicating the location where the main activity of each network component is performed. In order to draw a distribution network configuration indicating how the product reaches the final beneficiary from the target market, the international marketer must consider four groups of criteria:

- ◆ The financial resources required in order to manage the selected distribution network and the level of risk implied by the decided solution;

- ◆ The distribution network management which depends on the strategy chosen by the production facility and which is required to answer to a certain level of flexibility and a high level of covering the target market;

- ◆ The parameters specific to the international transaction which depend on the foreign market entry timing requested by the economical activity in order to obtain quick accommodation to the local market requirements;

- ◆ The level of control over the products and selling methods to final beneficiary the production (exporting) facility intends to achieve.

A close analysis of the above mentioned information contribute to making the right decision over the distribution network type in accordance with the financial resources the company intends to use for this purpose, the short period of entering the target market, and the set level of control over the products.

The network of direct distribution between countries is used if the producer or the consumer (beneficiary) takes over the economic activities regarding the physical and economical

transfer of the products intended to enter the foreign market. It requires an individual apparatus of one of the parties involved in distribution process in order to successfully complete the import or export activities.

The direct distribution network provides multiple advantages, but it can also bring some disadvantages as indicated in the following table.

Table no. 1 Direct distribution network – Advantages and disadvantages

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|--|---|
| Producer's direct access to the information of the target market | High level of risk regarding product advertising and selling activities |
| Producer's high level of control | Large amount of efforts in order to elaborate or to develop the own distribution system |
| More possibilities to control own employees | Dependency to the employees from the product destination country |
| A quicker reaction to the market changes | Risk of losses in case the project fails |
| Direct transfer of producer's image to the destination market | |
| Cost efficiency regarding the distribution activities | |
| A closer approach of the final customers | |
| A higher level of control within product advertising process | |

sources: Berndt, Fantapie-Altobelli, Sander, 2010, pp.375-376; Zentes, Swoboda, Schramm-Klein, 2010, p. 422.

The network of indirect distribution between countries classifies its market players in two main divisions: independent dealers and international intermediaries. The particular features of each type of intermediaries are

indicated in the table below. The main difference between the two groups is related to their position from the product property status.

Table no. 2 Indirect distribution network

| Indirect dealers | International intermediaries |
|--|--|
| The international negotiator – purchases and sells on his own behalf, has no permanent relations with the suppliers or beneficiaries, searches the product supplier after having identified the suitable client; | The producer's export agent – activates based on a power of attorney and investigates the market, sells, invoices, delivers the goods and receives a selling commission calculated as a percentage out of the price obtained. The export agent can warrant the activity based on an additional commission; |
| The Export Merchant – is interested in buying product from a large number of producers and resells the products in wholesale distribution type to the clients abroad; | The Broker – sets connection between exporter and importer and does not have property over the products; |
| The Export Jobber – activates on the industrial products market and owns property over the purchased goods, but is not in possession of it. | The Broker – provides contact between seller and buyer without any mandate and receives a percentage commission from both parties; |
| | Buyer's Import Agent – activates based on a mandate from the buyer which stipulates the conditions: quality, price, delivery terms, etc. |

The selection of an intermediary agent is generally related to the particularity of the local market in direct connection with the dissimilarity or similarity of the economic network [Meffert, Burmann, Becker, 2010, p. 211]. The economic structure varies in different countries, for instance in some countries the hypermarket type prevails (with selling areas exceeding couple of thousands of meter square), while in other countries the small size shops are dominating. The small shops limit the selling product and can ensure very low advertising at the selling place.

The relationship between direct and indirect distribution channels

There is a significant relationship between the wine-growing regions and the strategies the wine producers use. The wine sales grow constantly in relation to the wine-growing region; the same general trend may also be identified in relation to the fair sales, specialized stores, supermarkets and export. The export sales and the sales in small-sized stores are successful especially among the producers holding more than 30 ha, while the producers with less than 5 ha sell their product in their own retail stores, small-sized stores, trade shows and on-line commerce.

There is also a close relationship between the wine-growing region (company location) and the usage of direct distribution channels by both large- and small-sized producers. The very small-sized producers usually sell the entire production by direct channels. The specialty literature states that the direct distribution is an essential strategy for the small-sized wineries [Mitchell and Hall, 2004]. The sales percent by means of producer associations increases constantly for the producers with an output of up to 5 000 hectolitres per year. Larger producer do not rely on the sales by means of producer associations. On-site sell is the most important direct distribution channel. However, the medium-sized producers sell their products mainly by producer associations. The trade shows are intensively used by very small-sized producers. A survey carried out by Deloitte Touche-(2006) shows that the Australian producers use direct distribution channels in the

following sequence: on-site sales, mail and on-line commerce. Nevertheless, for the Australian large-sized wine producers, the importance of direct marketing channels decreases gradually in contrast with the sales made by indirect channels.

It is interesting to observe that many small-sized producers and not only have sold and sell more than their annual output. This situation can be explained by the fact that some wineries provide commercial services for other producers. Moreover, the wine produced in the preceding years which has not been sold can be stored and commercialized later when the market demand increases. Another phenomenon which explains the above-described situation is that the wine producers import low-quality wine and sell it under their own trademark.

Producers oscillate among different indirect sale channels and it is very difficult to identify a constant trend. For example, both small- and larger-sized producers sell their products successfully in small-sized stores. Although the speciality literature state that the supermarket sales are dominated and controlled by the large-sized producers, the small-sized producers have also increased their sales in supermarkets (especially the French wine producers). This is due to the fact that the small-sized producers have been participating into professional groups that negotiate with local and regional supermarkets under better terms.

Most wine producers from Romania and abroad sell their products in their own retail stores. The wine cellars provide the visitors drinks from the selection of wines, car parking and road posts that facilitate the access to the cellars. The visitors experience great pleasure and, therefore, may contribute to the increase of wine sale. However, it is early to define the causality relationship between what the wine cellars offer and the sales volume. An additional sale and taste test assistant may also contribute to sale increase. The best solution is to hire a full-time employee. However, each wine producer shall establish a cost-benefit report for each solution chosen based on the sales target.

The producers providing a restaurant and/or accommodation for visitors sell less or slightly more than the wineries offering no

additional service. This is the effect of cannibalisation between the accommodation and wine sale. Some clients may first consider the wineries as a provider of tourist services to which wine sale is a secondary activity, in the detriment of their main quality of wine sellers [Alant and Bruwer, 2004]. As a result the clients of the wineries might not be interested in wine purchase, which explains the poor sales of the wine producers with additional services.

However, when the additional activities are directly related to winery (vineyard visit) or commercial activities (sale of local products), the wine sales increase significantly [Alant and Bruwer, 2004]. The wineries selling other local products have obtained great results by putting wine into a specific local and traditional context [Getz et al, 1999; Mitchell and Hall, 2004]. The success of the strategy confirms the fact that wine is a product promoted based on information circulation and requires adequate development of management, communication and other intangible elements in order to increase awareness and add value to the product (Mowle and Merrilees, 2005; O'Neill et al, 2000). On the external markets the main wine purchasers are the local clients, their visitors and foreign tourists. As regards the wine sales by mail, the offers sent directly by mail represent a margin wine sale channel.

Regarding the direct sale by Internet, it has been found that specific online commercial functions may increase direct sale of wines on WEB. For example, the sites that permit only direct wine order have an annual average sale of 162 480 bottles, while the sites that provide a safe payment system have an annual average sale of 175 333, 33 bottles [Viniflhor, 2006].

As concerns the direct sales on fairs and exhibitions, there is a direct relationship between the quantity of wine produced and the type of commerce used. The largest producers participate into international exhibitions to make contacts abroad and initiate exports.

The agro-food markets may also be used as promotion events when the producers contact and discuss with possible purchasers [Viniflhor, 2006].

The direct sale by means of the producer association is used especially in France and large

wine-producing countries where the companies maintain a close connection and pursue one goal – to sell as much as possible on the markets where the demand cannot be satisfied by only one producer.

DIRECT DISTRIBUTION STRATEGIES

The interviews with the wine producers and exporters will complete the information given in this survey and provide a detailed image of the main component elements affecting the direct distribution strategy. The results of a previous survey [Laporte, et al., 2006] on the distribution channels used by the wine producers in other world regions have highlighted the ever-changing conditions on the local, regional, national and international wine markets which are characterized by dynamism, unforeseeable circumstances and growing competition.

These trends are also obvious at local level and post new challenges for all wine-producers. A high quality product with increased focus on customer can cope with all challenges [Pike and Melewar, 2006]. For small-sized producers, the direct distribution channels represent the most efficient strategy that allow them to control the quality of the products and related services and to manage their brand as well as other intangible aspects of the offer and finally, to foster long-term relationships with each and every customer [Dodd, 1999].

Direct interaction with the customers enables a complex process of co-creating value. In their book *The Future of Competition*, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) state that value is currently co-created by the companies and their customers. Therefore, new entry wineries shall embrace a relational approach. From this point of view value is embedded directly in the co-creation experience and does not result from products, services, marketing expertise and data supplied by service providers. This orientation evolves to a new dominant logic for marketing, one in which service provision, rather than goods, is fundamental to economic exchange and customers' valuable experience [Vargo and Lusch, 2004].

Wine suits the logic of dominant services since the perceived value of the product is determined by a complex mixture of various tangible and intangible elements. On one hand, the direct distribution strategy allows a better control of the producer in the co-creation process and management of both tangible and intangible aspects of the product [Mowle and Merrilees, 2005]. However, these advantages represent only the potential and they may be embraced depending on knowledge, resources and the capacity of the producer to adequately create, develop and manage the direct distribution strategy. On the other hand, the main inconvenient of the direct marketing

channels is the limited volume of wine that can be sold. Considering the cost needed to develop and apply a direct marketing strategy, the only viable possibility is represented by the premium brands that allow high profit margin.

The market shows us that most of producers use more direct marketing channels. It is interesting to observe the capacity of different direct marketing activities to consolidate each other and, therefore to save money and create synergistic effects.

It is necessary to adopt for all distribution channels an integrated direct marketing strategy by using the same central concept of value. To enhance value the producers apply a simplified process of distribution strategic planning:

1. The first stage consists of identification of the main elements that can be combined and integrated in order to create a positive image of the product. These elements include tangible elements (e.g. wine quality, packing, labelling, etc.) and intangible elements (e.g. historic background, tradition, local tourist attractions, etc.)

2. Throughout the second stage the most adequate mixture of direct marketing channels is chosen based on their capacity to present an enhanced image of the product and develop advantageous relationships with the customers. The channel must also be analyzed in terms of costs/ benefits based on the history of commercial transactions.

3. In the third stage of the planning process the producers must define general scenarios for situation of value co-creation, in which to

interact with the customers. They strive to maximize customers' satisfaction in order to generate loyalty, repeated sales and positive promotion by „word-of-mouth”.

4. Finally the fourth and last stage focus on the capacity of each direct channel to enhance value added by the proposals made by other distribution channels, and on integrating the positive elements in a common strategic approach.

CONCLUSIONS

Hence, in many cases the strategic planning process is extremely informal and is based on previous experiences, errors and intuitive ideas, rather than on solid marketing research. However, the producers are satisfied with this approach which suits the resource and expertise levels. The following quotation sums the marketing philosophy of wine producers: As long as the customers are satisfied with their winery experience, they will remember the place and return to it.

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