



Retail Education

By Harriet Lembeck



Learning from the Marketers

Two recent marketing studies on selling wines provide some insights into today's 21-25 year old customers. The first study, prepared for visitors to Vinexpo, the biennial wine show in Bordeaux, compared U.S., U.K., Japanese, French and Belgians from that age group — showing decidedly different buying patterns for each nationality. The second, created by Philippe Newlin, Associate Editor of *Wine & Spirits Magazine*, and also a teacher at Columbia Business School in New York, was targeted at a more specific U.S. group — one with perhaps more education and more available income than the general population. Some of the findings, which retailers may have known intuitively, have been confirmed. These, plus some new observations, can lead to increased sales if these ideas are noted and followed.

Varietal Labeling. This is the most important item in both studies. Wines named for grapes were the primary buying draw. Most said that varietal wines were easier to understand than wines with place names, and varietal wines were more universal — especially the international varieties — and less intimidating. Wines named for places, usually French, were associated with older, more-established customers.

This is a signal to you, the retailer, to make sure that any wines named for places, or made from proprietary blends, should be described with shelf-talkers, or other signs, listing the grapes in the wines. That becomes a great confidence booster for a group that is just entering adulthood.

Country of Origin. France is in the lead here, so make your French wines prominent. You may think it's more exciting to have other countries placed in the lime-

light, but for the newly initiated, French wines give a sense of security, and a feeling of quality in the bottle.

Price. Most new buyers were comfortable with a \$15-\$20 range. Ten years ago, the price range was \$10-\$15. Further, most do not buy fewer bottles because one wine may have a higher price. Make sure that you have a decent selection in that \$15-\$20 price point.

Matching with Food. This is of concern, and these younger buyers take advice wherever it can be found, often from friends, or even blogs. Try to become part of that trusted circle of advisors, by helping them educate their palates. In-store tastings are useful. Suggest wines for pizza, pasta, BBQs and picnics.

Health and Moderation. This age group is exceedingly interested in health, and wine is perceived as a healthful beverage. Since it is based on fruit, it is thought

of as "natural." As you surely know, today's wines come with warning labels, yet valid health benefits are not permitted on labels. You may not make health claims, but you are permitted to quote other writers or health experts, so have reprints of articles available on the counter or have articles posted on the walls.

Packaging. The Americans and Japanese

were the most receptive to innovative packaging — bright colors, shapes, smaller sizes, and even some "box" wines, perfect for suggesting something to serve pool-side.

Fun. Irreverent humor goes well with this group, which can have a cynical streak. Most of all, you want to be friendly, and you want to keep it light. If the people in this age group, which is about 50/50 men and women, can be given quality, and the confidence not to feel stupid, they will grow up with you. Their repeat business will be yours. □



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