



Marketing Plan prepared for Nebraska Winery and Grape Growers Association

April 2012

Introduction

With over 30 vineyards, wineries and tasting rooms, the Nebraska Winery and Grape Growers Association (NWGGA) represents a unique and broad range of members from the busy metro area to the rural beauty of the Panhandle.

Even though the grape growing season in Nebraska is shorter than traditional grape regions, the opportunity exists to promote and sell Nebraska wines all year.

An image campaign that builds the brand of Nebraska wine is crucial in creating and maintaining loyal and repeat customers. The marketing plan incorporates social media, professional websites, videos, informative brochures and enticing events that will help create loyalty to Nebraska's wine industry.

Challenges

There are a variety of challenges facing the NWGGA including a soft economy, rural wineries in small population areas, a shorter tourism season than traditional wine tourism states like California, varying price point at retail locations and an overall lack of awareness from Nebraska residents and tourists about Nebraska wines.

Objectives

The marketing plan offers the tools that will help direct the NWGGA in developing a consistent brand strategy for Nebraska Wines sold **on quality not low prices**.

The objectives consist of promoting the quality of Nebraska wines, increasing the total percent of Nebraska wines sold within the state, continuing the Passport Program which helps increase traffic to tasting rooms, turning the novelty of less familiar wine varieties into an advantage, and emphasizing the Quality Assurance Program among members. Meeting these objectives also helps with membership retention to the NWGGA.

Since one of the main challenges facing Nebraska wineries is driving traffic to tasting rooms (where wine sales occur and a higher profit margin is realized), increasing tourist traffic is a priority. Since many of the tasting rooms are located in low population areas, the success of Nebraska wines depends not only on individual tasting rooms marketing practices, but also on partnerships with local businesses, festival organizers and other area attractions that foster regional development. These events may include mystery dinners, cooking demonstrations, auctions, community celebrations, county fairs, music festivals, etc.



Strategy

Proper execution of these objectives will require a mix of traditional advertising, social marketing and public relations strategies for tourists and NWGAA members.

Recommendations:

1. Continue surveying members to monitor trends, identify partnerships and track sales.
2. Develop and maintain a close relationship with local and statewide media.
3. Promote the uniqueness of Nebraska's wine regions.
4. Create and maintain a consistent social media presence.
5. Network with non-wine associations and create promotional partnerships.
6. Offer workshops for members about social media, customer relations, wine making, and tasting room marketing.
7. Maintain databases of current and past visitors for mailings and e-blasts.
8. Share the awards won by Nebraska wines at regional, national and international competitions on the various marketing mediums including press releases, brochures, in-store POS displays, websites, in-store wine tastings and social media.

Traditional Print Advertising

The need for print materials and collateral support to highlight and share the benefits of an organization or business is still very important. A brochure or newsletter acts as a physical reminder of the services offered by the NWGAA. These print products can be distributed to customers during personal visits, used in mailers, distributed at tourism offices and handed out at events and festivals. A brochure or newsletter helps potential visitors plan an itinerary, and makes the winery a destination for a weekend trip.

Designing 'shelf talkers', 'point of sale' displays and bottle neckers/hangers for retail outlets will help draw attention to the Nebraska wine selections.

Recommendations:

1. Distribute brochure/newsletters to various local and regional tourist offices, hotels and event centers.
2. Create mailings and e-blasts to customers and media contact for special events and promotions.
3. Display brochure/newsletters at the wineries and tasting rooms.
4. Design a variety of point of sale (POS) displays and bottle hangers for retail outlets that sell Nebraska wines.

Video Development

Videos can be influential, educational and generate an emotional response. A high quality video for NWGAA can be used to highlight the different varieties of award-winning wines, the quality of grapes used across the state, the various events held at the wineries, locations to buy Nebraska wine, and the diversity of the association's vineyards, wineries and tasting rooms.



The video (and segments of it) can be shared on members' websites, YouTube, NWGAA's website, Facebook and media outlets. QR codes can be placed on brochures or point of purchase displays that direct users to the video.

Recommendations:

1. Create video that features Nebraska Wines and statewide wineries, vineyards and tasting rooms.
2. Develop QR codes that direct users to the video and will encourage a call to action (drive traffic to wineries and increase sales of Nebraska wine).

Online Marketing

Building the Nebraska Wine brand online will boost traffic not only to Nebraska winery websites, but will reverberate into increased physical traffic to tasting rooms.

When planning a trip, tourists research their destinations online before visiting wine destinations and events. All wineries need a professional online presence that will draw customers to their location.

Recommendations for both the NWGGA and their members:

1. Maintain a professional website that includes:
 - Mobile friendly (the growth of smart phones allows users to consult apps or GPS to find a winery).
 - Easy to find maps/directions
 - Links to social media outlets and blogs
 - Online newsletter
 - Video links
 - Calendar of events
 - Easy to use e-commerce store for wine-related product sales
 - Tourist promotional packages

Social Marketing

Businesses are finding the benefits of embracing social media. However, understanding how best the medium works is vital in using this marketing tool effectively. It is not a place to sell, but to provide content for users that promotes discussion and online community enrichment.

Social networks can engage wine enthusiasts to visit wineries, vineyards and tasting rooms. They have become increasingly popular with tourists as a source of word-of-mouth promotion on where to go and what to buy.

The NWGAA should develop a Facebook page that acts as a hub for members, visitors, vendors and tourists. The Facebook page would provide links to news stories, videos of members' locations, information and trivia about the association and its members, educational content about the wine and grape industry, fan contests, newsletter articles, photos from visitors at wineries/vineyards, tasting room specials, awards won in wine competitions, and invitations to events/festivals.



The Facebook page could become an exceptional marketing tool to highlight the Passport Program, sharing how to utilize wine in cooking, wine recipes and promoting Nebraska wines for holiday gifts.

Facebook also provides an advertising platform for businesses to create ad campaigns with specific geo-targeted options. NWGAA could run focused campaigns promoting its members' locations and events/festivals.

To create and maintain an effective Facebook presence, the posts should encourage social interaction and provide informative news. Establishing a posting schedule is beneficial for both the administrator(s) of the Facebook page and the audience. It's important to post frequently so followers grow accustomed to seeing new content. However, posting too often may annoy followers. We recommend posting 1-2 times each day and sharing different types of content with each post. We encourage experimenting with what time of day to post and which posts generate the most interactions. These posts could be divided into three categories: Deals, Questions, and Community. This variety will allow for a mixture of fresh content.

"Deals" will help drive foot traffic to various locations and could include 'deal of the day' wine specials or meal discounts.

"Questions" will encourage participation and help generate feedback. Sample posts could include, "Do you prefer sweet or dry wine?", "What wine do you enjoy cooking with?" or "Have you attended a murder mystery at one of the wineries?"

"Community" messages will help create a 'personality' of the page and promote the fact that the owners of the various wineries and vineyards are community members too and could include posts about local sports teams, non-profit sponsorships, favorite recipes, or quick fun facts about winery employees.

Recommendations:

1. Create Facebook page (consider a geo-targeted Facebook ad campaign)
2. Place the Facebook "like" button on the association's and members' websites
3. Develop a blog (helps create dialogue, promotes wine events, links to social media)
4. Design a YouTube channel (post videos and pictures, by visitors and NWGAA)
5. Sponsor a photo contest (that could be made into a calendar sold at wineries and retail locations or use the winning photos in brochures/billboards)

Public Relations

Implementing public relations tactics can assist NWGAA in establishing itself as a reliable and professional source of information for the media and foster a reputation for its members' locations to become a tourist destination. Public relations efforts would also include educational events, festivals, fairs, seminars, press releases, conferences, wine tastings at retail outlets and media interviews.



NWGAA should continue participating with local, state and regional tourism bureaus to leverage area events and festivals that entice visitors to add a few extra hours or days to their trips. Additionally, participating in government, retail or business conferences, seminars and symposiums will help with networking.

Monitoring community activity calendars and holding winery events during the same time period will help attract tasting room traffic and increase sales by providing non-wine items such as winery branded t-shirts, caps, aprons and home décor items.

Recommendations:

1. Sponsor educational seminars for members and visitors
2. Organize and/or participate in festivals and other community events
3. Maintain presence at county fairs and state fair
4. Attend various agriculture and economic development conferences
5. Build professional rapport with statewide media
6. Develop a list of special promotions within the state media that will fit with the promotion of Nebraska Wines such as NTV's morning segment, "Look What's Cooking" or Lincoln Journal Star's, Lifestyles Food and Cooking section.
7. Issue periodic press releases highlighting Nebraska wine events and activities
8. Sponsor wine tastings of award winning wines at retail outlets
9. Create a media tour, drive reporters to various wineries and tasting rooms

In Summary

Creating a consistent and professional branding image of Nebraska wineries, vineyards and tasting rooms as tourist destinations, and Nebraska wines as a top quality wine choice is vital in increasing visitors numbers and wine sales.

The key in the plan's success is *commitment and integration*. The association will see a positive return on its investment with a properly executed marketing campaign. A multi-channel marketing effort utilizing eye-catching brochures and store displays, story-telling videos, engaging social media communication and aggressive public relations tactics will establish an effective reputation for Nebraska Wines.