Grower feedback and developing relationships -

Orlando Wyndham's perspective

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Success through winegrowers
Orlando Wyndham has been successful because it has a commitment to foster strong company and winegrower relationships. During the rapid expansion of the wine industry in the early 1990s, Orlando Wyndham identified that the relationship between the company and its independent winegrowers needed to be developed if each was to remain competitive.

Winegrowers needed to be informed of the company's expectations. With training, education and information, winegrape quality could be improved. By providing information about the company, its financial plans, winery development and new product releases the winegrowers could feel secure about their future with Orlando Wyndham. The company also embarked on providing feedback to winegrowers concerning their vineyards and grapes. The aim was to develop a partnership between winegrowers and the company. Each party strives to reach a common goal. Two essential elements for a successful relationship are:

- The commitment by the company; and
- The development of a communication strategy.

A communication strategy
It is essential to develop a plan that defines what information is to be communicated and by what method. The plan period should be a minimum of one year. Communication is a two way process. Accordingly any strategy needs to incorporate appropriate methods to exchange ideas and information.

To enable the strategy to be effective, the information is delivered by appropriate employees of the company and requires a commitment from employees at all levels of the company including directors, marketing, winemaking and viticultural personnel.

The following information should be included in a communication strategy:

- Summary of five-year financial plan goals
- Annual financial budget goals and results
- Marketing goals and new product information
- Viticulture plans
- Winemaking plans
- Industry information
- Technical advice

Ways of communicating the information
- Pre-vintage small group meetings to discuss expectations for the coming vintage, pricing and intake arrangements.
- Post-vintage small group meetings to review the outcome of the vintage.
- Regional dinners, a corporate evening to present winegrowers with the company's directions.
- Winegrower newsletter, a quarterly update specifically for the company's winegrowers. The newsletter includes articles on marketing issues, new products, events and technical information.
- Individual winegrower vintage review. This is the opportunity to meet and discuss plans with strategic winegrowers.
- Informal grower functions which are arranged according to winegrowers regional needs. This may be a disease control workshop followed by a barbecue or a Christmas function.
- Vineyard site visits by company technical, grower liaison and winemaker personnel.
- Focus group workshops and meetings to address relevant issues.

Categories of winegrowers
Winegrowers require a variety of information depending on their situation. The company separates winegrowers according to their needs, skills and products. A winegrower new to the industry may require general viticultural assistance, whereas established winegrowers may seek only specialised advice. The new winegrower requires assistance with access to information on industry structure, organisations and publications. A special information session for these growers on the company's expectations and vintage arrangements may be of benefit.

A particular group of winegrowers may need the company to arrange and provide special technical support in order to achieve the company's objective. Further, the company may group winegrowers that are strategically important because they are:

- Critical to the company's wine brands.
- Included within a registered geographical indication.
- Able to produce winegrapes to the company's volume and specification.

Agribusiness personnel skills
Orlando Wyndham's grower-liaison staff utilise a combination of customer service, technical and business skills to support winegrowers and meet the company's objectives. Staff need on-going training to a level that allows them to respond effectively to requests by winegrowers and to support the company's objectives. The ratio of staff to number of winegrowers is also an important consideration.

Feedback to growers
The company accumulates information annually about each winegrower's performance. This information is presented to the winegrower to assist them in managing their vineyard and achieving the company's objectives. Grower feedback takes several forms:
Grower annual report
This report provides a record of all information the company has obtained from each winegrower. The report includes:

- Vintage and seasonal comments
- Spray diary analysis
- Yield estimates
- Maturity data
- Financial performance
- Winegrape quality classification
- Technical information
- Performance indicators referenced to area averages

Post-vintage meetings
These provide an opportunity for winegrowers and winery personnel to discuss any issues relating to vintage. Constructive comments derived from these meetings allow both the grower and the company to improve future vintages.

Vineyard inspections
Inspections allow direct feedback and comments on vineyard issues. For example winemakers can explain sensory characteristics of the winegrapes, and technical staff are able to explain the viticultural issues.

Establishing relationships
Many winegrowers are seeking long-term security from the winery. The winery also wants long-term supply arrangements. Prior to establishing or renewing the relationship, the winegrower and winery need to determine if they are compatible. Things that need to be considered are:

- Marketing: What are its products? Have you seen its advertisements? What is its reputation in the market place?
- Distribution: Is it a national or international company?
- Financial: Is the company financially sound? What is its financial reputation? Does the company plan for the future or is it just waiting for the future to happen? What are its plans?
- Technical: What is its involvement in the industry? Does it contribute to industry development?
- Support: Does the company provide a service for its winegrowers?

How well do you know your wine company?
- Enterprise: Have you discussed your business arrangements including succession planning with your winery?
- Vineyard: How well does your winery understand and know your vineyard?
- Support: Does the winery understand your requirements and the level of support you desire? How often does the company visit you and your vineyard?

Summary
In summary, an essential ingredient for success in today's wine market is that both the winery and the winegrower comprehensively understand each other's needs.