



Wine Events: Profitably Getting Started

By Gary Gottfried

Time to detail a few specific special wine event ideas. Some ideas that you may use with your personal touch or they may provide inspiration for you to do your own special expanded or varied version. The most important aspect to keep in mind is that wine is an extremely valuable marketing tool in elevating your brand as well as being its own high margin category profit generator.

Wine events can be as simple as creating special wine pairings or offerings, all the way to a full and more elaborate event around a theme. If uncertain, start simple and build up not only your wine experience and clientele but your wine confidence as well. There are logical limits or lack of limits depending on what type of on premise operation you have (i.e. ethnic versus mainline or higher end versus mid-range), but regardless, if you have a wine/beer license, you deserve to maximize it for both your top and bottom lines.

Here is the simple math. If you are a moderate priced restaurant (i.e. even be a mid-tier pizza restaurant) whose standard highest wine by the glass (WBTG) pour is \$7, those opportunities to offer and sell a \$10 instead is a 43% revenue increase. If a higher-level establishment instead of a \$12 and you go to a \$15 or an \$18, it's a 25% and 50% respective increase. Of course, most important in all the cases are **the dollars**. If you do the simple math of selling 1 glass of wine a day for a year at the higher price, your revenue improvements compound. That \$10 glass becomes \$3650, that \$15 glass becomes \$5475, and the \$18 is \$6570. At a 65% margin, that can pay a few bills and/or allow you to reduce margins to help you compete against other establishments in the on-premise wine market. Keep in mind that the likelihood of selling only one glass a day is low. An operation should consider the multiplier factor of multiple glasses (and therefore bottles) of WBTG, especially if you promote the wine.

Here are three simple examples covering an initial, a little more involved and a very involved wine event approach. For all instances I have one key recommendation looking ahead. Give yourself a month (or two) before starting and create a one-year wine calendar from that day forward with a start and ending date (i.e. start July 1,

run it through June 2022). This gives you time to plan, prep and execute. It also will provide you negotiation room with vendors.

Starting with the simplicity of pairings and offerings. First look at the calendar and look for potential “drive and/or promotional” times. Could be a special day like Mother’s/Father’s Day or the 4th of July or a less obvious one like Columbus (Italian) or Bastille (French) Day. In each case there is a natural or created reason to offer special wines and celebrate. Determine what menu items will appear those dates and plan for pairing with them. You are creating something special, and an impulse buy opportunity for your staff to offer. Although you may promote the offerings, these will succeed by simply being available for those guests attending. If you do this plan frequently enough, there is a good chance for you to draw a regular crowd as you become known for it.

Special flight wine tasting event offerings. These could be special promoted opportunities of wines being offered on a limited time basis and compared side by side (i.e. via flights) and at the same time offered to be paired with a food offering. Check calendar for any better or logical times to provide an offer. The flights themselves could be an array of interesting options not generally available as WBTC or thought of. For example, 3 California Cabs NOT from Napa, or 3 South African or 3 South American wines. You could also go the more traditional route of the same varietal vertical (same wine different vintages) or same varietal horizontal (same vintage different wines) wine tasting. Please, as a side note, recognize that these wines do not “have” to be flighted and can be sold WBTC to anyone interested to order.

A full out wine event. Again, look at your calendar. These are special opportunities that probably should be spaced out as, although they can be unbelievably valuable, however they also can be time consuming, particularly as you learn. Develop a theme. Make food a big part of it. Make it a marketing opportunity. Target specific audience or patrons that you will reap benefit beyond the evening itself (i.e. maybe regulars who you know have broader business interests and a special event could apply for their business interest and create additional event booking opportunities). Include something special unexpected, however covered in the event pricing as a takeaway reminder of the event. It could be wine or theme related. We know it is nice to have an actual winemaker attend for “celebrity” purposes, more important is having someone with some wine educational credibility and presenting skills. People love to learn about wine. It is knowledge they can share with others. Couple of important tips: Trusted resource support will help you develop your concepts and business. I believe any operator should personally have a sales representative (s), whether distributor or winery(s), who is not trying to simply sell you something, but helping you sell something. The good ones are there to help make it work, especially at the beginning. A smart rep should view it as a shared investment of their time and effort. A good one will understand they will benefit from your success.

Confidence to take the step: We know you see it as a risk (and it is). Just know there are a handful of ways through wine preservation to virtually lower or eliminate the risk. We know efficacy and cost are key factors. Educate yourselves for the best option for you.

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