Wine club operators benefit from new e-commerce technology

Introduction of Blackboxx e-commerce attracts interest from Australian wineries.

Kellie Arbuckle

IT STARTED AS a couple of guys writing wine reviews for a Canadian magazine and led to the formation of Canada's largest monthly wine club.

Formed in 2008, WineCollective provides members with international wines, tasting notes, food matches and tasting tips.

Powering the wine club is BlackSquare, a company that provides e-commerce technology specifically for the global wine and spirits industries.

What makes the relationship between BlackSquare and WineCollective unique is that they are both owned and run by the same people. In setting up the WineCollective, directors Matthew Protti and David Gluzman were quick to find the need to develop a more efficient way to handle its e-commerce which, with more members joining, was becoming increasingly unmanageable.

Together, Protti and Gluzman tailor made e-commerce technology, known

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>
> *Matthew Protti*

as Blackboxx, to suit their needs at WineCollective – specifically, they wanted to engage and empower wine club members while removing excess administration and time costs.

Being wine club managers of WineCollective and developers of Blackboxx also means Protti and Gluzman are able to fix inefficiencies with the technology as they find them.

It is this element that sets Blackboxx apart from other e-commerce systems for wineries. It's also an element that has allowed BlackSquare to develop Blackboxx as a product for other wine club operators, whether they are wineries, retailers or distributors.

Protti says there were three specific factors that drove BlackSquare's launch efforts into Australia.

"Australia has the world's most dynamic wine market, after the US. It has mature direct-to-consumer practices,

BlackSquare co-owner David Gluzman at Gemtree Vineyards cellar door in McLaren Vale.

favourable regulations and a tradition of wine clubs," he said.

Prior to launching BlackSquare in Australia, Protti and Gluzman travelled to Australia and met with several wineries to find out how they used wine clubs.

What they found was a number of wineries heavily reliant on inefficient marketing, such as telephone marketing and mass email lists.

The duo returned later, this time to showcase BlackSquare.

"Australian wineries we met with quickly saw that Blackboxx gave their marketing a unique level of power and user experience. They wanted that ability to do intelligent, targeted e-commerce that would resonate with their best, most loyal winery customers without resorting to discounts or 'spammy' selling," Prott said.

A number of Australian wineries are now signing up with BlackSquare, among them Gemtree Vineyards, in McLaren Vale, Villa Tinto, in the Barossa, ArtWine in the Adelaide Hills and Vinteloper.

Gemtree Vineyards cellar door manager Jenny West switched to Blackboxx to build on her existing customer database and to sell wine via a wine club.

"When we were introduced to Blackboxx we were all very impressed by the features it offered, the ease by which customers could place their order and continue to receive wine without the extra paper work, and the convenience for us with any follow-ups to the customer or payments," West said.

Prior to using Blackboxx, members would simply order wine online via the Gemtree website. While not a complete failure, what was lacking was regular connection with customers.

"Through Blackboxx we are able to keep a regular connection to our customers and, in turn, they are able to add their comments and view our products to make their selections and see the benefits of being more than just a wine buyer. It is more personalised," West said.

"It is very important to have a solid e-commerce system, as so much consumer shopping is now done online. Our wine is accessible to anyone, at anytime, anywhere – and there is no middleman." GW

Craggy Range and Rothschild's announce partnership in New Zealand

THE PEABODY FAMILY, owner of New Zealand's Craggy Range Winery, has announced a strategic partnership with Benjamin de Rothschild and his family to produce high quality Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir. The partnership will produce wines under the Rimapere label, a brand name derived from the indigenous Maori language of New Zealand meaning 'five arrows'. The five arrows are a symbol of the five branches of the Rothschild family, one of the world's most famous winemaking families.

In announcing the partnership, Terry Peabody said, "We are delighted to develop an association with such a revered wine family and look forward to a long and prosperous relationship. It is also a significant endorsement of the reputation of New Zealand, and the Marlborough region to have attracted such a distinguished wine family. We look forward to Rimapere becoming one of the region's most prestigious wine brands in the years to come".

Benjamin de Rothschild has also announced the purchase of a 26-hectare vineyard on Rapaura Road, in the heart of Marlborough's iconic "golden mile", home to some of the region's greatest wines. "This spectacular vineyard will become the home of the Rimapere brand, and represents my family's long term commitment to our partnership and expanding our prestigious international wine portfolio," he said.

The first wine that will released by the partnership in September, will be the 2012 Rimapere Sauvignon Blanc, made from grapes grown in the Rapaura sub-region of Marlborough's legendary Wairau Valley.

The wine will be distributed through the extensive international distribution networks established by both Craggy Range and Compagnie Vinicole Baron Edmond de Rothschild. This wine, and those to come, will be made under the direction of the Craggy Range winemaking and viticulture team. GW