

Developing a wineBANK (by Balthazar Ress) in Antwerp, Belgium

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Abstract¹

When entering a wineBANK for the very first time, one is astonished as well as utterly amazed. The perfection and detailing of the whole are astounding. The concept behind the appearance is equally unique. The possibility to connect with other wine-lovers on a business-related level is one of a kind.

The installation of a wineBANK in Antwerp could create the opportunity to start a distinct community of wine-lovers here. A community that mutually connects between the wineBANKs in different countries and with that, would create an international group of wine lovers who could in the same time, connect on a business level.

The project certainly sparks the imagination and activates the feeling that we, here in Belgium, are missing out on something.

Bringing the wineBANK to Antwerp could certainly main an asset to the international business scene here. But it is a most ambitious project which requires a lot of effort to develop.

The concept is invented by Christian Ress, owner of wine-estate Balthazar Ress. The wineBANKs in his home country, Germany, enjoy great success. He developed a franchise concept around his design so that a wineBANK network could start to unfold on an international level. But Germany is not Belgium, and in spite of being neighbors, there are some cultural differences and priorities. Also, the wineBANK network in non-German speaking countries has just been kicked off, so for the moment, there is no real proof of success outside of these. Nevertheless, business on a certain level is internationally active and people operating in this category are very susceptible for international focused enterprises. Those could supply them with new, important contacts. The fact is that Antwerp holds many multinational companies with business interests all over the globe. Are there a lot of them who are that interested in wine, to be wanting to become a member of a club that holds wine as the central theme?

Precious wines must be able to rest in the best conditions possible to avoid spoilage. Can the wineBANK provide in an environment where the owners can be ensured, that the wine will stay or evolve at its best? The place can be entered by any of the members at any time, doesn't that affect the wines? Is the special storage factor important for potential members, that important so that they would become a member just because they have nowhere to

¹ Abstract of the full thesis with the same title

store their wine? Maybe it is the fact that their special wines are on display for others to see and to be able to show off those, or the occasion to use the premises as a private club that will attract them to enter the community.

There is investigating required to assess the possibility of establishing a wineBANK in Antwerp. Likewise, research towards the necessity of this exclusive private members' club is essential. There is a target audience indicated by the hosts of the existing wineBANKS. It is exactly the managers, CEO's and company owners which show interest to become a member of an exclusive members' club with wine as the theme. It is assumed that the same target group must be addressed here. This must be confirmed in our own city's environment that these people are the ones.

Is the wine topic a good starting point for a business conversation? Is wine connecting them with others on a level that they aspire?

The franchise concept gives the comfort and opportunity to establish independent, a proven business design. It is very convenient that everything, from the design of the venue to the business model is already drawn out and ready to be applied. But, the franchise also means that the wishes and regulations, documented in the contract, have to be exercised and complied with.

Regardless of all this, a thorough study of what needs to be done and if it can be done, as well as searching for partners to support the project is imperative.

The first and most difficult step is, to be able to find the perfect, interested and reliable partners. These partners must not only be willing to put an extensive amount of money and effort in the project but should be people with a widespread business network. This way, their connections could serve as the core group of members where the local wineBANK community could further be developed around. This should lead to the best success possible.

Like the franchisor indicates, the city center would be ideal to open a wineBANK because of the advantageous location. But, also since it is there, that the beautiful and often historic premises are to be found which could be an ideal setting for a wineBANK. Is it possible to buy or rent one of the prestigious premises, which are for a big part owned by the city of Antwerp?

When the right spot is pointed out, the perfect architect should be appointed, so that the project is carried out with the utmost precision. What the profile of the ideal partner is, should be examined.

The build and the running of the business requires permits and requirements from the city of Antwerp and from the public authorities which have to be delivered in due time. And insurance contracts have to be taken out.

Only a few people are necessary to help run the place, but they must be reliable and hands-on.

There must enough interest be drawn, for this still unknown but exclusive high-end project that is obvious wine related. The Antwerp business scene must be willing to engage this ambitious project. Which could mean a great asset to them.