

Sweet Revival

A critical assessment of the marketability of premium sweet wines and a suggested new approach

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MOTIVATION

The category of sweet wines / dessert wines suffers from multiple challenges. The terminology itself is unfit to correctly describe these wines as it ties them to a specific sensation and food category instead of allowing flexibility and versatility of consumption. The category comprises several different styles coming from various regions, all having a story to tell. Despite high quality in the premium segment, the wines are overshadowed by their dry counterparts and the overall poor image of sweet wines.

It is my mission to help these wines show their true potential, receive the attention and affection they deserve and become a frequent and welcome companion for every occasion of enjoyment.

Combining my passion for sweet wines with the expertise and experience I gained in the field of strategic marketing and communication gives me a good angle to analyze the current situation and come up with a proposal on re-positioning the category.

The word count of my thesis exceeds the proposed limit of 5,000 words by 20%. The original version was double the size. I truly enjoyed the deep dive into this fascinating challenge and hope that you will read my work – despite of its extra pages – with a similar enthusiasm.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of my thesis is to explore the current situation of premium sweet wine production, market and consumption, assess and analyse the findings and suggest a customer-centric approach to re-position premium sweet wines in order to increase their consumption through innovative market development. I attempt to point out the bottlenecks and suggest possible paths to producers and distributors to reach new potential consumers by overwriting the current perceptions and fixing the image of sweet wines by providing an inspiring experience at every touchpoint.

My key assumption is that there is a gap – or better said, a mismatch - regarding the place sweet wines occupy in the consumers' mind (and heart) and the true potential of these wines. A re-positioning is necessary for consumers to get re-introduced to and thus re-discover this undervalued and underrated category.

METHODOLOGY

In order to obtain good quality information and sufficient insight, I used a combination of research techniques. For facts, figures, past and current trends I did extensive desk research in the professional and trade media and filtered out relevant information. I browsed through producer websites, official ratings and tasting notes to get more familiar with styles, quality

and prices. In order to receive consumer information on preferences, I conducted a comprehensive online survey, collecting 173 answers from 18 countries. During March, I interviewed four winemakers, two opinion-leading wine experts and one sommelier to have more clarity on challenges, strategies and trends. Desk research and focused fieldwork combined with an additional overview gained during professional events and workshops from representatives of the sweet wine industry provide a solid foundation for relevant findings and conclusions.

CONTENT

Section 1 explores the market of premium sweet wines. A brief historic overview is followed by a short introduction of winemaking techniques, winegrowing regions, grape varieties and styles produced. A longer paragraph is dedicated to selected key regions and markets as well as to pricing, packaging and distribution, specifically with relation to premium sweet wines.

Section 2 provides an analysis of the current situation, highlighting bottlenecks and world trends having a direct or indirect impact on the market and marketability of sweet wines.

Section 3 and 4 are devoted to presenting the perspective of the producer, distributor and customer. Findings and conclusions of original research on consumer preferences are summarized and challenges faced by producers are explained in detail.

Section 5 evaluates the current strategies, highlights positive and negative examples of different approaches. Based on market information gathered by desk and field research, and using the framework of a customer centric marketing and communication strategy, a new approach aiming at re-positioning sweet wines and re-introducing consumers to this category is described.

CONCLUSION

A shift from product and sales focus to a customer-centric approach offers new, exciting and promising possibilities to turn the downward consumption trend and develop a market for high quality sweet wines. Accurate targeting, inspiring and credible messages, powerful communication through new channels, personal professional guidance, product diversification, increased opportunities for tasting and drinking are just a few elements that can help win new sweet wine fans and ambassadors, providing consumers an ultimate experience.

The mission is to have more people enjoy more sweet wine, more often, and share it with passion.