



LET'S MAKE ONE  
THING CLEAR:

# BRANDING

A clear brand story should be the basis for all marketing planning  
– especially in China, reports Larry Lockshin.

WORDS LARRY LOCKSHIN

I've just completed four regional breakfasts discussing some of the initial results of our Chinese Wine Barometer – a project tracking Chinese wine consumers' perceptions of Australia and Australian wine in six cities. The survey will be run twice a year over three years to provide longitudinal information on how Australia is viewed in China compared to our major competitors. I was impressed to see how many Australian wineries are in China, visiting the country and starting to engage with the trade and consumers there. During the breakfasts we asked the attending wineries how many had a brand plan for China and how many had a brand plan at all. The answers were not so impressive.

Very few wineries had specific brand plans for China and only a few had some sort of overall brand or marketing plan. I wouldn't expect most wineries, especially small ones, to have detailed multi-year plans. These take a lot of time and resources to develop and maintain. But I hope that more

wineries would sit down and define their brand, their story and their direction in a formal way. Why is this important? There are both internal and external reasons.

First, let's talk about the internal ones. A brand is the encapsulation of the story of the wine inside the bottle. In many consumer products like soft drinks, breakfast cereal and washing powder the story is quite simple – eat, drink, use me, I am good, fun, work well, etc. It is less about differentiation than just reminding consumers the product exists and to consider it during the next purchase occasion. The same could be said for the biggest wine brands, where the consumer is not really fussed which Chardonnay or Shiraz is purchased; they all taste pretty good and cost about the same.

But when consumers are staring at a shelf with multiple dozens of brands, or at a wine list, intending to purchase something 'nice' or 'special', they have only the package or maybe just the name, variety and wine region to help him or

her decide. Merely recognising a wine increases the chances of it being chosen, so linking the brand's story to the package, the label, the region or even the grape, makes sense. It also must be an authentic link between the story and the wine. This story, the brand's meaning, must be developed, focused and described by the brand custodians (owners, managers, marketers). It is usually crafted over time based on the real development of the wine, but it can be 'written' or transcribed by a good marketing mind or even a consultant. This person does not make up the brand story, but merely records it clearly, helping formalise and emphasise the meaning. This makes it easier for the brand custodians to first learn the story and then communicate it.

We have all heard about singing from the same hymn sheet. It is imperative that the brand story sounds similar from anyone representing the brand. It will sound a bit different; each person will have his or her own link to the brand, which can be expressed in a personal interpretation. The original family will have a different way of saying it than the marketing manager, or the cellar door staff, or the agent overseas, but the essence will remain the same.

The second part is the external telling of the brand story to others, whether wine writers, agents, importers, retailers or

consumers. Sometimes there is plenty of time to tell the story and embellish it with audio-visual effects, like a presentation to agents, distributors or retailers. Other times, the package must speak for itself. This is why formalising the brand story is so important. Once it is known and accepted, it can be used as the starting point for developing better packaging. It can be used for redesigning the cellar door, for the website, for an advertisement, for a trade show display or for any ancillary material. The story becomes part of the brief to anyone engaged by the winery to help communicate to the outside world. The brand story can be used to size up opportunities such as sponsorships, trade or consumer shows to see how they fit with the brand's story.

The brand story should be the same and communicated clearly through all external engagements. This means a winery should have an authentic brand story in export markets – the same story as used in Australia. Our own research in China clearly indicated the Chinese expect authenticity, not virtual brands developed for the export market.

When a winery has one brand the process is fairly straightforward, though it may take years to bring all the elements from label to cellar door to website into line. Even if the winery brand has price/quality tiers, the story can overlap



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THE BRAND STORY SHOULD BE THE SAME AND COMMUNICATED CLEARLY THROUGH ALL EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENTS... OUR OWN RESEARCH IN CHINA CLEARLY INDICATED THE CHINESE EXPECT AUTHENTICITY, NOT VIRTUAL BRANDS DEVELOPED FOR THE EXPORT MARKET.

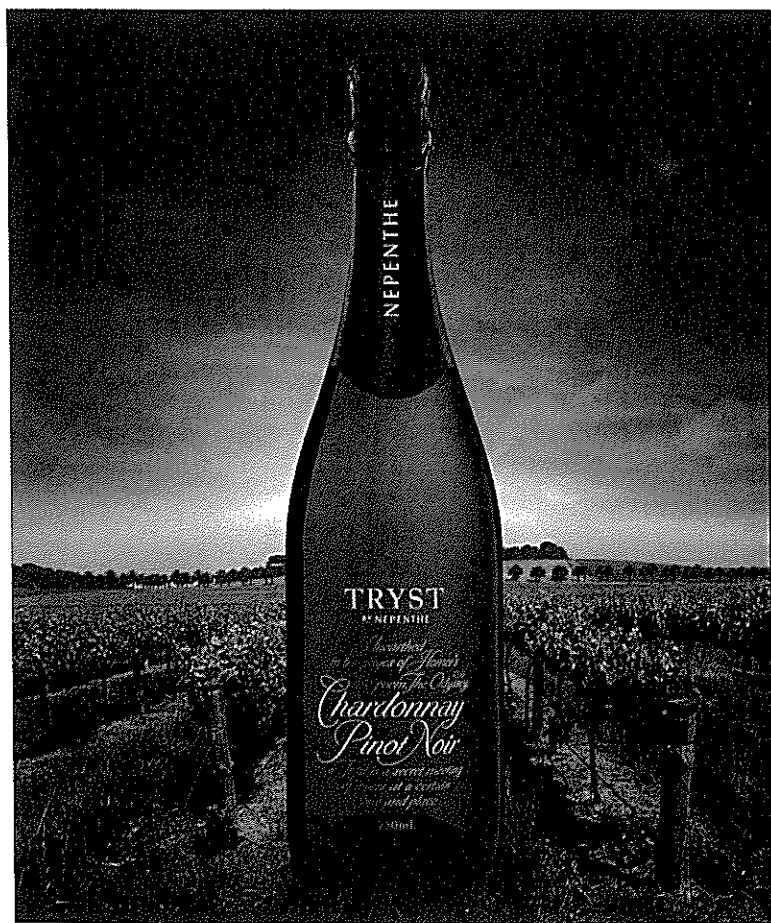
these. Some wineries have multiple brands with different names and stories, which forces some decisions to be made. Obviously, packaging, websites and promotional materials can be developed to tell and enhance the brand story. The problems come when trying to communicate two or more different brands, either by the same person or at the same cellar door or website.

Sometimes a trade show or customer visit can be focused

around only one brand, and then it is easy. Other times, two or more brands are presented to the trade or at a wine show or at cellar door or on the website. Here, the clearer each brand story is, the easier to communicate. Again, this is why I suggest working on the internal story for each brand first, even engaging a writer or consultant to help clarify the description. Often the stories intertwine, because there was a reason for the second brand. When there is no reason for the second brand, the issues in developing a clear story emerge. Do you really need this second brand, then?

A clear brand story is the basis for all marketing planning. The story sets the guidelines for what must be communicated. In each market, whether domestic or international, the winery's staff can work with their representatives and/or communication specialists to develop marketing programs with clear goals. Without a clear brand story, a winery risks going off message, wasting time and effort by confusing the market, rather than building brand associations leading to recognition and, of course, purchase. ■

*LARRY LOCKSHIN is with the Wine Marketing Group, Ehrenberg Bass Institute of Marketing Science at the University of South Australia.*



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Wouldn't hesitate to work with them again.

- Kate Kriven, Senior Brand Category Manager - "Nepenthe Wines"

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