

How can a wine competition add value to a winery and a brand?

Weinakademiker Thesis (D 7)

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Abstract

There are hundreds of international wine competitions all around the world. Their role often criticised, but thousands of winemakers continue to enter their wines to these competitions. According to experts, professional wine ratings will continue to play a crucial and increasingly influential role in wine distribution, so it's worth paying close attention to them. Moreover, awards are still an effective marketing tool and are used by consumers so market actors have to take them into consideration.

The aim of this thesis was to explore and give a comprehensive analysis of the many aspects of wine awards. It examined the added value of wine competitions regarding marketing and sales activity of a winery or a brand. It also outlined the characteristics of the 'ideal' wine award from the point of view of the entering wineries.

In order to get a wider perspective both secondary and primary research methods were applied. The following sources were used during the desk research: wine-related textbooks, academic and other professional articles, online videos and websites.

To gain specific understanding of the topic, interviews were conducted with wine experts in May 2023. The questions examined wine awards from the consumer, the organiser and the competitor perspective. The 21 interviewees were wine judges, wine professionals, critics, trade representatives and winemakers. Questions were sent to them by email, and they could answer with their own words, thus have the possibility to articulate their thoughts freely.

The structure of the thesis follows a consequent order. First, the most important wine awards are summarized and classified. As the thesis focuses on the added value for wineries and brands, wine award participants, their needs, motivations and potential entering strategies are analysed. One of the main chapters is how a wine competition can create value for entering producers and innovation opportunities for organizers are discussed in detail. In the conclusion part the most important findings are summarised.

Based on the reviewed literature, the interview responses and my own experience the following conclusions can be made.

Wine awards can be classified in many ways and entering wineries have to be careful when choosing the right competitions. Some useful recommendations for producers can be:

- getting to know wine competitions comprehensively and discussing the pros and cons of entering with award-winning winemakers,
- thinking over the potential benefits and strategy, and entering their wine accordingly,
- implementing a trial-and-error approach based on previous results when entering competitions,
- publicizing awards to get the most out of the competitions as a powerful marketing tool.

Wine awards should help the award-winning wines, brands, and producers to be successful (commercially) on the market. Therefore, getting to know the many facets of motivation of entering wineries is of utmost importance.

One of the main conclusions of the thesis is that wine competitions can provide added value in many ways, but these values are grouped around 3 well-defined focus points: 1) consultancy & service, 2) distribution & sales and 3) media & marketing. These are the factors that can have a decisive role in increasing the value of the producer's brand.

On the other hand, competition organisers should think of the following aspects to be more efficient and successful on the market:

- what extra services they can offer to motivate and help producers to enter the competition and how they are able to give detailed feedback to the wines entered,
- what events and other forms of personal contact they can provide for entering wineries in order to meet wine professionals, traders, and consumers,
- what platforms they can use to publicize the competition and the awarded wines.

It is worth continually and consciously developing the service of wine competitions, considering the competitions themselves as products and entering producers as customers.

After all, products are complex bundles of benefits that satisfy their needs, and this is exactly what a wine competition should always keep in mind!