



## **The Top 8 Ways to Increase Country Club Revenue and Customer Loyalty: *Build a Superior Wine Program***

Across the United States, the conversation in country club boardrooms is the same: How do we create a culture of customer loyalty? How do we stimulate usage of the club's facilities? How do we attract new members and continue to exceed the expectations of our current members?

We are constantly talking with country club managers and board presidents; there are three primary themes that have emerged from these conversations:

1. "The core features of our club are exceptional but net growth of the membership community is staying the same. Attrition due to professional transfers and an aging population offsets new members". Without net membership growth, capital enhancements are being postponed or, in the worse cases, assessments are being levied.
2. "The social environment of our club is both energetic and engaging, but our current club members have a wide variety of options for their discretionary time and money". People are working longer hours and there are more places than ever to network. Fierce competition for membership leisure time results in lost member opportunities and, therefore, lower revenues.
3. "The dining experience at our club is outstanding; we have a fantastic staff, a creative chef and an inviting dining room. However, there are so many great restaurants within a narrow radius of our facility." Members are always faced with the question of dining at the club versus a restaurant; clubs are constantly striving to be the number one choice for dining.

The good news: the population demographics are more favorable now than ever for building a stronger membership. Statics show that most people join a club between the ages of 36 and 50 and in the United States there are more people in this age category than there has ever been. This is a generation of potential club members that have many options for their discretionary time and money but they are ready to invest in a membership that delivers value.

One great way to differentiate your club and stimulate usage of the club's facilities is to offer an enticing wine program. According to the Wine Market Council's annual consumer tracking reports, the consumption of table wine in the US was up in 2011 (Consumer Wine Trends: Overall Consumption Up, Nichols, 02/02/12). This study also shows that "21 percent of all adult core wine drinkers, drinkers who consume wine daily or several times a week, represent 47 million people; another 34 million people are marginal wine drinkers, totaling at 81 million wine drinkers in the U.S." Build a wine program to cater to this established collection of wine lovers and you will improve your club's bottom line!

In this article we will discuss ways to drive your wine program toward the excellence already found in the core areas of your club. There are some simple strategies that can be implemented immediately and others that are building blocks for continual growth.



### *Develop a great inventory of wines.*

There are thousands of wines available! Some are meant for sipping and some require food. If you have a bar area with appetizers, include fun and interesting wines that are carefree and will encourage guests to try something new.

On the other hand there are many heavier wines that need to be enjoyed with food. I remember when we were in Italy and started to drink a glass of red wine without any food. Our Italian host almost jumped over the counter to stop us, then he cut a piece of Parmesan and said, "OK, now you can drink this wine." Offer a collection of more serious wines that will really pop with food to create memorable wine and dine experiences.

Build an inventory of wine that ranges from serious to fun, heavy to light but always focus on delivering value. Search for wines that are hard to find, wines with low production, wines with a great vintner or vineyard story. Include some highly rated wines that are affordable. And, if you have an audience of serious wine drinkers, include some highly rated, indulgent wines suitable for event dining.

Most importantly, get help if you need it!! A savvy wine professional can help you construct a set of customized choices for your inventory that will fit both you and your membership.



## *Education is the key to YOUR success.*

Customers are not afraid to buy good or expensive wine...they are afraid to buy wine that they know nothing about. Your customer needs to feel informed and empowered to choose.

Whether picking an inexpensive bottle of wine for pizza or indulging in a special bottle of wine to celebrate an occasion, nobody wants to make a blind choice. Many customers choose a less expensive bottle of wine because they don't know enough about a wine or enough about what they like and are intimidated by the wine menu.

An educated wine staff can offer guidance while building a relationship of trust with the consumer. Take the time to research wines and keep a searchable "cheat sheet" for each wine on your list. These wine hints should contain tasting notes, menu pairings, professional ratings, and vineyard information.

Whether the customer wants to drink Pinot Grigio with a rib eye or Cabernet Sauvignon with sea bass, the point is for every guest to feel good about their choice. Provide your staff with the tools they need to provide relevant information to your consumer. An educated consumer will feel empowered, will trust your wine list and will want to buy good wine from you.



## *Create an engaging wine menu.*

Create engaging wine entries by suggesting wine and food pairings, providing anecdotes about the vineyard or supplying professional ratings. With an engaging wine menu, your membership will want to visit your club regularly to try something new or enjoy something previously discovered.

So, use your wine list as an opportunity to develop a long-term relationship with your member. In great restaurants, repeat guests will visit for various reasons; a quick drink and an appetizer, an early bite or a leisurely event meal. If you can accommodate all experiences in a way that is inviting, your member will frequently return.



## *Create focused wine events.*

Wine events are fun and can target audiences ranging from the most seasoned connoisseur to members who are looking to broaden their experience. If you can cater to a wide variety of audiences, you will draw your regular customers into the club more often and you will give the rest of the membership a new reason to visit the club.

### **Wine Flights**

A tasting flight includes a selection of wines, usually between three and eight glasses, and is offered for the purpose of sampling and comparison. This is a great way to encourage a member with limited wine experience to explore different wines.

### **Vertical and Horizontal Wine Tastings**

A vertical tasting offers a selection of vintages of the same varietal from the same vineyard. A horizontal tasting offers wines from the same vintage but from different wineries keeping the varietal or wine region constant. This event will draw the novice and the connoisseur alike.

If your club has a wine cellar, why not leverage the space and hold a tasting in the cellar? It can provide a casual and relaxed venue that invites membership interaction.

### **Wine Dinners**

Wine dinners are another great way to encourage your members to explore new wines. Wine dinners can be vintner or retailer hosted and can be entertaining as well as educational. Professionals familiar with the featured wine can provide interesting stories about the vineyard, varietal and or vintage. Themed wine dinners, such as “a taste of Tuscany” or “dinner in Paris” will encourage members to visit the club for a fun evening of fine dining paired with wines that may broaden their scope of experience.



## *Develop a wine society.*

A wine society is a cost effective way to create a sense of community inside of your club. It is an effective way of bringing like-minded people together to share a passion. In this way, you are not only encouraging increased club usage but you are paving the way for new friendships within the club.

As members discover they have a mutual interest in wine, more relationships will form among the members. As relationships form, members will not only be inclined to spend more leisure time at the club but they will also be more likely to maintain an active membership at the club. Members, in turn, will also become active recruiters of new members.

A wine society membership is easy to establish and can be designed to include benefits that will complement your club's atmosphere. Most wine society memberships are by yearly subscription and include benefits such as private tasting events, exclusive access to wine offering, retail purchasing cooperatives and on-site private locker storage.



### *Create a wine club locker service.*

Does your country club have extra bin storage available in your wine cellar? Or, is there an unused space in the facility that could be converted to a wine cellar? If so, establish a private locker service for your wine society members.

Wine lockers allow your members to store a private collection of wine at the club. This is a great differentiator for your club, as members will have access to personal wines they may want to share with other members, potential members or other guests.

To complement your wine lockers, create a superior level of service that not only allows the member to store their wines on-site but also provides the member with a customized, private list of wines available in their personal locker. Your staff can do some simple research on each of the client's locker wines and provide details such as winemaker's notes, label images and professional ratings.



### *Invest in an iPad-based wine menu system.*

It could be a great differentiator that will save you time and money associated with printing menus and compiling inventory reports. And, you can buy a wifi-enabled iPad for as little as \$400! Some restaurants are using them as a tool for their servers to consult while other restaurants have enough iPad menus to distribute to all customers. A third category of restaurant uses the iPad wine menu to entice bar-area customers.

The fact is, you can leverage this technology and use it to your advantage. The iPad is intuitive, it is sleek and it provides a visual experience with label art displays and engaging menus that are easy to filter and navigate. A wine menu software system is always up to date, hiding information about wines that are sold out.

A good wine menu software solution will provide you with back-office reporting to enable inventory evaluation. Your wine menu systems should easily allow you to analyze your pricing strategy, print paper menus, as needed, and provide inventory reporting such as low stock and total inventory value.

A *great* wine menu software solution will also provide you with the ability to display private locker inventory. Imagine bringing an iPad-based menu to your wine locker client. The menu will show only that client's wines in an intuitive format and will display quantities, wine labels and wine descriptions along with the standard vintage and region information. Your locker clients and their guests will be delighted at the personalized service offered by your club.

The iPad is a device that has been embraced by the world...it is everywhere and the technology is familiar to almost your entire prospective customer base. Even my 70-year-old father in law is using one! *According to Apple Inc., they sold 15 million iPads in Q1 of 2012 alone and have sold over 67 million iPad devices since the first release in 2010.* Based on that growth, it is safe to say that in less than 5 years the iPad-based wine menu will be the new "normal" and in 10 years our kids will be saying, "remember when Dad used a paper menu to order his wine?" The iPad-based wine menu has been shown to be a tool to increase wine revenue...why not jump on board now to differentiate your club?



## *Leverage your country club's e-presence.*

Use the public side of your club's website to highlight the features of your outstanding wine program. Update it periodically to feature upcoming wine events and pictures or anecdotes from previous events. A thriving wine program will establish your club as one that offers value beyond the core areas of excellence.

Finally, create a new section in your club's e-newsletter. Since you already have a captive audience, why not demonstrate your knowledge by offering varietal notes, pairing suggestions, or feature a wine of the month. A timely and informative paragraph will identify you as a trusted expert, encouraging increased membership loyalty.

***Give your members compelling reasons to want to use your club and you will ensure continued and long-term use of your facility that will translate to healthy growth. More member activity will be followed by increased membership, both of which will work to fund the capital improvements that allow your club to be exceptional.***

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Questions? Contact us at: [info@corkguru.com](mailto:info@corkguru.com) or visit us on the web [www.corkguru.com](http://www.corkguru.com)

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