

A Guide to Getting Best Results from the Wine Media

Know The Media

Wine writers don't work for you or your marketing department. Most are professional freelance writers who are paid by their editors/publishers to deliver unbiased, professional advice and news to their readers/consumers.

Many professional wine writers have multiple writing, teaching, speaking, website and social media outlets. It is important to know who they work for (publications and websites), where (what markets they serve) and when (their deadlines), then tailor your message accordingly. Keep an on-going updated database of writers in your area, and make sure your PR company has one too before you hire them. Many don't.

Never expect professional wine writers to be influenced by whether you advertise in their publications. Don't even tell them whether you do.

Wine writers are journalists, and journalists want news. Any new wine and/or new vintage is potentially news. A new winery or winemaker is news. New ownership is news. New equipment is not news unless you are the first kid on the block to have it and it will revolutionize your wine.

Some writers have national reach and should therefore be on your media lists whether or not they live in your area. Wine magazines like Wine Access, Vines and Tidings are all national magazines so ensure you know who is writing for them. Call the editors to find who the key contacts are.

Business cards tip. Wine is a global game, and writers from outside of Canada will show up. Your address should include the full name of your province; ON, BC and QC mean nothing internationally, and you should always include the country CANADA on your card. If you are really a terroir-ist your geo-coordinates would be useful too.

Media Tastings at the LCBO

In Ontario new LCBO, Vintages and some Vintages Shop Online releases are made available to the media, three Fridays each month (Hint: don't schedule lunches/tastings on Fridays).

Most writers do their best to attend and taste as much as possible. However, this amounts to almost 300 wines per month, which is virtually impossible to assess completely or well in three days. And not every writer can be at each tasting. So don't assume your wine is being tasted at the LCBO. You must make that extra effort to send your wine to the writers of particular importance for that particular wine and should the writer get to consider it twice, all the better.

The majority of Ontario wines are not listed by the LCBO. Wines in the LCBO Go To Market and Craft Winery programs are not usually tasted at the LCBO. Sending samples is the only way to get them in front of media.

Writers outside of Ontario do not have this type of preview tasting at all, although in Quebec the importers association does stage monthly tastings of new products.

Sending Press Materials and Wine Samples to the Media

Don't send press releases and tech sheets without samples. That's a waste of time. Writers don't write about wine without tasting it.

Do not expect to impress the media with overly wordy, flowery or breathless press releases - just the facts. Provide the news in the first paragraph, why it's important in the second, and how to follow-up in the third. Generic quotes written by the marketing dept and attributed to the winemaker will rarely be used. If a writer wants a quote they will phone to get an exclusive.

Do consider preparing a short but detailed vintage report by your viticulturalist or winemaker detailing the winter weather and growing conditions throughout the harvest.

Don't offer stories as an "exclusive". If you are doing it for one writer, you are alienating all the others.

Do not send "gifts", trinkets, caps, T-shirts, aprons, baskets and teasers to the media. It's amateurish and unnecessarily expensive. Spend the money on expanding your sample reach instead. Just send the wine and its information.

Do not send the scores/ratings/reviews of other writers. Professionals will want to come to their own judgments.

Wine samples sent blindly to writers may not be tasted for weeks, so if there is an important time frame/release date in mind make sure you send it far enough in advance and communicate that time concern to the writer. It is always good practice to inform writers via email that samples are coming.

Make sure the shipping address is correct and that couriers know what to do if there is no one home. Do not send materials to the offices of the newspaper or magazine unless you know the writer maintains an office there.

Without the price a review will not be published. Affix a label to the back of the bottle with price, release date, CSPC # and contact info. This may already be on the accompanying tech sheet but very often those sheets get separated from the bottles and the writer will not take the time to find them.

When you send the sample make sure that wine information is also posted on your website (see below), even if not yet released. Writers will automatically go to your website for information and to download photos.

Invest in proper shipping cartons. Bottles wrapped in newspaper and stuff in taped up boxes are a hassle and send a message that you don't care about your wine. Styrofoam chips and crumbled up newspapers are a royal pain at the receiving end.

Do not ask or expect the writer to automatically inform you when the review is published. It is your job to track the writer and follow up.

Tailoring your Website for Media

Websites have become the most important, most efficient research tool for media. It is strongly advised that you create a special **For the Media** tab on your website. This is different from a tab that presents all your media accolades/clippings and awards.

The "MEDIA" tab should not require special registration/passwords etc. That is too cumbersome and there should not be any info that the public shouldn't know.

It should contain concise, factual background information on winery history, ownership, specialties, vintage reports, stats and bios of key people and easy links to all currently available wines. Each wine should have all the key info on price, availability and production. Don't make writers have to enter the "shopping cart" area to find out the price.

Each wine should be accompanied by a high res, downloadable bottle shot and label shot.

Ensure that writers are guided to the right contact people, with their hours, cell phone numbers etc., in case follow up is required. And that person needs to be aware and agreeable to take media calls/emails at all hours. Many media actually write early in the morning or in the evening, which is when they need that piece of missing information.

Examples of Websites with Good Media Centres:

<http://www.yalumba.com/default.asp?p=135> Look under wines tech sheets previous vintages etc... also images under winery, a great resource.

http://www.road13vineyards.com/media_center.php Road 13 media centre

<https://www.bonnydoonvineyard.com/> Look for Trade and Media button

<http://www.lynmarwinery.com/images/presskit/PressKit.pdf> Lynmar Estate Sonoma County Image library

Hosting Media at the Winery

Most media visits, especially as part of group tours, are tightly scheduled. Know in advance how much time is allotted and be ready with a plan.

Tasting the wine is most important thing so it should be done first. And it is very important that the tasting be physically well set up so that the writer is comfortable in making definitive and accurate notes. Please see below.

Begin with a welcome and introductions and take writers to the tasting area to get their books/recorders/ computers ready. Provide a brief overview of the history, size and specialties of the winery then begin tasting.

Have all wines opened in advance. Don't pre-pour "until the bus pulls up" as you don't know exactly when the wines will be tasted. Proper temperature is crucial. Make sure whites are not too cold, or reds too warm.

Have tasting sheets and tech sheets available, organized in the same tasting order. Ensure they contain price, release date, availability, and case production. Some writers will use their own notebooks but will take the info sheets with them.

As the tasting proceeds make sure you are saving time for the wines most important to you. The tasting leader/host should be something of a moderator, not allowing questions/conversations to get too far off track. Don't be intimidated by the media.

When the tasting is finished, offer a winery tour if time permits. Make sure the winery is spotless. It is fine that the winery is "working" during a tour, but be sure that safety precautions are taken.

Do not leave the tour to your tour/tasting room staff, unless they are more knowledgeable and quotable than the winemaker or owner. Writers have been through 100s of wineries and know the process. Don't do a winemaking A to Z. As you tour ensure you are hitting highlights in terms of equipment or processes that make your wines unique.

As the visit ends, have a staff member quickly check the tasting area for any bags, notebooks, clothing that might be left behind.

Thank the media for the visit and do your best to move them on to their next visit in a timely fashion. It is not necessary to provide free wine as they go out the door, but you might suggest that if they want to try the wine again they could contact you for a sample.

Basic Tasting Set-up for Media

Whenever possible conduct the sit-down tasting, indoors, under optimum lighting in a scent free room. This is good time to remember no one working in a winery or a winery tasting room should be wearing any strong scented perfume, aftershave lotion, hair gel etc. Details, Details, Details.

Glassware: Mid-size Riedel or equivalent, rim smaller than the mid-glass circumference.

Table cover: White background whenever possible.

Plenty of light in a well-ventilated room.

Offer plenty of water, slightly cooled but no ice cubes.

Spittoons, bread or crackers,

Don't inundate with wines to be tasted. Select your very best wines to be tasted. If the writers want to taste something else they will ask or you could suggest there are other wines to taste if they would like. If your wine ages well consider serving an older wine to illustrate the point.

Barrel samples are of little interest to most writers because they or the public may never see the same wine again. If you want to make a point with barrel samples put them in the tasting behind finished wines for a comparison.

