

Strategy Document: Regional Collaborative Marketing

Background

The story of wine in the geographical area known broadly as Wairarapa is admirably that of the pioneer – a unique combination of vision, drive and relentless hands-on effort. It's an against-the-odds tale leading eventually – but not without tremendous challenge – to success and acclaim.

Collectively and individually, vineyards and wineries have crafted reputes here for product and brand which belies company size and production volume, punching well above their weight class in a worthy field of competitors on both a local and international stage.

It's been happening since the 1980s. It's still happening today. While some have since gone and others come, the story of excellence in winemaking endures. Newcomers are picking up on the past and crafting their own future.

Current context

On the journey of the past few decades, parties in our wee local industry have collaborated in order to draw better attention as, inevitably, growth and maturity determine that we discover and define commonalities, marketing more effectively through united representation. It is a micro version of what New Zealand has had to do for economic traction for our wine industry in the world.

Locally, beyond particular brands, vintages and specific wine releases (which will always have their individual successes) it's a search for a common story on which to hang our hat: the pioneering attitude, or terroir, the climate, sub-regional signature – pick one or any number of things. As we have over time.

Historically, pushing it forward has been manifest in a number of bodies who promulgate what we have here; effort which we all hope leads directly back to commercial success for the business owners invested in those bodies.

In current shape, we have Martinborough, Gladstone, Masterton; GIs and non-GI areas; towns. We have Wines from Martinborough, Wairarapa Winegrowers and Wairarapa Wines. And let's add Toast Martinborough and a boutique wine cluster to the mix.

These explain how we've evolved and frame who we are now, and that's to be respected. But are these entities relevant, meaningful constructs in the minds of our future wine-buying audience? And, as other winegrowing regions have undergone their own growth stages, reinvention and successes as equally they mature, are we remaining competitive, innovative and effective? Or losing ground?

Today, we appear poised for a further stage of maturity. There is current appetite for exploring what both the 'what' and 'who' we are actually mean. And, with that, what brand essence best positions us for success and, importantly, what structure of collaborative organisation is best to successfully deliver on it.

As surely as the big fish eat the smaller, our question is: how can we find a way to be a bigger fish?

A way to be a bigger fish

There is certainly common interest in and intent to see our region step up in the wine industry, being more sophisticated and thus more successful in brand and marketing. Of course, 'region' is a bit elusive. And 'we' – if we can yet agree who 'we' means – have a lot to tell, yet a big world in which to tell it.

To date, in cluster groups and individual businesses we have done a lot well, yet thoughts are converging on our not doing enough together to draw attention and win share of voice (and wallet). Also, that we are doing lots of different things in a disparate manner, some of which even overlap. At the same time, we're acutely aware of what other regions are doing to get ahead.

Discussions on the topic have led to the formation of a Collaborative Marketing Group (CMG), with representatives from Wairarapa Wines, Wines from Martinborough and Wairarapa Winemakers.

This document provides a brief to each of these bodies on the CMG's thinking regarding an effective way forward. The objective is to receive agreement in principle to proceed as outlined.

Role of the CMG

Firstly, it is important to note that this is a steering body, with an initially high-level view. It is not a group immediately tasked with coming up with a name for a region we all agree on and all will be fine with the world. Rather, our role in this starter phase is to:

- Determine the terms of reference for this group's activity and focus on behalf of its three represented organisations
 - *Achieved by clarifying the role of our group as governance – establishing strategy, but not (at least in its current form) being the management body which carries out plans*
- Discuss vision, outcomes and the commonalities of purpose and intent between the three groups which allow us to refine this into something succinct, meaningful and actionable
 - *ongoing*
- Distil aims and objectives into something universally endorsed across the groups
 - *ongoing*
- Define through the course of collaboration a process and timeline which is robust in the first, yet achievable in the second
 - *Ongoing*

Implicit in our recommendation is an acknowledgement that whilst the desired long-term, enduring *outcome* is a cohesive and regional brand, the first step is the *structure* of marketing collaboration which will successfully address and deliver on that.

The following points outline the suggested steps and stages.

Step One: Creation of a single marketing entity

Despite one thread of discussion in recent times being the number of entities, duplication and crossover, the CMG is advocating the creation of one more: a new organisation accountable for cohesive regional branding.

The vision, however, is not to add extra complexity, rather to concentrate and coordinate the existing resources and effort currently being undertaken in separate fashion to actually reduce effort and at the same time get more from it.

The new body will be invested with the goals of meeting the specific marketing mandates of each organisation as well as an overarching set of objectives for regional brand development, which delivers across the board for all businesses in all groups. That is not a simple mandate, and will require careful planning, namely:

1. Feasibility

With agreement in principle on the above, the role of the CMG will be to:

- Flesh out exactly what this new body looks like and how it may operate
 - This will involve, for example, the articulating of mandates which protect the existing brand value and goodwill of any invested body/area/group; rather, building on them as strategic and tactical assets for future strength.
- Assess the most effective type of entity and legal status for operation (e.g., COPNL is a limited liability company, is that best for us? Why/why not?)
- Quantify the current separate investments in marketing activities as an indicative start point for an operating budget
- Consider the potential funding model and recommend best structure/approach
- Gain indicative commitment on funding sources to pass an initial viability test.

Timing: end December 2014

2. Groundwork/establishment

Following socialisation of ideas, feedback and ratification, we then proceed to:

- Develop a Charter and Guiding Principles for operation
- Establish an appropriate governance structure for reporting lines and accountabilities
- Define a medium to long-term vision for a definition of success (a 5-8 year strategic framework)
- Determine and resolve where alleviating marketing activity from within each of the groups has implications for existing resources, e.g., current staff or contractors and/or the structure of those entities themselves
- Firm up funding commitments and potential new avenues for a draft operating budget
- Incorporate the entity, completing any and all commercial and legal requirements for operation, agreeing and accepting any downstream implications on respective organisations

- Broadly scope roles and structure for endorsement by all bodies.

Timing: end January 2015

3. Start Up

This is a key phase of development, and will demand we tap into existing or past-life experiences of many in our talented wine community. Broadly, it will mean we:

- Define staffing requirements reflective of funding available and need for effective operation –position/s, hours, remuneration etc.
- Commence any required recruitment
- Determine other functional requirements – Office? Computers?
- Create meaningful and measurable KPIs for management
- Hone a strategic plan at a governance level from which management can effectively take up the reins

Timing: end March 2015

Step Two: Definition of a regional brand

Once we have the right entity in place – and the right governance structure to support it – we can and will develop what we need to push the region forward.

This will likely involve a wide range of parties from whom we can draw support, good counsel and commitment financially or other. There are enough clever buggers in our community, and so many with far-reaching connections, to make this happen.

A lot more must be done on this and the CMG is deliberately leaving the details undefined at this stage; deferring to the first important step of establishing a structure with which to deliver on it (whatever 'it' may yet be).

Timing: mid 2015?

Step Three: Operational delivery

It should be expected that by the end of 2015, we have:

- A fully-operational new entity meeting objectives for effective marketing day-to-day, in a cohesive, coordinated manner which demonstrably improves on how we have been in the past
- Regional buy-in to a brand, a positioning and a sound plan for deployment
- Measurements which management own to gauge progress of initiatives and report accordingly to stakeholders
- Local industry's individual members believing in what we have created and supportively expectant of future tangible return.

A footnote

It is important to raise that some of the steps and stages outlined above may well be able to be developed and delivered concurrently. We should make good progress where we can, unencumbered by pedestrianism and refusing to get bogged in minutia.

Equally, however, we must set ourselves up for success. If we do not measuredly marshal an appropriate set of resources to carry things forward, we will, looking back, merely be a bunch of well-intentioned folk who had a good idea at the time.

Appendix: Hallmarks and features of a successful region/regional marketing entity:

To shape perspective on vision and support for direction, here are a number of things we see as being attributable to us in the future:

- A Rhone Valley (by example) – a wide region with clear commonality, yet well-defined, communicable and embraced differences
- Organised collaboration
- Not precious about (local) competition
- Belief in what it says
- Heart to invest
- Clarity in message
- Pooling of resources
- Talked about (as much as COPNL at PN13? More?); admired by others
- Quality-oriented
- Standards driven
- Delivering fully on the brand promise
- Knows what it is and what it isn't
- Commercially successful for business members both small and large
- Comfortable with change and reinvention
- Dismissive of the trivial and engaged in the meaningful
- Organised, orchestrated
- Yet nimble, responsive
- Financially robust
- Single-minded, not easily distracted from bigger goals
- Supported (more than a fair share) by industry bodies.

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