

The Portuguese wine industry and Web 2.0: The Infovini project

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This paper presents the INFOVINI project, a Web portal that addresses online promotion of the Portuguese wine industry in an innovative way, clearly separating information targeted at the end consumer from information targeted at different consumer profiles. Its main objective is to enhance user experience, taking into account the critical determinants of electronic service quality. The development of mobile applications for specific functionalities and the usage of Web 2.0 technologies to enhance interactivity are amongst its most distinctive features. The INFOVINI project represents an important contribution to a new way of promoting collaborative processes across organizations and between users, in order to build an innovative presence of Portuguese wines on the Internet.

Keywords: Electronic Service Quality, Internet, Web Portals, Wine Industry.

Topics: Wine Portals, Web 2.0, Mobile Web, European Wines, Online Marketing Strategies

1. Introduction

The emergence of the Internet, together with the rapid pace of development of new technologies seen in recent years, have changed the traditional way of promoting products and services. This new medium demands innovative strategies for attracting new customers and a proactive learning attitude.

The wine industry has adopted this new channel on a global level with varying enthusiasm, depending not only on the region of the world and its level of ICT adoption, but also on the widespread use of broadband access to the Internet. Myriads of websites are indexed when searching for wine related issues on the web, promoting either wineries, wine-shops, wine regions or wine portals. In order to stand out from the crowd, top wine country producers have adopted wine portals as a first level entry point to information about their wines and regions, typically publicly funded and targeting different audiences.

Questions are now arising about what should be the role and the mission of these information portals, and how we can assess their value, through user's experiences and participation. In fact, the wine sector is an ideal environment for testing innovative forms of promotion, as the end user is enthusiastic and passionate about the production and consumption of wine [1], always eager to know more.

This paper addresses these issues by focusing on the experience of the INFOVINI project, (<http://www.infovini.pt>), an Internet portal for the Portuguese wine industry, designed from its conception to bring an innovative perspective to the promotion of Portuguese wines. First, a global benchmark analysis of the top wine producer portals is performed, evaluating their target audiences, informational structure, and integration of Web 2.0 functionalities for building communities. Based on this analysis and a brief introduction to the Portuguese wine sector and its main characteristics, the initial objectives and basic features of the INFOVINI project are then presented. A final reflection about the role that these high level wine portals could play in promoting a wine country concludes the paper.

2. World Wine Portals: Benchmark Analysis

According to OIV [2], France, Italy, Spain and the US are among the top wine producing countries and their strategy of using the web as a vehicle for promoting a unified global country-brand is very diverse. Both France and Spain have bet on a well structured, informative and appealing web portal, although it can be said that Spain seems more attentive to new trends, as can be seen by the recent addition multimedia channel. As one of the top three wine producing countries, the lack of a global portal for wine promotion in Italy is striking. The US clearly pursues a different strategy, as you can find high quality small scale portals for promoting specific wine regions, using the latest technology (e.g. <http://www.pasowine.com> and <http://washingtonwine.org>). A summary of the common features of the portals of the top wine producing countries is depicted in *Table 1*, including information on the target audiences, informational structure and the usage of Web 2.0 functionalities.

Countries belonging to the New World, like Argentina, Chile and Australia, use the Internet effectively for promoting their wines and brands, particularly by reinforcing the links to tourism and tourism portals, be it in or outside wine regions. Among the common features of these information portals one finds: appealing and modern design, tourist information, videos, multilingual sections targeted at specific countries, a schedule of upcoming events (e.g. wine contests), where to buy wine and wine routes. An example of these high quality and innovative features is the recently added section called "Regional Heroes" in the Australia portal (<http://www.wineaustralia.com>).

Table 1: Benchmark analysis of wine promotion portals.

Country	Argentina	Germany	Australia	Chile	Spain	France
URL	winesofargentina.org	germanwineausa.org	wineaustralia.com	winesofchile.org	winesfromspain.com	frenchwinesfood.com
Target audience	Consumer	Consumer	Consumer and trade	Consumer and trade	Consumer and trade	Consumer
News/ Events	X	X	X	X	X	
Tourism	X	X		X		X
Oenology		X	X	X	X	X
Gastronomy	X	X	X	X		X
History	X			X	X	
Surplus Value	Videos	Connection to gastronomy	Wine Regions information	Tourist Information	Specialized Information, multimedia	Website structure, connection to gastronomy
Web 2.0 offers	Twitter	None	None	Blog, feeds	Facebook, youtube	Blog, feeds

In summary we could claim that although all of the aforementioned websites are examples of best practice in wine information/promotion, all have disparate strategies, a fact that can be partially attributed to the way the target audience is defined. As an example, we could say that in Europe the right mix between wine-producing and tourism-related WebGIS services is generally missing, since they are either targeted at tourists and wine consumers, or else to wine producers and wineries [3]. In the end, the lack of a clear definition of a target audience may lead to a weaker message for the end user and a less effective promotion of the country's wines.

3. The Portuguese Wine Cluster

Portugal is the 11th biggest wine producer in the world [2], and its wine industry is the most important sector of Portuguese agriculture, representing a total volume of nearly 7.5 million hectolitres and €760 M in 2008 [4]. "Port Wine" and "Madeira Wine" are worldwide brands with a long history and very strong reputation; yet Portuguese table wines with worldwide recognition are scarce. The Portuguese wine industry is investing heavily in vine restructuring and modern technology over the last years, in order to improve the overall quality of Portuguese table wines and reflect the diversity of its regions and grape varieties. Promotion remains a problem, due to the need for continuous investment in the different media channels.

As a consequence, we believe that an effective and innovative use of the web channel might be a good differentiation opportunity for Portuguese wine promotion, with comparatively less resources and potentially high impact. A global and consistent Web strategy should be pursued, emphasizing interaction, community building and openness.

4. The INFOVINI Project

The INFOVINI project started in 2004, partially sponsored by the Portuguese National Program for the Information Society and the portal was launched in 2007. A second phase of this project started in 2008, and the portal is now funded by the Vine and Wine Institute (IVV-IP) and the Port and Douro Wine Institute (IVDP-IP), the more relevant public institutions in the wine industry.

The idea of designing a web portal from scratch, gathering information scattered between different regional commissions and institutions, as well as addressing different target audiences, first emerged in 2004. The wine business and the vast and interesting information associated with it, given that it can be seen as a "cultural product", represented a major opportunity for developing innovative business models of cooperation between wine producers, wine associations and government institutions. The vision INFOVINI has had since 2004 still holds true: having a first level entry point for all the latest information about the Portuguese wine cluster and being at the forefront of innovation in promoting a wine country on the web.

The development of the portal took into consideration the relevant literature on electronic service quality and the provision of a superior user experience to the consumers with respect to the

interactive flow of information [5][6]. The determinants of e-service quality identified by Bressoles and Durrieu [6] for consumers to evaluate wine websites were at the core of the development of the website interface (Figure 1). There are: ease of use, information, security / privacy, design, reliability, offer and interactivity.



Figure 1: Homepage of the INFOVINI Portal.

Ease of use and interactivity were also the factors considered relevant to the development of the application for pairing wine and food (“A wine for each occasion”), as everyone immediately understands how to proceed without further instructions (Figure 2, left). Another feature worth mentioning is the application in Google maps for oenotourism, using a consistent interface to display all the wine routes for the various regions (Figure 2, right), with advanced search capabilities. For example, it is now very easy to identify what the wine farms are that provide a certain type of service (e.g. wine tasting, vine visits, vintage events) for a given wine region.

As the information on the wine brands transferred automatically from the vitiviniculture Institutions is very synthetic, it is important to complement it with information that users value, such as the information about the oenologist responsible for the wine, the tasting notes or the prizes a particular brand has obtained.

All information targeted at producers and trade has been kept separate, in a section called INFOVINI PRO, easily accessible through the main page. In this reserved area, besides managing and updating the information portfolio of their wine brands, a producer can analyse usage statistics for each product, for different periods of time.

We believe that this clear separation of content targeted at the consumer, either at a national or international level, and the more specific information for the producers and trade, is more efficient, enabling different interests to co-exist in harmony.

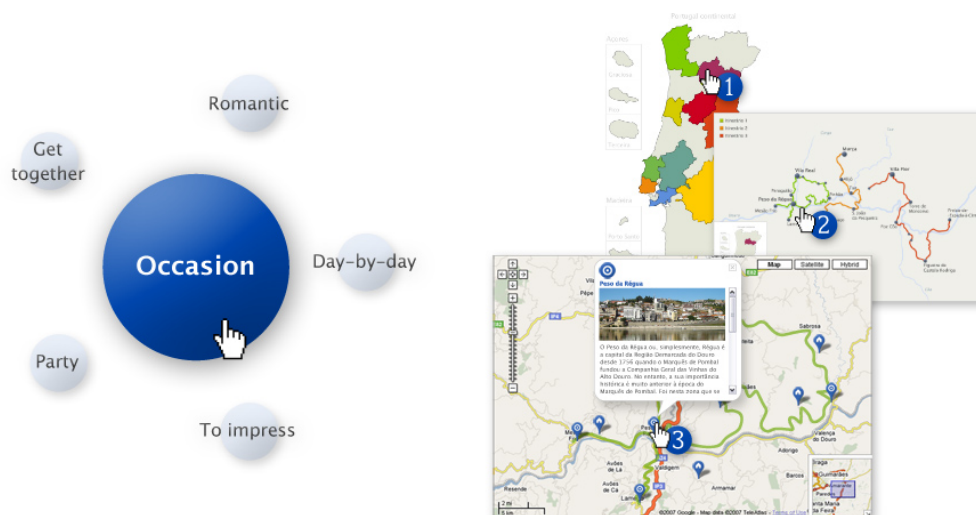


Figure 2: Pairing wine and food (left) and wine routes (right).

The main objectives of the INFOVINI project can be summarized as follows:

- To integrate all quality Portuguese wine brands in a single multilingual website;
- To develop a multimedia, interactive portal with daily updates;
- To create dataflow and protocols with owners of privileged information, in order to disseminate information on the Portuguese wine industry;
- To create a wine promotion web portal that stands out as best practice on a national and international level;
- To actively promote Portugal as a quality wine producing country.

Some of the pre-defined objectives are still underway and require additional clarification. For example, the objective “To integrate all quality Portuguese wine brands in a single multilingual website” seems like a fairly simple task to accomplish, assuming that all regional institutions responsible for the wine certification, with similar procedures and business processes had implemented a similar data model. However, this is not the case, and the degree of process dematerialisation with ICT support between institutions varies immensely.

Further activity is required within the realms of multimedia and interactivity, which are currently at the core of the developments underway. Social networks like Twitter, Facebook, and wine blogs, are essential for the development of the community, emphasizing interaction and users’ involvement. The long-term business value of the portal will be dependent on its ability to use these second generation Internet-based services and to foster collaboration and social networking between its users. Although the end user in the wine industry is enthusiastic and passionate about the production and consumption of wine, online collaboration and sharing of information amongst users is not yet generalised. We believe that other unforeseen benefits will arise for all the players of the value system of the wine industry when community driven content becomes a reality.

5. Future Developments

Consolidating this development methodology and enhancing users’ participation and true collaboration between wine regions, is still a challenge. Yet the fast pace at which new technologies and applications for the internet emerge, forces the wine industry to continuously rethink promotion of its products and services. In actual fact, Web 2.0 opened up new opportunities, allowing organizations to listen to their direct customers which create a conversation of value [1]. This type of conversation or communication energizes the customer base to be more than just consumers but

rather an engaged part of the business [1], and any further development in the portal should take this into account.

The major milestones for short-term development include:

- *Web 2.0 based services*: enhance interactivity and portal's value through facilitating and fostering user generated content;
- *Mobile applications*: although three mobile applications are now freely available for download on the portal, we still need to evaluate their impact and enhance their usability;
- *Explore synergies between existing databases*: link information that already exists through partnership agreements (e.g. tourism national institution, wine magazines);
- *Oenotourism*: a prototype is being tested to facilitate the planning of a complete journey, integrating information provided by tourism sources (e.g., points of interest, restaurants and hotels), with the information already in existence from wine farms.

6. Conclusions and Reflections

Promotion is a shared concern of the wine industry, as money is scarce and competition is fierce. Benchmarking analysis of the top level informational portals of the leading world wine producing countries revealed clearly different approaches, showing that it is still not clear what should be the most effective strategy for online promotion of the wine industry.

Sellito and Burgess [7] referred explicitly to the case of government-funded Internet portals as promoters of regional clusters in Australia, highlighting the fact that the wine industry experience demonstrates conclusively that there are synergies gained through a combination of collaboration and competition between traditionally competing firms [7]. We believe the same is true for the very diverse and also traditionally competing Portuguese wine regions. In fact, there is not a tradition of joint marketing approaches, or even active collaboration, between different and sometimes neighbouring wine regions. A small country like Portugal has to find innovative ways of promoting its wines on the Internet, by giving visibility to all wine regions equally, enhancing its diversity and effectively linking the information of their brands, history and culture. Contributing to enrich a common project like INFOVINI fosters collaboration between competing regions, requiring a different mindset – Portugal should focus in augmenting the visibility of the country, intertwined with the quality of its regions and wines, instead of fragmenting this message through a multitude of regional portals.

The INFOVINI portal addresses online promotion of Portuguese wines by enhancing user experience, developing mobile applications targeted at younger generations and promoting collaborative processes across organizations. The challenge the INFOVINI portal now faces depends on its ability to foster an active participation of its end users by sharing comments, videos or photos, allowing them to create rich media content to the portal.

Understanding if the user experience provided by the portal has a positive correlation with a change in attitude towards Portuguese wines, still requires further assessment. In summary, the question is whether the perceived image of Portuguese wines changes after a rewarding experience with INFOVINI and evaluate the impact a generic portal could play. This leads to research questions that need to be addressed, such as: i) Evaluate if increased perceptions of web site quality will lead to increased levels of trust and increased levels of perceptions of product quality [8] ii) Identify the way to implement a virtuous cycle of constantly attracting more users and particularly Millennials, by correctly assessing the impact of INFOVINI beyond simple metrics (i.e page views and unique visitors).

Bridging the gap between two very diverse realities - the traditional, culturally rich wine industry and the rapidly evolving information society – is a difficult but essential task to accomplish in order to compete in a global market. INFOVINI can pave the way for a European portal encompassing all the important information on European wines and exposing their rich cultural heritage.

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Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank all the other team members Ana Marques, Nuno Ramos, Miguel Jesus, Nuno Almeida and Miguel Fernandes for their invaluable work in the project.

The authors would also like to thank IVDP IP and IVV IP for their unconditional support since the beginning of the project.