

10 tips for doing business with European buyers

When doing business with European wine buyers, making their life easy is the key to success. European wine buyers want to work with suppliers who can add value to their business. They are looking for suppliers that meet the European legal requirements and who know their target market. They expect you to know how to approach your target market and assume that the marketing of your wine is in good order. Use the following ten tips in your dealings with European wine buyers.

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1. You need to comply with European legislation and requirements for wine

The imports of food and drink related products in the European Union are strictly regulated to ensure the provision of safe products to consumers in the European market. If your wine does not comply with European legislation and requirements, it will not be accepted on the European market.

European buyers need to know that your wine is compliant with European legislation before closing a deal. They will ask for up-to-date documentation and certification to make sure you are able to meet these requirements. Make sure you are able to show them a certificate and analysis report for your compliance with European oenological practices.

There are strict labelling regulations in Europe. The European Union has drafted a list of compulsory information that should be present on your label. For example, your label should contain allergen information. If your wine contains sulphites, you are required to inform the consumer on your label.

Be aware of quality and food-safety management systems (such as [HACCP](#), [ISO 22000](#) or [BRC/IFS](#)), as these may be required to demonstrate your ability to control food safety hazards. This also applies to certification for quality control and traceability. A thorough approach to compliance demonstrates reliability and is welcomed by potential buyers.

Tips:

Make sure you meet the European legislation and standards for wine, to the very last detail. For more information on specific legislation and requirements, please read our study on [buyer requirements on the European wine market](#) or consult the [EU Export Helpdesk](#) (specific product code under Chapter 2204).

Read more on different food-safety management systems at ITC's [Standards Map](#).

2. You need to have a detailed business plan before you start exporting to Europe

To successfully export your wines to Europe, you need to be ready. Having a detailed business plan will help you seize business opportunities in your target market.

Your business plan should *at least* include answers and strategies to tackle the following questions.

- Which segment of the market will you enter and how?
- What are the market requirements?
- Who are your competitors and what makes you different?
- What is your export marketing plan?
- Who will be your buyers and how can you best approach them?
- How will your importers make money by importing your wine?

A business plan is fundamental to your company if you want to export your wine to Europe. Having a detailed business plan helps you to prepare your company for exporting to the demanding European market.

Tips:

Formulate a business plan to prepare your company for exporting wines to Europe.

A common way to formulate your business plan is to formulate your [marketing mix](#). You need to think about your product, place, price and promotion, among other factors, before entering your target market.

3. Do proper target market research prior to approaching the target market

Although the European Union shares legal and non-legal requirements for wine, it is not a single wine market. Each country has distinctive characteristics, preferred taste profiles and trends. It is absolutely necessary to research your target market before approaching it.

Market research consists of analysing statistics and wine reports on trends, news and interesting developments in a target wine market. But more importantly, it includes interviews with local experts, importers and exporters and visiting your target market. Market research will be more complete by acquiring information from various sources.

Through market research, you can inform yourself on trends, taste profiles, market channels and segments, and buyer requirements in a target wine market. As a result of your market research, you should know about the opportunities for your wine in your target market. You should be able to understand the route to your target market.

Tips:

Our studies on [European wine markets](#) are a good starting point for your own market research.

Please read our study on [finding European wine buyers](#).

4. Ensure you are able to market your wine in various ways

When you contact potential buyers to sell your wine, they will expect you to have a clear and convincing story about how your wine will add value to their business. If you do not have this, it will be hard to convince importers to buy your wine. You need to show your professionalism and be prepared to offer all relevant information if required.

There are various marketing tools to market your wine to your potential buyers: samples, flyers, tastings, promotions, storytelling, a website, social media, wine certificates and certifications. Additionally, importers expect you to have all necessary product information available.

Being able to offer various marketing materials improves your credibility among your potential buyers.

Tips:

Keep in mind that when you send a sample to your potential buyer this should be your final product (attractively packaged).

Create a Unique Selling Point for your wine and tell your story.

Use a website or social media platforms such as [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#) to promote your business.

Make sure you have a variety of promotional material readily available, as different buyers prefer different promotional materials.

5. Determine your Unique Selling Point and communicate this well

Most European wine markets are saturated. This means that entering the market as a supplier might well force another supplier out of the market. To enter such a market you need to distinguish yourself from your competitors.

You can do so by determining Unique Selling Points (USPs). A USP is a factor that makes your product different from your competitor's product. You can build your USP around such matters as your grape variety, origin, [geographical indication](#), unique production process, unique attributes of your winery, awards, sustainability, history, quality or even price.

Clear and effective communication of your USP is equally important as your USP itself. Wine buyers have to be convinced about your USP and it needs to stand out from your competition in your target market. If you fail to communicate your USP effectively, you might not be able to enter your target market, even if you have a good product.

Tips:

Determine Unique Selling Points for your wine to stand out from your competitors.

There are various ways to communicate your USPs. These include aligning or realigning USPs with fashion trends in your target market and contact specific wine buyers. Or consider providing an in-depth story about your winery on your website or flyers. You can also consider using social media to

promote your USPs.

6. Emphasise your success stories in other export markets when approaching a new market

Wine buyers value reliable and knowledgeable suppliers to avoid risks. They want to ensure that potential suppliers can add value to their business and are able to deliver agreed quality and volumes. If you already supply wine to other (European) markets, you have already convinced buyers in other countries that you comply with legal and quality standards of the export market and can add value to their business. It also shows that you are able to consistently meet agreements on wine volumes and quantity, which indicates reliability.

Tip:

When approaching a new wine market or wine buyer, emphasise your previously successful exports. This will increase your credibility as a supplier.

7. Find and/or use an endorsement of a wine expert

Recognition is very important in the wine industry, especially in the premium segment. Competitions such as [Decanter World Wine Awards](#), [Concours Mondial](#), [International Wine and Spirit Competition](#) and [Bacchus](#), and endorsements by wine experts such as [Masters of Wine \(MW\)](#), will surely add credibility. MWs are also useful consultants as they have built up an national and/or international reputation, and their assessments are valued.

Gaining recognition and subsequently an endorsement for your wine from a wine expert or Master of Wine can be a great attribute to market your wine. Their review of your wine could be published in (online) magazines such as [Meininger's](#), [Harpers](#) and [the Drinks Business](#). Additionally, you can use the endorsement in your other marketing tools, such as on your label, flyers and website, or on social media.

Tips:

Ask wine experts if they are interested in tasting your wine and if they have suggestions or tips for your wine.

If they do, you can ask in what segment your wine would perform best.

If a wine expert is extremely positive about your wine, you could ask them to write a review about your wine.

8. Be flexible about labelling and packaging, in line with preferences of your buyer

The European Union has strict and specific requirements for the labelling and packaging of wine in Europe. Besides these legal requirements, wine importers can have specific labelling and packaging preferences. These preferences are generally based on packaging trends, taxes and additional requirements of specific European

countries.

For example, in conservative European wine markets such as the Czech Republic and Poland, cork stoppers are still the preferred type of closure. However, in more mature wine markets such as the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands, screw cap stoppers are a 'must'. Be flexible in your type of stopper when supplying these markets.

Wine importers follow market and consumer trends. Being able to adapt to packaging preferences makes you a more interesting business partner for wine importers.

Tips:

Discuss packaging preferences in your target market with your importer and be flexible to be able to adapt to their preferences.

For more information about packaging trends on European wine markets, read our studies on [trends on European wine markets](#) and our [country-specific wine market](#) studies.

9. Only agree on order sizes if you can live up to your agreements

It is paramount to live up to your agreements when exporting wine to Europe. Wine buyers in Europe are looking for reliable suppliers. Wine exporters new to exporting wine to Europe would do well to focus on being able to deliver on their promises. This might be easier when starting with small order sizes. This enables suppliers to live up to their agreements on wine volume and quality.

Small order sizes, as initial orders, may result in increased transport costs because you might not be able to fill a shipment container on your own. To lower these transport costs you could find other exporters from your country and ship your wines together. This way you can fill a shipment container and share transport costs with other wine exporters.

Tip:

When agreeing to delivering small order sizes, team up with other wine exporters from your country to share transport costs.

10. Use a storage facility in Europe to ensure on-time delivery in the right volume

Wine traders and retailers sometimes need wine at short notice but transport to Europe can take a long time and can be costly. This can result in delayed or inadequate supplies or even out-of-stocks. A storage facility where you can store your wine in the European Union might prevent supply issues, as wine can be transported quickly throughout Europe.

If you have not already done so, it is advisable to find a storage facility in Europe for your wines. Being able to store your wine in a storage place or depot in Europe will be very well received by wine importers. However, do this only when you already have at least one customer in Europe. Storing your wine in a warehouse without a customer could be a disaster if you do not manage to sell your wine within the limited shelf life.

Tips:

If you already have a customer or customers for your wine, find a strategically located warehouse/storage place/depot in Europe where you can store your wine.

For an overview of wine storage facilities in the world, including European countries, visit the website of [wine searcher](#). Note that this list is not exhaustive.

Team up with other small wine producers to share transport costs of your wine to Europe.



'You need to have a good business and marketing plan with a planning, what to do when, aimed results etc. if you do not, you will not make it'

Stefan Metzner, Wine consultant - Tip 2



'If you are interested in exporting, make sure you are ready to export. The last thing buyers want to do is do your job'

Alan Crowley, Master of Wine - Tip 3



'You have to keep life simple for a wine buyer. He is looking for commercial success, not extra work'

Ivan Barbic, Master of Wine - Tip 4

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