Wine Recommendation Site Research

The following classifications are adopted from the "Economics of Advertising." Philip Nelson originally coined the terms "experience good" and "search good." Other economists later included "credence goods." This is an analogy, not a strict interpretation of the terms.

Experiencers: Those who believe the quality of a wine can only be assessed after consumption. (It needs to be tried in order for the user to be able to say how good it was.) The best way to know whether to buy it is to try it.

Credencers: Those who find wine difficult to value, both before and even after consumption. They don't trust themselves enough to claim that a particular wine is good. They are more likely to turn to other sources to inform them of the value of something. (e.g. wine spectator) Example: U2 said that ordering wine in a restaurant is stressful. If U1 and U2 were there together at the restaurant, U2 stated that he would be perfectly happy to defer to U1.

Searchers: Ones for which all of the qualities are readily observable and verifiable. "I want some red '2 buck chuck'" or, "I want a $10 bottle of merlot."

Summary of Directed Storytelling:

U1:
U1 is a Professor in his mid-thirties who considers himself a wine buyer with an intermediate experience in buying wine. U1 considers himself to be a choosy buyer.

U1's last experience in buying wine
U1 went to a winery and purchased several cases, consisting of Syrah and other "heavier" red wines. He wanted to purchase a specific wine (that he had tried before) from that particular winery. (Not available in stores.) The other bottles he bought were introduced to him via tasting at the winery when he asked about their new wines.

As U1 describes the entire purchasing experience, "It was a short transaction." He spoke with the wine pourer at the winery about each wine but for U1, the taste was the deciding factor for purchase.

What U1 looks for when purchasing wine
The informational descriptions give him some direction, but he buys based on taste.

Other Qualities he may ask about are:
Where do the grapes come from?
 Does the winery grow its own grapes?
 How old are the vines?
Is the wine a mix of grape types, and if so what %?
Is there a punt in the bottle? (Identifies if wine is unfiltered, he prefers the richer taste).

U1 considers awards irrelevant since there are so many.

Bottle and label aesthetics are not representative of quality. If an inexpensive wine has an elaborate label, it must be compensating. It makes sense if a luxury wine has an elaborate label.

Price was irrelevant. $20-25/bottle. Would not spend over $100.
However, if he were to have wine shipped, would need to spend more to cover cost of shipping (no $5 bottles).

User goals
U1 classifies wine purchases for social settings: the wine he purchased at the winery he would use for a "nice dinner" or a "small party." If buying in CA, U1 buys "good" wine to store for the future. For everyday wine, he buys at the PA state stores. He does not look for new wines at the state store.

Online wine shopping
U1 has only bought wines online that he has tried before.

Credible sources of wine recommendations
Friends

U1 does not consider WineSpectator magazine to be credible. Thinks they are a poor source of information because they have an incentive to boost certain wineries based on their advertising. U1 does consider a credible resource to be Anthony Dais Blue, based on his experience with his suggestions. ADB has a column in the American Airlines In-flight magazine.

Going to a winery and tasting the wines yourself.

U2 is also a professor in his thirties. He considers himself a wine novice but he knows wine connoisseurs.

U2's last experience in buying wine
 U2 last bought wine at the PA state liquor store on Center Avenue. He bought 1 Shiraz, 1 Merlot, 1 Riesling, and 1 Chardonnay for a party he was hosting.

What U2 looks for when purchasing wine
U2 goes through phases where he likes certain types of wines (Syrah, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, etc.) but he prefers to stay away from sweet wines. When he identifies a new type of wine, he will experiment within that type. For U2, the type is the "brand."

For U2, "price is an indicator of quality." He stays within the $9 to $15 range. For U2, the probability of getting a bad $8 wine is higher.

U2 does not remember or pay attention to details like year, vintner. Ratings are irrelevant to him. Awards are not relevant. However, if two comparably priced wines, the award might sway him.

Right now, U2 likes Rieslings.

User goals
Buy a certain type of wine for a certain price. (ex. Nouveau Beaujoulais)
U2 wants to get in and out, it is not worth the effort for him to try to find a "killer wine."

Online wine shopping
U2 has never bought wine online. U2 thinks it would be too overwhelming to buy wine online, doesn't know where to start.

Credible sources of wine recommendations
Friends, family will order wine at dinner that he will try. U2 learns about new wines via happenstance. U2 does not actively search out new wines to try.

U3:
U3 is a female in her 30's. She likes wine but considers herself a wine novice and is not personally adventurous. If a friend of hers recommends a wine or if she has something she likes while with friends, she will buy it, but she is not willing to "bear the risk" herself of trying something new.

U3's last experience in buying wine

U3 went to the state store and looked for one of the wines that she always gets. She and her husband were having a "nice, romantic" dinner.

What U3 looks for when purchasing wine
U3 only buys Syrah and Merlot, she will experiment within those types but she has about 5 that she is comfortable with. She can name two of them but the others she describes by their labels. She also affirms that she will only drink "red wine." She views trying new wines as exciting but she highly values knowing what she's going to get. "I'm not going to change on my own; if I like something, I'll stick with it."

Qualities that influence an "experimental" purchase: 1) is it red? 2) does it have a "pretty" label? 3) is it in my price range ($7-25) ($7 is "pushing it"… wine that is cheaper increases the chance you'll get something bad.)

Sources of wine information/choices:
Friends, magazines, fare
" I like fish but I don't make it that much because I don't like white wine…."

U3 likes to read the reviews and other information about wine in wine spectator and does sometimes of the wines they recommend. She has taken reviews with her to the state store and asked the state store to order wines she wanted that weren't in stock.

User Goals:
Get something that I'm relatively certain to like. At the same time, to become very knowledgeable with wine requires "more energy than I want to spend."

Note: U3's husband doesn't drink wine. They have a wine rack in the kitchen, and he views a full wine rack as part of the furniture. Their wine rack is full at all times and it contains wine they have no intention of drinking. For him, any bottle is good enough if it fills the slot, the cheaper the better.

U4 is a professional Usability Specialist at Macromedia! He considers himself an intermediate wine buyer.

U4's last experience in buying wine
At a restaurant, he was perusing the menu to see what would go with pork and tomato sauce but he was unfamiliar with Italian wines so he asked the waiter for a recommendation. U4 went with what the waiter recommended.

Last experience buying wine in a store – usually goes to Winespecator.com to look at reviews and then correlates to the PA control board web site to see if the wine is available and at which PA store.

NOTE: Problem with this process is that it is cumbersome. User needs to make a list, then check the other web site. There is no current way to automate this process.

What U4 looks for when purchasing wine
Type of wine and price. Looks for an over 90 rating but under $20.
U4 will take a chance on new wines. Usually buys an old standby and a new one. Knows which brands he likes and would possibly try a new one from a specific vintner that he had previous experience with.

U4 tends to be distrustful of awards.

User goals
$10 – 13 (would pay less in CA)

Online wine shopping
Never bought wine online. Illegal in PA

Credible sources of wine recommendations
WineSpectator.com – had good experience with the quality of the reviews. The reviewers have domain knowledge that he does not have – know a region or a certain type of grape.

Wine newsletter from Epicurious
Bon Appetit articles
Ordering in restaurants
Friends

NOTE: Problems with WineSpectator.com are that the rankings don't correlate to the descriptions. 80-90 is a skewed scale, can't tell the

difference. A high and a poor rating can both have attractive descriptions so you don't have a sense of what you are getting.

U5

U5 is a working professional who considers herself a novice wine buyer.

U5's last experience in buying wine
User went to Trader Joe's with the specific intention of stocking up on a certain brand (Charles Shaw for $3.29/bottle). User purchased 3 Merlots and 3 Cabernet Sauvignons.

Her last experience purchasing a wine she had never tried before:
U2 went to her local wine shop and talked to the store owner (Tony) and asked for a recommendation. He knows what she likes and she is a regular customer. They talked about what sort of meal she was going to be having, she was looking for something that goes well with spicy food.

What U5 looks for when purchasing wine
Price – needs to be a bargain. Her average price is $10. For U2, an inexpensive wine does not necessarily mean a poor quality wine.

Taste – likes red wines

Bottle aesthetics – these come into play only when she has 2 bottles of the same price and she has no help in choosing which one.

Awards or ratings are a factor for her. She will walk around the wine store and read the reviews that are posted. She knows that if a wine is described as "really fruity then it's not for me." U5 trusts the reviewer's opinion because "I'm naïve….If they say so, it must be true."

U5 is not dedicated to a certain region.

For U5, the descriptions on wine labels do not describe wine, they are not helpful in her decision.

For U5, the brand reputation of well-established wineries is also a factor. For her, if it is a well known brand, she will try another wine from them.

User goals
Find a $10 bottle of wine that will complement the meal she is having.

Online wine shopping
U5 attempted to buy wine online once, but she was unable to ship the wine into her state.

Credible sources of wine recommendations

User saw a special on 60 minutes detailing the Charles Shaw story and she decided to try it out. This is an unusual situation.

Other sources:
Tony, owner of local wine store. U5 does not read wine reviews in magazines or online because "I have a personal relationship with Tony, not a magazine."

Friends
The Food Network

U6:
U6 is a political science professor in her late 20's. She is an experimental wine buyer and like U2, thinks of the grape type as the "brand." She likes Shiraz, Chardonnay and Merlot.

U6's last experience in buying wine
She went to the state store near her house and picked out a bottle in one of the "types" that she likes.

She lamented that buying wine in PA is more of a transactional experience. In other places she's lived, she enjoyed being more experimental with wine. In particular, she like buying wine at Trader Joe's because each wine had a description next to it. The TJ prices were within a range she wanted to spend, and TJ's allowed her to take some more risks on her purchases. (In a state store, she wouldn't buy a $7 bottle but at TJ's she would if it had a good description.)

Theme: All users put NO value in asking the clerks in PA for a recommendation.

Label
Wine Spectator

3 bottles on hand at home.