

QR Codes Gain Popularity With Winemakers, But Level Of Consumer Use Remains Unclear

A growing number of producers are putting QR (short for Quick Response) codes on wine bottles, which customers scan with smartphones to find online information about the wine, according to a report in [Wine Spectator](#). It's an attempt to connect with younger wine drinkers, and producers like Justin in Paso Robles, MacRostie in Sonoma Coast, Napa Valley's Chappellet and Charles Smith Wines in Washington are using it to separate their brands from the pack. Foreign producers are also adopting QR codes for bottles sent to the United States. But the question remains—will consumers use them?

For wine shoppers, the benefit comes from the ability to make a more informed decision when purchasing wine. Or, they can learn more about a wine they've already bought, after they pop the cork and sit down with a glass. Some codes open simple tasting sheets with information on the vineyards or vintage. Others, like those used by Oregon's Argyle Winery, are more complex and link to content such as winemaker videos and food-and-wine pairing suggestions.

Many producers are using QR codes to tell a story about their wines. Customers who scan codes on bottles from Sonoma County's Dry Creek Vineyard can watch videos about the winery's history. "I could travel 365 days a year and never be able to tell that story to enough people," says Kim Stare Wallace, vice president of the winery.

QR codes were originally developed by a supplier for Toyota as a way to track auto parts through the assembly process. But they've been popping up recently in magazines, display advertisements and on a variety of products. The square codes, usually the size of a postage stamp, feature black-and-white designs that resemble pixels. (Some new codes come in multiple colors.) Numerous apps on smartphones can scan the code, using a phone's camera, then translate the design into a Web address. Mark Smith, CEO at QR4Wine, which designs codes for the wine industry, explains that each code is really a string of characters that make up a link. "The camera phone reader converts that image back into the string," he says.

One advantage of QR technology is that it can link wine drinkers to a winery from almost any location, as long as they have a smartphone. A bonus for producers is that they need to create only a single code for a particular bottling, such as their flagship wine. They can keep the same code but change the linked Web page for subsequent vintages. Producers can also create codes in different languages for bottles that are exported.

It's unclear how quickly consumers are adopting QR. And while QR may be the most widely available technology, it's not the only service offered. Microsoft has developed its own 2D barcode technology, called Microsoft Tag. Another technology is Near Field Communication (NFC), which embeds radio frequency chips in tags. Smartphones with NFC readers have begun to arrive on the market, allowing customers to quickly jump to product information and coupons by simply waving their phones by the tag. Phones can

also be linked to bank information, potentially allowing consumers to buy the bottle at checkout with a quick scan of their phone.

Producers such as Opus One and Bevan Cellars in Napa are employing NFC tags, with bottles featuring a stylized “N” logo on the back label so consumers can identify where they can use their NFC-capable phones. Bevan plans to update the content associated with its wines every six to nine months. While the most important element will always be the wine in the bottle, the new technologies may help consumers have a better idea what’s in it before they buy.

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