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WINE PUBLIC RELATIONS: PROMOTING GEORGIAN WINE IN THE U.S.MARKET

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WINE PUBLIC RELATIONS
PROMOTING GEORGIAN WINE IN THE U.S.MARKET

A Creative Project Submitted to the
Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts & Sciences of
John Carroll University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Tea Kokhreidze
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The creative project of Tea Kokhreidze is hereby accepted:

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Overview of the Project

This project offers a hypothetical public relations plan for Georgian wine to achieve success in establishing Georgian wine export to the United States. It begins with the history of wine public relations and explores how winning public relations campaigns have been conducted in the wine business. Based on research presented in the literature review, a hypothetical public relations plan is provided on how to build a brand image for Georgia as an origin for wine and introduce Georgian wines to various U.S. markets. The public relations plan presented in the paper will aim to: introduce Georgian wines to various U.S. markets, expand the visibility of Georgian wines in targeted U.S. markets, and stimulate demand for Georgian wines. Finally, points of consideration for the hypothetical public relations plan will be presented followed by a conclusion.

Literature Review

The review of literature will first examine some trends of the American wine industry. Next, it will explore the history of wine public relations. An overview of successful public relations practices in the wine business is necessary to develop a blueprint for activities that will aim to create a cause around Georgian wine in the U.S. market. Finally, this section of the paper will review three unique and important aspects of Georgian wine: qvevri wines (qvevri – a large egg-shaped clay vessel, buried underground and used for the making, fermentation and storage of wine since ancient times), wines made from unique Georgian grape varieties, and Georgian natural wines. The public relations plan will mainly focus on these three categories or styles of Georgian wine and offer guidelines on how to build a brand image for Georgian wine that will be in line with the unique and positive elements of the Georgian wine industry.

Overview of the U.S. Wine Industry and Market

One of the biggest challenges facing wine marketers and publicists in the U.S. was how to make wine more accessible and understandable to consumers without entirely eliminating the mystique that has made it such an interesting and enduring beverage (Posert & Franson, 2004). Historically, there has never been a cultural disposition for Americans to drink wine as it has traditionally existed in Europe, despite being populated primarily by European immigrants. The two main reasons for this were because the vineyard and production infrastructure was very small in the 19th century when the country was developing, and the first alcoholic beverages to be mass produced and readily available nationwide in the U.S. were beer and whiskey (Silverman, Castaldi, Baack, & Sorlien, 1999).

Thus many Americans – perhaps most of them – were not familiar with some of the niceties and rituals involved in serving and drinking wine. “Most Europeans have been familiar with such “rules” for centuries; many Americans have become aware of them only in recent decades” (Posert & Franson, 2004, p. 14). The American renaissance of the wine industry really began with the affluence of the late 1950s when American winemakers began the practice of labeling their wines according to the grape varieties. This was in direct contrast to the European custom of labeling wines according to place of origin (White, 2014, p. 23). Most importantly, American winemakers started to concentrate on making high quality wines (Zraly, 2007).

By the middle of the 1970’s, the Wine Institute realized the future of the wine industry needed top quality education. In 1977, the institute launched the Society of Wine Educators (SWE) to promote and publicize accurate and informed knowledge about wine

(Posert and Franson, 2004). Expansion continued into the 1990's, driven by America's newfound love affair with the grape. Wine consumption rapidly increased with an ever-expanding group of wine consumers.

Today, Americans are drinking more wine than ever before (Zraly, 2007). The U.S. is the fourth-largest wine-producing country in the world, and California alone is responsible for 94 percent of its output. After Italy and France, it is the world's largest wine-consuming nation (Keevil, 2010). There are approximately 67 million adults in the U.S. who drink wine. Almost one-third of American adults in households with incomes greater than \$35,000 per year drink wine and 58 percent of all Americans say they purchase wine either for themselves or someone else (Wine Market Council, 2009). The wine market in the U.S. is now the largest market in the world in terms of retail sales value, and well positioned to become the largest market in terms of volume (Wagner, Olsen & Thach, 2007). Sales data have also identified that the states with the largest markets are California, Florida, New York, Texas and New Jersey (Gomberg, Fredrikson & Associates, 2008).

Meanwhile, Americans' taste in wines continues to change. The proliferation of wine classes, tastings, dinners, and publications has certainly been beneficial (White, 2014). The number of educated wine drinkers grows as well as the demand for choice in the wine market. As to the imported wines, Wagner, Olsen, and Thach (2007) report that they make up a growing percentage of the U.S. marketplace and come from many nations around the globe. In fact, the U.S. has one of the most "open markets" in the world, with low barriers to entry for imported wines.

Despite this, California wines have traditionally dominated the domestic market for years due to the ideal growing conditions and favorable marketing and branding actions taken by some of California's larger wineries (Silverman, Castaldi, Baack, & Sorlien, 1999). Overall, the import segment has seen some fluctuations over the years and is currently on the rise. With the high number of producers and with the market dominated by a few major wineries, competition in the U.S. wine market is high. Today's wine buyer has thousands of choices (Zraly, 2007). More producers from more regions than ever before are vying for space in the wine market (White, 2014).

Wagner et al. (2007) states that imported wines coming into the U.S. face the same challenges as domestically produced wines in finding a spot in a crowded marketplace. Just as with domestic wines, the strategic challenge is to position the imported wine to appeal to a segment of the market better than competitive offerings. Fortunately, there are many consumers in the U.S. market who enjoy exploring wine from producers around the globe and collectively create market segments that importers can reach (p. 356). Silverman et al. (1999) identifies various approaches implemented by wineries to try to establish a competitive advantage. Main strategies include targeting varietal segments, strategic supplier and distribution partnerships, and differentiation based on image and price.

Wine public relations. In order to incorporate the most effective strategies in the public relations plan for promoting Georgian wine in the U.S. market, it is helpful to review the history of wine public relations and look at several case histories that proved to be successful in getting both publicity and public affairs support for wine in the United States.

As Wagner et al. (2007) notes, historically the wine industry has been a business dominated by the mentality of production rather than marketing. For years, wineries have produced wine under a simple philosophy – to produce a high quality wine that will drive sales. In today’s wine market, making quality wine is just the baseline. One also has to know how to sell wine. This calls for a basic understanding of marketing principles and practices.

Robert Mondavi, a legendary vintner, who brought prestige to American wines and to the attention of the world, emphasized the importance of wine public relations. He also helped popularize wine drinking across the nation.

In the preface of Posert and Franson (2004), Mondavi writes:

But once we achieved that quality, public relations programs and publicity were crucial in telling the world about our wines and the appropriate place of wine in our lives...In my mind, public relations – after wine quality – remains the most important factor in winery success. (p. 1)

Before reviewing several successful case histories, it is important to describe the term ‘wine public relations’ itself. According to Wark (2012), the craft of wine industry public relations is not different than real estate, publishing, high tech, or any other industry public relations effort. “The simplest explanation of what a Wine PR professional must do is the simplest explanation of what any public relations professional does: communicate a brand message to a targeted audience” (para. 1). Wine public relations is concerned with providing positive news about the winery and its wine brands to the media and other audiences (Wagner et al., 2007). In the simplest of terms, public relations is the art and science of managing a company’s relationships with the various

publics or audiences that are important to its success. According to Public Relations Society of America, it is “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (para. 4). It is the responsibility of a public relations practitioner to recognize the needs of an organization’s public and build a campaign around those needs. All these definitions are particularly valid for the wine business because public relations is usually the single largest element in marketing efforts (Vine, Harkness, & Linton, 2002). It can build a positive image for the winery and its products. Thus public relations is about forging the long-term reputation of the wine or winery – building the respect, admiration, and relationships that will support sales and enhance image of it (pp. 301-302).

What have some of the winning public relations campaigns accomplished? Yellow Tail, for example, is the best-selling imported wine in the United States, recognized and acknowledged as an Australian brand (Resnick, 2008). The company accounted for 11 percent of all U.S. imports in 2005 (Veseth, 2008). According to Resnick (2008), the key factors in the success of Yellow Tail are the quality of the wine, the label – in 2000, the brand was the first with a funny moniker and Yellow Tail has a story. There is a family behind the brand with a moving story which echoes in the American imagination (Resnick, p. 173).

Telling a compelling story also helped Bordeaux Superieur wine increase its reach in the American market (Franson & Posert, 2012). Michael Wangbickler, a certified wine educator and manager at wine marketing and public relations agency in Napa, explains that the key was to update not only the message, but also the medium for the messaging about Bordeaux wines. According to Wangbickler, “to reach new consumers, they needed

to focus their efforts on conveying a fresher, more vibrant image of the wines and the region” (p. 78). Along with a new interactive website and blog, they utilized social media tools to promote wines generating a positive buzz within the target market.

Mark Chandler, a marketing manager and former Executive Director of the Lodi Winegrape Commission, conducted various public relations campaigns to enhance the image of the company. The campaigns incorporated an eye-catching logo and first-rate graphics for press packs and ad campaigns. They also consolidated various messages to increase demand for Lodi (Franson & Posert, 2012). As a result, they were successful in legitimizing Lodi as a source of high quality grapes and wines in the media and the trade. Most importantly, the public relations campaigns helped Lodi become a standalone region, rather than being categorized with the Central Valley. Chandler notes that to carve out a niche from a public relations perspective, a region has to be known for one thing, or a very few things, that can help shower a positive impression on all the other things it does (p. 101).

Aside from traditional public relations and marketing, Barefoot Wine company demonstrates the power of so-called ‘influencer marketing,’ which focuses on reaching and interacting with specific key individuals who have influence over potential buyers and are capable and willing to build buzz around a brand that results in increased sales (Mitchel, 2014). In the mid-1980s, Barefoot co-founders Bonnie Harvey and Michael Houlihan built the brand with no advertising. Today, along with utilizing cause marketing to generate word of mouth, Barefoot also makes effective use of social media to garner even more support. The social media representatives behind Barefoot acknowledge the importance and opportunities of online communications channels and realize that their

job is not merely to push content but rather to interact and engage with fans and followers (Mitchel, 2014).

This is how Barefoot PR team representatives define what they do:

Barefoot PR is founded on the belief that reputations are built on heart and soul and a true commitment to ‘doing the right thing.’ Never dressing up clients to be something they are not, we build reputational capital through traditional and non-traditional public relations strategies. We focus on community investment, and incorporate such efforts into our clients’ stories – all the while never losing sight of values, mission and objectives. (para. 1)

When it comes to building a wine brand, Gino Colangelo, President of Colangelo & Partners Public Relations in New York, provides an example of Mionetto wine company, which is one of Italy’s most progressive Prosecco producers (Franson & Posert, 2012). Mionetto hired Colangelo’s agency and set out to build a wine empire in the U.S. As Colangelo explains, their public relations goals include: to make the American wine trade and wine drinkers aware of Prosecco, to educate Americans about sparkling wine, and to calibrate brand awareness with distribution, i.e., “to support sell-in to trade and pull-through with consumers in focus markets” (p. 105). Today, Mionetto is the brand leader in the US market's Prosecco category (Huyghe, 2014). The Prosecco category is growing 27.2 percent while Mionetto is growing 61.8 percent in volume and 58.2 percent in dollar sales.

The core strategies of the public relations plan promoting Mionetto Prosecco in the United States were media relations: wine trend stories, features, business stories, pairings and occasions for drinking (Franson & Posert, 2012). They also executed a

limited advertising plan to achieve two objectives, which were to demonstrate support to the trade and create pouring opportunities at media-driven events (p. 106).

Posert and Franson (2004) provide an example of Louis M. Martini Winery, which faced significant competition from other wineries making wines from Italian varietals in California in the early 1990's. Principal Sam Folsom, who worked for public relations agency, was in charge with generating press coverage and trade interest in the winery, as newer wineries were capturing all the attention. Folsom developed a public relations program for Martini that was designed to remind the trade and wine media of Martini's long success while also working with other wineries rather than in competition with them. The campaign targeted influential wine writers in major markets around the country. Each writer received the pitch letter, samples of the wines, background information from each winery and contacts for additional information. As Folsom notes, this was everything wine writers needed for a wine column on the emerging trend toward Italian varietals in California.

According to Posert and Franson (2014), from a public relations standpoint, this program illustrates how significant press coverage can be obtained in the absence of hard news, such as a new product, a new winemaker or an acquisition, or even without a newly released wine. In addition to generating press coverage of the wine and the brand, this program also earned the goodwill and appreciation of the target media, because it provided them with the tools for a good story. (pp. 70-71)

Vine et al. (2002) also states that the main focus of public relations is working with the media, maintaining strong contacts and presenting newsworthy information. However, special events and consumer enhancements like wine trials also fall into the

category. According to Wagner et al. (2007), the most challenging element of public relations is how to attract the media with the need to effectively tell the winery's own story in the messaging. However, there are basic rules for working with the media. It is also very important to understand that most writers consider themselves journalists first, and wine experts second (Wagner 2007, p. 149). Therefore, wine writers seek the same kinds of stories that the general media wants: trends, news developments, and exciting news.

How can Georgian wine attract key markets and audiences including media for its story? To answer this question, an overview of the history and the trends of Georgian wine will be provided.

Overview of Georgian wine

Georgia, a country wedged between the Black and Caspian seas, is reputedly the cradle of wine (McGovern 2003). Evidence in archeological records places Georgia as possibly the first region of the world to produce wine. It has experienced 8000 vintages and is blessed more than 500 indigenous *Vitis vinifera* winegrape varieties (Anderson, 2013). As a result, there is a long tradition of producing Georgian wine from more than 500 grape varieties grown in the country.

In recent decades, Georgia has been a major supplier of wine to the Soviet Union (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2006). Exports to the Soviet Union and Russia accounted for nearly 90% of Georgian wine export sales. However, in recent years, Georgian wine has gained popularity and made an impression in strategically important markets such as China and the European Union (EU) (Meaney,

2015). The Georgian National Wine Agency reported China was one of the most strategically important markets for Georgia in 2015, where wine exports had increased by 87 percent. Overall, the five countries that imported the most Georgian wine were Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, China, and Poland (agenda.ge.).

Indeed, Georgia is a relative latecomer to the tidal wave of wine export growth that has accompanied the past two decades of globalization (Anderson, 2013). The share of European Union wine that is exported has risen from one-sixth to more than one-third since the late 1980s (Anderson, 2004). One-third of the world's wine is now consumed outside its country of production, while Georgia's share is less than one-eighth and much lower than for most of its East European wine-producing neighbors.

According to Anderson (2013), being a latecomer to Western markets can have some benefits, in addition to well-known challenges. Recent history and experiences of several New World countries suggest that it would be technically possible for Georgia to rapidly expand its exports. In Argentina's case, for example, the value of their own exports has grown at more than 20 percent per year since 2001, and New Zealand's at 25 percent, following Australia's 19 percent per year growth during the 1990's (Anderson & Nelgen, 2011). There is a significant opportunity for the Georgian wine industry to develop markets and achieve success in establishing Georgian wine exports to the U.S. (USAID, 2006).

Overall, the Georgian wine industry is in a period of rapid change in the post-Soviet era (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2011). According to Koff's report, the industry is very awake to its need to capitalize on its strengths to produce the quality and styles of wines demanded across the world, and to

move away from the standardized Soviet-era production paradigm. Old vineyards are being rehabilitated and replanted, and new vineyards are being developed (p. 22).

Despite the long tradition of wine production, Georgian wines as well as grape varieties remain mostly unknown to the international customers, including to those in the United States (Anderson, 2013). There are many natural advantages that could be exploited in promoting Georgian wine in the United States. While those advantages on their own are not enough to guarantee sales in new markets, they can certainly be used to capture the initial attention of American wine writers, importers, and consumers.

Georgia can emphasize numerous points of difference to attract attention to its wine. Those differences include its history, diversity, uniqueness, and authenticity (Anderson, 2013). Still, one of the biggest reasons why Georgian wine is likely to achieve success in the United States is the fact that American wine buyers are constantly in search for “the next big thing” and Georgian wines could fill that role. This “next big thing” can be several things: 1) qvevri wines; 2) wines made from unique Georgian grape varieties; and 3) Georgian natural wines. In order to craft a public relations plan that will be effective in helping Georgian wine achieve success in the United States, it is necessary to first review these three vital aspects of Georgian wine:

1) Qvevri wines: Georgia's winemaking heritage goes back 8,000 years and centers on the qvevri (Cheslow, 2015). It is a large clay amphora that is planted into the soil and filled with fermenting grape juice (Feiring, 2011). Georgian qvevri is a unique vessel with an original shape, an archaic simplicity and, most important, an indispensable role in true Georgian winemaking (Barisashvili, 2011). Noticeably, this ancient Georgian traditional winemaking method of fermenting grapes in earthenware has been added to

the world heritage list of the United Nations educational, scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO), which makes qvevri winemaking method part of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

Qvevri wines are increasingly being used by producers across the world who prefer a minimal intervention or natural approach to their winemaking (USAID, 2011). The practice has recently spread to other countries, such as Slovenia, Italy, Armenia, Croatia, and even the U.S., alongside current interest in natural and orange wines (Gilby, 2013). Joel Butler, President of the Institute of Masters of Wine North America, has stated in his report that qvevri wines can be the key hook to drive curiosity about Georgia's wine and ancient history, including wine traditions (USAID, 2011). Qvevri wines are a national treasure that should be promoted in the same manner as Sake and Kabuki are in Japan.

According to Alice Feiring, a wine and travel columnist for *Time* magazine, and known as an advocate for "natural wine", qvevri has been a major engine for interest in Georgian viniculture (Cheslow, 2015). Anderson (2013) also states that qvevri is a major factor that makes Georgian wine unique and interesting for international markets, including for that of the United States.

This is how Andrew Jefford (2013), an award-winning wine writer, sums up the unique characteristic of Georgian qvevri wine:

We know about white wine, pink wine, red wine, sparkling wine and fortified wine: the great five genres of wine. Taste a few Georgian wines made from white varieties in a qvevri and you will be in no doubt: this is the sixth genre of wine.

The missing sixth? Well, only from a Eurocentric or Occidental perspective. Here

in the Caucasus, nursed in the cradle, wines of refinement have been made in this way for 8,000 years. (para. 1).

Overall, qvevri wine can be a great draw to wine enthusiasts in the United States where qvevri culture can be utilized as a marketing tool (Anderson 2013). It could also appeal to a much wider clientele if it could be demonstrated that qvevri wine is healthier than wine that is conventionally produced in the west. Additionally, qvevri wines need to be promoted to high end, adventurous restaurants and stores, where the consumer's knowledge is assumed to be higher regarding wine, and they are often more willing to try something completely new (USAID, 2011, p. 9).

2) *Wines made from unique Georgian grape varieties*: There are only 2,000 grape varieties in the whole world and Georgia is home to an astonishing number of indigenous grapes, with more than 500 (Shain, 2015). More than half of these grape varieties are currently still in production and others are in nurseries (Anderson, 2013). In addition, Georgia has imported western varieties and methods of production since the 1820s (Kharbedia, 2010). Currently, the country's most notable estates don't seem particularly tempted by international varieties like Chardonnay, for example. (Salcito, 2014). According to Guinand (2010), up-and-coming grapes in Georgia include two red varieties, Alexandrouli and Ojaleshi, which are typically used to produce semi-sweet red wines. Three white grapes also show promise: Tsolikouri, which is very light and fresh, as well as Kisi and Chinuri.

In addition to being planted in Bulgaria, Moldova, China and Ukraine, Georgian varieties are finding their way into U.S. vineyards. The most common grapes in wines imported to the United States are Rkatsiteli and Mtsvane among whites, and the red

Saperavi (McIntyre, 2015). Dr. Konstantin Frank of German origin is largely responsible for championing the planting of Georgian grapes in the Finger Lakes region of New York in the early 1950s, where at the time native American grapes thrived (Kvatchrelishvili, 2014). Dr. Frank was particularly satisfied by the results he obtained for both Saperavi and Rkatsiteli and thought they would have great potential in the United States. His winery – Dr. Konstantin Frank Vinifera Wine Cellar – remains the main nursery for Georgian varieties in the United States, and Dr. Frank’s chosen grapes are still the two most important Georgian varieties in the country (Guinand, 2010). His grandson, Frederick Frank, is now in charge of the winery, which has 9 acres planted of Rkatsiteli and 1.4 acres of Saperavi.

According to McIntyre (2015), a good Saperavi, like most Georgian wines, has what wines from anywhere else don’t have: “a taste that spans centuries of history, and a whiff of ancient origin” (para. 10). Alberto (2012) believes that this grape variety can be a good postcard for Georgian wines. There is a good opportunity for some white wines as well. Kisi, Rkatsiteli, and Mtsvane, for example, have what it takes for a white wine to be successful: They are fruity, fresh and well balanced.

Most new world wine countries have found that they initially became famous for just one or two varieties – as has Austria since its recent resurgence as a wine exporter (Anderson, 2013). Therefore, with the hundreds of grape varieties available, it is important that Georgia focuses on a few varieties to make them the signature wine of Georgia (USAID, 2011). This concept also gives the retailer a focused slot to fill on the retail shelves, rather than a range of products too large for them to comprehend or market. Thus, the focus should be on 2-4 white varieties and 1-2 red ones, in order to

focus people's attention and create an 'identity' for iconic Georgian wines. Georgia needs to create in people's minds an immediate association of “Georgia and Saperavi”, for example, in the same manner that Grüner Veltliner has for Austria, and Malbec for Argentina (pp. 51-52).

However, Carter (2011) expresses different point of view stating that it is wiser to market the country rather than its signature varietal. Indeed, there are many experiences that prove that marketing grape varieties can be very successful. For example, Argentina’s export success with Malbec has been phenomenal. In 2010, it exported more than 4 million cases of Malbec to the United States, 20 times the amount it sent in 2002 and nearly double its 2008 volume. Malbec now represents 60 percent of Argentina’s exports to the U.S. Even Robert Mondavi is one of the best examples of a winemaker who concentrated solely on varietal wine production to promote his wines (Zraly, 2006). As early as the 1940s, California winery owners also started to market their best wines using varietal labels that led to higher-quality winemaking and the worldwide success of California wines. Additionally, Silverman et al. (1999) is a proponent of targeting varietal segments.

According to Jefford (2013), there are two compelling reasons to seek out Georgian wine. The first is its repertoire of indigenous grape varieties, and the second is, qvevri wine. This paper also focuses on the third division or style – Georgian natural wine.

3) *Georgian Natural wines*: "Natural" is a small but growing category in wine, signaling biodynamic, organic or vegan winemaking practices (Teague, 2013). Interestingly, natural wines have existed since time immemorial (Legeron, 2011). When

wine was first made 8,000 years ago, it was not made using packets of yeasts, vitamins, enzymes, Mega Purple, reverse osmosis, cryoextraction or powdered tannins – some of the many additives and processes used in winemaking worldwide. As Lewis (2012) notes, natural wine claims to speak of terroir that is reflective of place and season. They are about minimal intervention and environmentally sustainable winemaking.

Isabelle Legeron, Master of Wine, describes it as a celebration of life in its purest form. They are farmed at least organically and are made without any additives whatsoever in the cellar. Natural wine is zero chemicals in the vineyards and zero chemicals in the cellar. (Legeron, 2014, p. 95)

Natural growers make a panoply of wines, but all share a similar outlook: nurturing biodiversity while embracing and observing nature, rather than fighting to control it (Legeron, 2011). At the same time, the lack of additives is claimed by natural wine proponents to be a boon for wine drinkers, as anecdotal evidence suggests that natural wines induce fewer side effects than their conventional counterparts. Overall, natural wine producers promote a philosophy, a way of life, which undoubtedly contributes to the profound appeal of their wines to people across the globe (Legeron, 2014).

As interest in natural and artisan winemaking increases, a great deal of attention has recently been falling on Georgia's ancient tradition of winemaking. Not only do many Georgian wineries produce wine in the traditional way, some growers and winemakers are adopting a holistic approach with biodynamic wine (no fertilizer, pesticides, fungicides). These "natural wines" are growing in popularity internationally, with Georgia at the forefront of the movement (Shain, 2015). According to Garland

(2015), the Republic of Georgia is at the forefront of the most natural wine revolution yet. The country's winemaking practices have changed little over the past 3,000 years. Many consumers over the world are realizing what a precious and unique gift these wines are and cannot get enough of them – they are a vinous window into the oldest known wine producing country in history (para. 1). According to Alice Feiring (2014), Georgian wines have “become improbable darlings in the natural wine world” (para. 4).

Consumption of natural wine continues to rise in the United States as well. Jenny Lefcourt, co-founder of natural wine distributor Jenny & François in New York, says her company's sales have doubled since 2009 (Leiber, 2015). A January survey of 1,000 wine drinkers by market-research firm Nielsen showed 65 percent of 21- to 34-year-old respondents were interested in natural wine. The demand for natural wines gives Georgia an opportunity to partly fill the role of a natural wine supplier in various U.S. markets.

Public Relations Guidelines

Based on research presented in the literature review, a hypothetical public relations plan will now be offered aimed at expanding the visibility of Georgian wines in targeted U.S. markets and at stimulating demand for Georgian wines. The section will begin with an evaluation of the situation and of the circumstances Georgian wine is facing in the U.S. market. A SWOT analysis will be provided first to examine the potential of Georgian wine and to carve a sustainable niche for it. Various publics will also be identified as they represent the key audiences who are likely to contribute to the success of Georgian wine and to establish its presence in the U.S. market.

The second part of public relations guidelines will establish goals and objectives that will help build a brand image for Georgian wine in U.S. Next, tactics will be offered

for communicating and engaging with various publics and for achieving the established goals and objectives. In addition to this, the outline of the guidelines will be presented as a quick reference point. Finally, limitations to the public relations guidelines will be discussed.

Situation Analysis

The situation analysis is an overview of the circumstances Georgian wine is facing in the U.S. market. As the U. S. is increasing its wine imports, the size and growth of the market ensures that wineries from all parts of the world are working hard to capture market share (Wagner et al., 2007).

A key challenge to the success of the Georgian wine is to capitalize upon the unique assets. In the early 2000's, attracting the interest of the leading wine experts in the U.S. was not achieved as Georgia remained an unknown factor in the global wine industry and the time and attention of the experts was focused on traditional wine-producing regions around the world. Over the last few years, however, the level of awareness of Georgian wines has been raised through the earlier efforts that were accomplished with Exclusive Brands International (EBI), Georgian Wine House, Daqopa, Click Distribution, and Whole Foods Markets coupled with the pioneering work of individuals like Chris Terrell and Mamuka Tsereteli (USAID, 2011).

The International Qvevri Symposium has also installed a small but vocal group of Georgian wine devotees in the U.S. Together with the small existing distribution network, they constitute a rich resource for getting the word out on the uniqueness of Georgia as a wine producer.

Additionally, the export price of Georgian wine per liter has been increasing from the middle of the 1990's from below 1 dollar to 3.2 dollars in 2011. Today, the export price of Georgian wine is above the world's average, underpinning its status as a luxury good (Mosiashvili, 2014). Therefore, it is clear that Georgia will not compete with the low-cost producers of wine around the world and that should not be a concern or interest for the Georgian producers or those that support them. However, this does not prevent Georgia from having a significant and profitable market in the U.S. (USAID, 2011).

Indeed, outside of the diaspora population from Georgia, traditional Russian or Eastern European grocery stores or specialty shops, Georgian wines remain relatively unknown in the U.S. (USAID, 2011). Past efforts to expand markets in the U.S. have been successful at building a beachhead to expand sales. However, further work in promoting Georgia as an origin for wine is required. The industry has gained significant ground in popularity since the end of Russian imports in 2006 and many wine experts are beginning to follow Georgian wine activities, with many focused on the qvevri wines, which are unique to Georgia or have Georgian roots.

In addition to this, there is a myth that the current selection of Georgian wines in the U.S. fills the existing market demand. The fact is that Georgian wines on the U.S. market do fill the current demand for products to be sold through the ethnic Russian and Eastern European stores. However, many of these wines are not representative of the quality that Georgia has to offer to the broader targeted market. With success of the Georgian wines outside of the traditional stores, the wines currently on the market will be able to maintain their current markets while other wines, more acceptable to the western consumer, will increase as consumer awareness increases (USAID, 2011, p. 5). While the

wines sold in the traditional stores can continue their sales, new and different wines are expected to enter the broader market.

Overall, there is a significant opportunity for the Georgian wine industry in the U.S. Georgia can emphasize numerous points of difference to attract attention to its wines. Those differences include qvevri wines, wines made from unique Georgian grape varieties, and Georgian natural wines.

To develop a clear position in the marketplace, it is important to synthesize and to integrate information about Georgian wine industry, competitors and customers. Therefore, SWOT analysis will be presented to craft a strategic public relations plan that will position Georgian wine in the U.S. market successfully. According to Wagner et al. (2007), SWOT analysis is widely used in the wine industry because it is helpful for creating a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

The first step of the SWOT analysis will be the identification of strengths and weaknesses of Georgian wine and its internal characteristics. The second part of the analysis will be the study of opportunities and threats, which will include characteristics of the external environment. Finally, the third part of the SWOT analysis will be to see how these four categories can be matched together to identify the direction of the public relations plan.

Step 1: Analyzing Strengths and Weaknesses. When it comes to strengths, Georgia has many natural advantages that could be further exploited in marketing its wine in the U.S. It has numerous points of difference. Some of the strengths include:

A history of 8000 vintages, longer than any other country: Increased awareness and respect of Georgia's winemaking traditions delivers a compelling story that helps attract the attention of a greater audience and as a result, builds exports.

More than 500 unique Vitis vinifera winegrape varieties. Georgia has quality wine grape varieties that whilst generally not well known in much of the consuming world, makes fine wines at key consumer price points that are viable to producers. Thus, there is a plethora of unique grape varieties, all of which have characteristics often found nowhere else.

A unique and ancient wine production method (qvevri): The advantage of still having the ancient qvevri production style is a genuine point of difference. Georgia produces some high quality qvevri wines with unique selling points. According to the classical theory, the idea of competitive strategy is to find a different niche market. Traditional qvevri wines are the products, which really occupy this different niche. Qvevri wine is a great draw to wine enthusiasts in the U.S. and the qvevri culture should be utilized as a marketing tool to reach a greater audience. Overall, qvevri wines are the key hook to drive curiosity about Georgia's wine and ancient history, including wine traditions.

Natural wine production: There is low chemical applications in Georgian wine production in general. As the demand for natural wines is increasing, Georgian wines, including those made in qvevri, are becoming more and more appealing to the natural wine industry. As Legeron (2014) explains, natural wines give you less of a headache than conventional ones as they contain far less artificial "stuff" and there is a scientific basis to this claim (p.84). As a result, Georgian natural wines are attracting the attention

of those consumers who care what is in their glass and want to explore unique flavors of these wines.

Growing international markets: Average volume of wine export in 1990s was 5 million liters per year; by 2013, this figure has risen to 35.9 million liters (Kharaisvili, Chavleishvili, & Natsvaladze, 2014). As a result, the awareness of Georgian wine is increasing, creating a larger market worldwide as well as in the U.S.

Increasing demand for high-quality wine: There are enough wineries now in Georgia that produce clean, fresh, vivid wines from the local varieties. Some of these wines are even produced for a reasonable price (to retail on U.S. shelves between \$10-17) and communicate to the widest consumer population.

In addition to strengths, the following weaknesses of Georgian wine have been identified:

Low awareness of Georgian wine in international markets: To the international customer, Georgian wines are usually unknown, produced with unknown varieties, and traditionally priced as a premium wine. They are mostly unknown in the U.S. outside of the ethnic Russian markets. Most consumers are unfamiliar with Georgian wines and are hit daily with the marketing of wines from other countries, thus making it difficult to introduce a “new” wine source.

Moreover, most Americans remain unfamiliar with Georgia as a country, not to mention as an origin for quality wine. Georgia was until recently one of the members of the USSR, and not much of its history, geography, and culture were taught in American schools. It’s easy to assume that Americans, in general, have very little knowledge about

the country of Georgia. Therefore, the work on creating a brand for Georgia needs to go beyond wine to the country as a whole.

Additionally, there is one large hurdle to Georgian wine promotion: America already has a Georgia. For this reason, creating a larger market in the U.S. for Georgian wines hinges on providing a greater awareness of Georgia as a country and its wine culture.

Production of varieties unknown outside of Georgia and the Russian market:

Georgia does not historically produce globally well-known grapes such as Chardonnay, Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon, or other widely consumed varieties. Even though there is a handful of Georgian grape varieties that can serve as good postcards for Georgian wines in the U.S., these varieties are, for the most part, unfamiliar to Americans. This fact means that Georgia not only needs to introduce itself as a source for wine but also introduce the consumers to new varieties, many of which are unpronounceable to those unfamiliar with the Georgian language. It has been argued that German wines, for example, do not sell well in the U.S. because the language on their labels is incomprehensible to the average consumer. Some wine experts have therefore suggested that Georgian wine producers simplify their front labels and create nicknames for grapes like Rkatsiteli and Mtsvane, while providing the more specific and required information on the back label. Another challenge is to repeatedly identify Georgia with specific grape varieties such as Kisi, Rkatsiteli, Mtsvane, and Saperavi. Otherwise consumers will be deflected and confused easily.

Flavor profiles unknown outside of the traditional markets: Hand-crafted, high-quality examples of qvevri white wines are sufficiently different from any other type of

wine. One may even say that they are the antithesis of what most American wine consumers look for today. As a result, these wines have an appeal on only some segments of the market. However, that does not mean there is no audience for them. The very traditional, flavorful, but sometimes unpalatable qvevri wines have a strong pull from the natural wine movement subscribers. Still, they offer the flavors that make them a less approachable type of wine to the American palate.

Lack of experience with and exposure in the international markets: As the Georgian wine producers enter the wider global market, they face many challenges they were not exposed to when working nearly exclusively with Russian buyers. Having had a focus on the Russian market for decades it may be difficult to broaden the focus of the industry and to develop the experience and exposure necessary to compete in the U.S. market.

Step 2: Analyzing Opportunities and Threats. There are significant opportunities for the Georgian wine in the U.S. as a result of various trends that give Georgian wine the capability of achieving success in the U.S. market. Some of these opportunities for Georgian wine include cultural trends.

One trend that can have a positive effect on Georgian wine consumption is the natural wine movement and the focus on healthy diet. Georgia offers a wide selection of natural wines including those made in qvevri, which are made with the least possible use of chemicals, additives and overly technological procedures. They are also produced in a more environmentally sustainable fashion making them more appealing to those consumers who are interested in the environmental impacts of the products.

The Annual International Qvevri Wine Symposium also helps Georgian wine gain popularity with some famous participants leading it, such as American wine writer Alice Feiring and Isabel Legeron, Master of Wine from France. These people are heavily involved in the natural wine movement as well, and one can certainly assume that this fact alone will help bring attention to the Georgian wine industry.

Additionally, the expansion of qvevri technology in general can help raise awareness of Georgian wine. Some producers in Italy and Germany, for example, have been experimenting with qvevri recently. Rather than being concerned about this development, it should be encouraged: imitation is the best of compliments and it can generate additional and free publicity for Georgian wine.

Tourism development is another factor that creates opportunity to draw attention to Georgian wine. In a region with such an extensive wine history and culture, wine will be an important component of tourism. The expansion of knowledge of Georgian wine as a result of increased tourism is likely to be a catalyst to the expansion of Georgian wine exports. Without awareness of what Georgia has to offer, its wines will go undersold. The United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) 1st Global Conference on Wine Tourism that is to be held in Georgia in September 2016, will be an effective way of promoting tourism in Georgia as well as the country's unique wine-making traditions.

Finally, there are some factors that pose threats to the competitive well-being of Georgian wine in the U.S. market. One of them is the fact that the Georgian wine industry does not have as strong a domestic market as do most other wine producing regions. As such, the wine industry is trying to serve two very different masters: those of traditional markets from Soviet times (mostly ex-Soviet republics) and western markets.

The consumers from the former markets are willing to purchase and drink styles of wine that have minimal commercial potential in western markets, including those in the U.S. On the other hand, those producers who target western markets are usually mid-sized, quality-minded producers making flavorful wines that may have significant commercial potential in the United States. Therefore, it is important that the positive branding of these quality wines in the U.S. is not negated by negative branding obtained by producers making wine for the ex-Soviet markets. In other words, Georgia has to use the strategy to promote high quality wines in the U.S., rather than all small, medium sized and big wineries together under the umbrella name of 'Georgia.'

Another challenge that Georgian wine faces in the U.S. market is to find the right quality/price ratio. Pricing needs to be very competitive for opportunities to exist considering the fact that the American market is already crowded with wines from many wine regions of the world. At the same time, imports represent only 23- 25 percent of the market. The remaining 75-77 percent of wine choices is produced by U.S. wineries with avid fans that are loyal to their home-grown wines (USAID, 2011). So, Georgian producers have an uphill battle to fight to gain a share of the U.S. market. Moreover, some quality-minded producers have very high price expectations, which may also diminish their commercial viability.

Finally, as it has been noted by Luiz Alberto, a wine expert, being competitive is very different than being cheap. Georgia cannot compete at the lower levels of the market, as the cost structure in some New World countries (such as Chile, Argentina, and Australia) is much lower than the one existent in Georgia. The time spent visiting wineries and tasting wines came to prove that Georgia is able

to produce – European wines (or conventional wines) of high quality. This constitutes the stepping-stone for any future marketing and sales efforts. Entering a price war at the low levels is not an option for the country. (USAID, 2011, p. 72)

Another factor that may hinder the development of Georgian wine market in the U.S. is an unfulfilled demand for Georgian wine due to the small size of the companies. There are a number of big players and small players in the Georgian market. In total, 129 wine producing units are registered at Georgian National Wine Agency (Khitashvili, Hanf, & Schweickert, n.d., p. 11). The primary basis for successfully selling Georgian wine in the U.S. is that a critical mass of the most viable wines will be readily available (USAID, 2006). As the popularity of Georgian wine grows, it is important that Georgian wine producers are able to fulfill the demand of the U.S. market.

A final possible threat is the political tensions between Russia and Georgia, which may create the risks of political instability in the country.

As the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of, as well as threats to Georgian wine industry have been identified, the next step is to define the audiences in order to decide how Georgian wine needs to compete in the U.S. market.

Identifying the Publics

Georgian wine producers that welcome the chance to expand their export sales: Building the brand of Georgian wine will serve as an umbrella under which individual Georgian wine producers can promote their wines. This will require cooperation among wine producers that will result in developing the interest in, and demand for, Georgian

wine in the U.S. markets. Moreover, Georgian wine brand owners may also compete for their share of a growing business interest in Georgian wine.

First of all, only those producers whose wines are marketable in the U.S. should be promoted to establish a Georgian wine presence in the U.S. market. With the hundreds of grape varieties available, it is important that these wines are signature wines made from signature Georgian varieties to avoid confusion as a result of a range of products too large for consumers to comprehend. The idea is to repeatedly identify Georgia with specific wines so that consumers will not be easily confused.

Additionally, wine companies should be carefully selected because it is critically important to foster positive results in the early stages of building the Georgian wine brand. If a consumer has a good experience with Georgian wine, they often tell their friends and then the demand snowballs as more people are referred to the wine. This can happen in a negative direction as well if a consumer does not enjoy a wine and the chance of him or her buying more Georgian wines in the future may diminish.

Thus the companies that produce quality qvevri and natural wines as well as those who offer wines made from signature Georgian varietals such as Saperavi, Rkatsiteli, Mtsvane, and Kisi should be targeted. According to Clark Smith's report, Georgian wines made from two indigenous varietals and produced in a modern style should be promoted (Deloitte, 2011, p. 26). This would include dry semi-aromatic Rkatsiteli, which can supplant Austrian Gruner Veltinger and Spanish Albarino's successes, and the highly-colored Saperavi with its distinctive blackberry richness, which should be able to challenge Italian Barbera and Nero d'Avola. Taking these factors into consideration, some of the marketable Georgian wine producers would include Tbilvino, Chateau

Mukhrani, Vinoterra, Schuchmann, Naotari, Iago's Wine, Jakeli Wines, Pheasant's Tears Winery and others.

The Media: Creating and pitching stories to the key trade and lifestyle media – stories that will put a Georgian wine brand on the map, create demand for wines, and generate attention for Georgian wine – should be an important part of the public relations plan. Interestingly, some of the U.S. media representatives have already spread the word about Georgian wine as possessing some unique points of difference.

Moreover, 2015 was a year of unprecedented media coverage for Georgian wines on the U.S. market in general. Throughout 2015 major media outlets including CNN, Washington Post, Forbes, Bloomberg, New York Times, Financial Times, NPR, Mashable, National Geographic, and many others, named Georgia as a major wine destination, and gave Georgian wines the highest of appreciation. Small Georgian Qvevri wine producers like Iago's Wines, Orgo, Our Wines, Jakeli, Shalauri Wines, alongside larger producers such as Teliani Valley, Telavi Wine Cellar, and Schuchmann Wines received major media coverage (Tsereteli, 2015). Wine & Spirit Magazine named Georgian producer Schuchmann Wines among the top 100 value brands imported to the U.S. The same publication ranked multiple Georgian brands at 90 points and above.

Such media exposure has helped Georgian wine brands communicate with various consumers and increase awareness. Maintaining the attention of general interest media as well as that of wine trade media should remain as an important part of the public relations strategy. Not only top wine writers but also journalists of widely-read newspapers should be encouraged to cover stories about Georgian wine to legitimize Georgia as a source of high-quality grapes and wines. Generating numerous feature articles in the wine media

will further the knowledge and appreciation of Georgian wines and as a result, increase export demand in the U.S.

Importers, Distributors, and Retailers: Importers, distributors and retailers are a critical audience and part of Georgian wine public relations plan should aim at reaching out to these networks and build a closer working relationship with them.

According to Krigbaum, Expert Promotion Specialist, in the U.S. a wine has to go through a three-tiered system of importer, distributor, and then retailer. Despite the three tiers, the driving factor is the end consumer who purchases the wine for consumption. If the distributor and importer are confident that they can make a profit on the wine, they will purchase it. Therefore, when targeting importers who will buy Georgian wines, it is important to target importers who distribute to the target market with the demographics and purchasing habits that have been identified as the target buyers. Given the nature of Georgian wines and the existing great market potential, I would recommend that the industry work with distributors who work with retailers. (2006)

Taking this into consideration, distributors who work with such retailers would include national chains such as Whole Foods Market, Trader Joe's, Wild Oats, Kroger, and Albertsons, as well as statewide distributors and specialty wine shops from various states.

Restaurateurs: Restaurant trade is another target audience that requires thought and attention in the process of Georgian wine promotion. The year of 2015 has been successful for Georgian wine not only in the area of media coverage, but also in mainstream American restaurants in Washington DC, Baltimore, and Annapolis with

trendy restaurants like Compass Rose, Red Hen, Maketto, Iron Gate, Wits & Wisdom, Dino's Grotto, and others (Tsereteli, 2015). More importantly, Compass Rose restaurant pioneered in creating a separate menu of Georgian wines that feature six qvevri white wines from four different producers that were made from Georgian native varietals: Kisi, Rkatsiteli, and Mtsvane.

Overall, the target markets are high end, adventurous restaurants that combine the advantages of leadership in new wine style trends, cosmopolitan point of view, and an available concentration of Georgian wine enthusiasts. Top targeted cities for this effort would include New York, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, Atlanta, Huston, Seattle, and Dallas.

Consumers: The end user is always a critical part of any public relations program, and the wine industry is no different. While the price and style of Georgian wines may not be appropriate for all consumers, they have appeal to consumers who are adventurous, including the buyer in the millennial demographic. Georgian wines offer a hook mostly for those consumers who are curious about natural wines, and interested in traditional and historical styles, or who want to explore wines made from non-international grape varieties.

Overall, those consumers whose knowledge is assumed to be higher regarding wine and who are often more willing to try something completely new, are the target audience for Georgian wines, especially for qvevri wines. This very fact suggests that the demand for Georgian wine is going to be geographically-spotty mostly concentrated in the U.S. states such as California, Washington, New York, Florida, Texas, and Illinois. Thus Georgian wines will have a definite niche among the consumers with a better-than-

average understanding of wine and with an income that places them in a position to buy wine in the price range from 20 to 40 dollars.

Sommeliers and Wine Professionals: The sommeliers and wine professionals are the initial consumers who have already shown a solid interest in exploring Georgian wine. They are the target market given all of the factors involved with Georgian wine. These individuals have the profile of people who dedicate considerable time and effort to knowing the wine industry. As a result, they should be utilized as a great asset for Georgian wine.

Wine Organizations: Professional, Educational, Appreciation. Wine professional, educational and appreciation organizations serve as gatekeepers to many other audiences, including both consumers and many members of the trade (Wagner et al., 2007). They have a large sphere of influence in the wine industry and are able to utilize that sphere of influence to promote Georgian wine in the U.S. Some organizations that can be considered as a target audience are: Georgian Wine Association, National Wine Agency of Georgia, Georgian Wine House, Georgian Wine Club, Wine and Spirits Trust (WSET), American Sommelier Association, American Wine School, American Wine Society, The Society of Wine Educators, and others.

Goals and Objectives

In order to establish a Georgian wine presence in the U.S. market, it is important to set realistic goals that will forge the long-term reputation of Georgian wine and increase its demand. One of the important goals of public relations strategies should be to provide a greater awareness of Georgia as a country and its wine culture. Attention first needs to be drawn to what the nation has to offer in general. In other words, it is of

utmost importance to promote Georgia as an origin for wine in order to further the knowledge and appreciation of Georgian wines in the U.S. This will also insure to build strong associations with Georgian wine history and expertise in the minds of various publics.

The second goal of the public relations plan needs to incorporate relationship management by focusing on key publics. This goal will aim to attract the interest of various audiences to communicate the history and points of difference of Georgian wine and develop strong relationships with them.

The third goal relates to creating and maintaining the perception of a differentiated product in the minds of target audiences. This goal has a specific purpose to draw attention to unique aspects of Georgian wine: Qvevri wines, wines made from unique Georgian grape varieties, and Georgian natural wines.

In order to obtain these goals, numerous objectives need to be established. First, it is important to target a certain number of influential wine writers in major U.S. markets and encourage them to cover the stories about Georgia, its history, and its wine culture. This objective also incorporates generating coverage in widely-read sections of various magazines and newspapers other than wine media: business, politics and news. Moving the topic into these sections will help reach a wide readership. This objective will be of use in building the Georgian wine brand in the U.S. market, under which individual Georgian wine companies will be able to build their own brands as well. Extensive media coverage will not only raise the awareness of Georgian wine, but also create opportunities for wine tourism in Georgia. According to Longwoods International reports, readers are

75 percent more likely to get travel information from editorials than from advertising (Vine et al., 2002, p. 302).

In order to develop relationships with key audiences, one of the objectives should be to participate in specific international festivals, expositions, conferences, and other events. This will help create a stimulus for professional and enthusiastic support and message-spreading. Another objective would be to offer a selection of Georgian wines that are marketable in the U.S. to various purchasers in selected states. This should be organized by Georgian wine industry bodies as well as by Georgian wine companies and wineries. Additionally, it is important to create a group of Georgian wine ambassadors that will educate both wine trade buyers and consumers in key U.S. markets. They will provide presentations and tastings at various wine events in order to attract and develop relationships with importers, distributors, retailers, wine professionals, and wine organizations.

A specific number of seminars and tastings should be organized and held about Georgian wines in key American markets by Georgian wine industry bodies and Georgian wine ambassadors. For example, Georgian Wine Association can serve as the central point for organizing efforts and providing funding. These events will educate key audiences about unique aspects of Georgian wine, which will help create and enhance the Georgian wine brand.

Specific public relations efforts should be addressed towards natural wine enthusiasts, including non-professionals. There is a vocal group of wine specialists and connoisseurs in the U.S. who advocate natural wines made by minimal human intervention. Georgian qvevri wines not only have an authentic story, but they also meet

this definition that will be useful to exploit in capturing the attention and imagination of natural wine buyers and consumers.

Finally, one of the most important objectives is to make a range of Georgian wines accessible for wine trade and consumers in key U.S. markets. These wines need to be in the U.S. and available for sale, promotions, branding, and tastings.

Tactics

1. Tactics for providing a greater awareness of Georgia as a country and its wine culture: In order to raise awareness of Georgian wine, the following public relations tactics will first address four primary categories of media: 1. general interest media; 2. wine trade media; 3. electronic media; and 4. the Internet.

Tactics for media exposure will include sending a range of Georgian wines to various publications for rating. The samples of conventional Georgian wines, qvevri wines and wines made from signature Georgian grape varieties should also be sent to influential wine writers. These samples should include the pitch letter, background information from each winery, and contacts for additional information, all in a single shipment.

Some of the tactics of the public relations plan needs to cover social media platforms. The Georgian Wine Association, for example, needs to devote some resources to social media. Georgian wine ambassadors should also consider blogging and using social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. regularly to keep Georgian wines in the front of the mind for both trade and consumer. Selected Georgian wine companies also need to develop their websites to provide information about their wineries, product offerings, event calendars, photographs, maps, and other visuals to

drive sales and help consumers get immediate information. Some wineries can even consider adding a virtual tour. Another valuable addition to the websites can include fact sheets, background information, contact lists, and press releases for reporters.

Additionally, Georgian wine companies should use an opportunity to cooperate with public relations firms in the U.S. such as Balzac Communications and Marketing, Diaz Communications, and others. These wine and food marketing communications agencies will help individual Georgian wineries set their strategies and tactics of marketing, public relations, advertising, and graphic design to achieve success in the U.S. market.

2. Tactics for developing relationships with key publics: Communication efforts need to be oriented to specialized trade people. It is important to try to get to know trade people and target media representatives in person through tastings and wine fairs. Participation in the events such as Society of Wine Educators Annual Conference, Master of Wine Educational Seminar, Texas Sommelier (TEXOM) Conference, Wine Spectator's New York Wine Experience, Wine Enthusiast's Toast of the Town, The International Qvevri Wine Symposium, etc. represents the way to gain entry into the marketplace. In addition to this, Georgian wine industry bodies and Georgian tourism organizations need to arrange an annual trip for opinion-setting sommeliers and wine educators to visit Georgia and see for themselves. This will create a rich resource for getting the word out on the uniqueness of Georgia as a wine producer and for spreading the Georgian wine culture when they return home.

Teaming up with wine associations, wineries, tourism groups, and other community businesses will also help Georgian wine build a strong network of assistance.

To develop partnerships, Georgian wine ambassadors and wine companies need to visit target restaurants, hotels, gourmet shops, and other businesses regularly. One of the tactics will aim to offer wines to larger-volume purchasers such as airlines, cruise lines, retail chains, restaurant chains, wine clubs, etc.

3. Tactics for creating and maintaining the perception of a differentiated product in the minds of key U.S. audiences: One of the tactics for promoting unique characteristics of Georgian wine is to hold a number of trade-focused wine tasting seminars exploring qvevri wines and different expressions of Georgian grape varieties. This will help attract attention of various distributors and retailers. Qvevri wines and Georgian natural wines represent a unique value proposition. These wines also need to be promoted to vocal groups of natural wine specialists and connoisseurs as well as to high-end, adventurous restaurants and stores, where the consumer's knowledge is assumed to be higher regarding wine.

Georgian natural wines also offer a hook for consumers who are interested in traditional and historical wine styles and willing to try something new. Therefore, it is important to hold tastings and special events for this target audience. Possible venues for such tastings include restaurants and specialty wine shops in targeted cities such as New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, Atlanta, Huston, Seattle, and Dallas.

Finally, it is essential to have a collection of high quality Georgian wines available to interested buyers in the U.S. Some of the wine companies that are marketable in key U.S. markets are: Tbilvino, Chateau Mukhrani, Vinoterra, Schuchmann, Naotari, Iago's Wine, Jakeli Wines, Pheasant's Tears Winery, and others. At the same time, the

focus should be on wines made from Kisi, Rkatsiteli, Mtsvane, and Saperavi varietals in order to create an identity for signature Georgian wines.

A Public Relations Outline

I. Situation Analysis

1. Need to get the word out of the uniqueness of Georgia as a wine producer
2. Unrepresentative selection of Georgian wines in the U.S.

II. SWOT Analysis

1. Strengths:

- a. A history of 8000 vintages, longer than any other country
- b. Unique grape varieties
- c. A unique and ancient qvevri wine production method
- d. Natural wine production
- e. Growing international markets for Georgian wine

2. Weaknesses:

- a. Low awareness of Georgian wine
- b. Production of varieties unknown outside of Georgia and the Russian market
- c. Flavor profiles unknown outside of the traditional markets
- d. Lack of experience with and exposure in the international markets

3. Opportunities:

- a. Natural wine movement
- b. The expansion of qvevri technology in different parts of the world
- c. Tourism development

4. Threats:

- a. Weak domestic market compared to other wine producing countries
- b. Focus on the ex-Soviet markets by some producers that do not deliver quality
- c. High competition in the U.S. market
- d. Potential unfulfilled demand for Georgian wine
- e. The political tensions between Russia and Georgia

III. Publics:

1. Georgian wine producers
2. The media
3. Importers, distributors, and retailers
4. Restaurateurs
5. Wine consumers
6. Sommeliers and Wine Professionals
7. Wine Organizations: Professional, Educational, Appreciation

IV. Goals:

1. Provide a greater awareness of Georgia as a country and its wine culture
2. Attract and develop strong relationships with key publics
3. Create and maintain the perception of a differentiated product in the minds of target audiences

V. Objectives:

1. Generate certain coverage in wine media as well as in widely-read sections of newspapers: business, politics and news

2. Participate in specific international festivals, expositions, conferences, and other events
3. Offer a selection of Georgian wines to various purchasers in selected states
4. Create a group of Georgian wine ambassadors and educators
5. Organize and hold a specific number of seminars and tastings about Georgian wines in key American markets
6. Attract the attention of a vocal group of natural wine specialists and connoisseurs
7. Make available a range of Georgian wines in key U.S. markets for trade and consumer

VI. Tactics:

1. Tactics for providing a greater awareness of Georgia as a country and its wine culture:
 - a. Send wines to various publications for rating
 - b. Send a package of a selected Georgian wines, the pitch letter, background information from each winery, and contacts for additional information to target wine writers
 - c. Devote resources to social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.
 - d. Develop wine company websites
 - e. Cooperate with public relations firms in the U.S. such as with Balzac Communications and Marketing, Diaz Communications, and other organizations

2. Tactics for developing relationships with key publics

- a. Participate in the events such as Society of Wine Educators Annual Conference, Master of Wine Educational Seminar, TEXOM Conference, Wine Spectator's New York Wine Experience, Wine Enthusiast's Toast of the Town, The International Qvevri Wine Symposium, and others to get to know some of the media representatives and trade people in person
- b. Organize an annual trip of opinion-setting sommeliers and wine educators to the region
- c. Organize visits to restaurants, hotels, gourmet shops, and other businesses regularly by Georgian wine ambassadors and wine industry representatives
- d. Offer wines to larger-volume purchasers such as airlines, cruise lines, retail chains, restaurant chains, wine clubs, etc.

3. Tactics for creating and maintaining the perception of a differentiated product in the minds of key U.S. audiences

- a. Hold a number of trade-focused wine tasting seminars exploring different expressions of Georgian grape varieties
- b. Promote qvevri wines to vocal groups of natural wine connoisseurs as well as to high-end, adventurous restaurants and stores through tastings and seminars
- c. Hold tastings and special events for consumers who are interested in traditional and historical wine styles

- d. Promote wines made from Kisi, Rkatsiteli, Mtsvane, and Saperavi varietals to various key publics
- e. Make a selection of Georgian wine available including Tbilvino, Chateau Mukhrani, Vinoterra, Schuchmann, Naotari, Iago's Wine, Jakeli Wines, Pheasant's Tears Winery and others

Limitations

There are a number of limitations related to the public relations guidelines provided in this project. First, the public relations plan is only hypothetical in nature and the potential success of it cannot be measured or tested. Secondly, the goals, objectives, and tactics that are provided may not be applicable to all Georgian wine companies that seek to establish exports to the U.S. For example, the implementation of some of the tactics requires significant budgets and some wineries may not have enough resources to achieve success without government funding. Finally, this project provides a subjective view of what can ultimately be achieved or how Georgian wine should be promoted.

Conclusion

This project sought to identify public relations guidelines for Georgian wine to achieve success in the U.S. market. One of the main goals of this paper was to promote unique value propositions of Georgian wine under the umbrella name of 'Georgia.' Much has been accomplished in the development of Georgian wine exports to the U.S. Georgian wines have gained reputation lately at different exhibitions, fairs, or special wine events. Yet, much remains undefined and untested. It may be difficult to broaden the focus of the industry and to develop the experience and exposure necessary to compete in the U.S. As Georgian wine producers start entering the American market,

they are likely to face many problems they were not exposed to when working exclusively with Russian buyers. Therefore, continued support from Georgian government and wine industry representatives is critical. Finally, the success of the U.S. market penetration efforts will depend upon establishing, monitoring, and maintaining standards for Georgian wines that are exported.

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