

# How Tweet It Is

*Social media cultivates wine storytelling*

BY LEAH JORGENSEN

Hardy Wallace best summed up the value of social media when he wrote, "Whether in wine or any other industry, the value is in connection and relationships, and fortunately, that is the fun part, too."

You might not recognize the name Hardy Wallace, but you may recall last summer's blazing nationwide search for a social media specialist to generate buzz about a certain Sonoma County winery's products. The opportunity was blasted all over the media: \$10,000 to Tweet about wine? It's a "Really Goode Job."

After receiving hundreds of video responses, California's Murphy-Goode Winery selected Hardy Wallace as their wine country lifestyle correspondent, whose job for six months was to report on the cool lifestyle of Sonoma County Wine Country and to blog and Tweet what he was learning about winemaking.

In February, Wallace bade farewell to his 'Really Goode Job' on the winery's blog and addressed the "online storm surrounding the value of social media in wine (and some beating up of social media in general)." He called it "just another clash of traditional vs. social media (or vice versa)," and he explained "as a social media guy, I love all media, but I just don't like it when you call my kids ugly."

The online storm Wallace is referring to is whether or not we are spending so much time Tweeting, blogging, vlogging (video blogging), Facebooking, YouTubing (and so on) that we don't stop and make real-life connections. Wallace aptly responded, "Social media, at its nature, creates connections with real, living people, but it is, perhaps, at its greatest when it brings complete strangers together face to face via these tools."

It is clear that Twitter and other social

media forums are very much alive and redefining how we use media and communications to engage and inform. One of the most compelling elements of social media is the means for storytelling.

At a recent press panel held in conjunction with the IPNC (International Pinot Noir Celebration), Snooth.com's founder, Gregory Dal Piaz, stated: "Scores are being replaced by stories."

It appears Dal Piaz is on to something. Social media has been leading the way in how stories about wine are being cultivated and shared today. The hands that are typing come from all walks — so in some cases, buyer beware. However, in an effort to spread the word about wine and launch marketing and communications programs to reach the masses, wine businesses are quickly learning there's no better way to go than by word of mouth; and Twitter is leading the online discussion.

For one, the consumer is able to wax poetic while also using Twitter to form or join tasting groups and communities. The conversation becomes viral.

In her Forbes.com article "The New Way To Learn About Wine: Twitter," wine media expert and author Alyssa Rapp explains how the social media tool is perfect for discovering and learning about different styles and varieties. She points out that Twitter allows users to express their thoughts at any given moment, on any subject, in 140 characters or less; and that, as limited as that might sound, it's actually the perfect medium to discuss new or interesting wines with other like-minded people. Because of the limitations of the medium, everyone's comments are short and succinct; all voices are at the same volume.

Rapp also explains how users can form their own wine tasting groups and how to use what's called a hash tag (e.g., #Oregon Wine). Hash tags allow you to use a tool such as Hashtags.org to aggregate the Tweets of the theme.

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Another means for getting involved in the wine community on Twitter is by following your favorite wine industry personalities. You can easily search Twitter for the names of wine writers, winemakers and wineries you want to follow. Not sure who to follow?

Blogger Dale J. Cruse of Drinks Are on Me posted the “12 Must-Follow Wine People on Twitter” on [www.twitip.com](http://www.twitip.com) — a site dedicated to Twitter tips. He devised what he called a mixed 12-pack of the most essential winos to follow on Twitter and pointed out, “It’s important to note that all of these are real people — not automated bots.”

Cruse’s list included: Gary Vaynerchuk (@garyvee), the undisputed heavyweight champion of wine and new media; Bill Daley (@billdaley) of the *Chicago Tribune*; Tim Elliott (@winecast) and crew, who create a consistently entertaining and enlightening wine audio podcast; and Kevin Zraly (@kevinzraly), who wrote the book “Windows on the World Complete Wine Course.”

Wineries are also using Twitter to spread the word and build community around their products. Recently, WillaKenzie Estate hosted a “Twitter Wine ReTweet” for media members to taste their wines paired with food prepared by Chef Andy Arndt of Portland’s Aquariva. The guest writers Tweeted in real-time as they tasted the pairings, then later blogged about the event.

Sokol-Blosser, R. Stuart & Co., Abacela and others are using Twitter to invite con-

sumers out to their wineries, often offering wine specials for mentioning the Tweets.

In California, wineries united to set up a California Cabernet Twitter event, which invited the world of wine to participate. Soon after, the same kind of tasting formed for Washington Merlot. July 15, wine bloggers Tamara Belgard (Sip with Me), Joe Herring (Suburban Wino) and Ed Thralls (Wine Tonight) recently launched the largest varietal tasting event on Twitter dedicated to Pinot Noir, Pinot Noir Twitter Tryst 2010.

According to Belgard, the three partners organized tastings all over the East and West Coast, and soon wineries from all over the globe (Argentina and New Zealand) were getting involved. The two-hour tasting invited participants to vote in a Pinot Noir Twitter Smackdown for their favorite region by adding another two-character hashtag after #PinotNoir.

As for the results, Belgard said they had 450 individuals Tweeting in the two-hour period, at about 17 Tweets per second. People were Tweeting two weeks up to the event, and two weeks following the event, giving a month’s worth of buzz just for Pinot Noir.

The winner of the 2010 #PinotNoir Twitter Smackdown? The Willamette Valley (#WV). You can see the blow-by-blow results on [www.winetonite.com](http://www.winetonite.com). ☺

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