

OFFSET

Wine Commerce
Technology and
Brand Design

Guide to the 7 Do's and Don'ts for Creating a Thriving Online Wine Shop

Launching an online wine shop in addition to your brick and mortar space is a great way to sell more wine — if you do it right. Once you have the essentials in motion, learn these next-level **do's** and **don'ts** to keep your online wine shop booming.

Just like running a retail wine business, there are things to know about successfully adding an online shop to the mix. But beyond the basics of compliance, shipping rates, and competitive pricing, what can you do to make it thrive? Plenty.

As you'll soon find out, there are a range of challenges when it comes to launching your wine shop's digital space. But follow these seven do's and don'ts and you'll be in a much better position to grow your customer base, sell more wine, and enjoy doing it.

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DO offer a referral program.

Word of mouth as a means to gain new online business should not be overlooked. Gaining new customers from your existing ones can be a boon for expanding your sales. If you decide to add a referral program, be sure to give away a significant dollar amount, both to your existing customer for their referral and to the referral as an incentive to get that first order. The offering has to be enough to woo existing customers into sharing the contact information of their wine drinking friends. Don't worry about giving too much away. Oftentimes, customers new and old will end up spending more money anyway. Technically speaking, this is a pretty easy thing to implement on an ecommerce platform. Referral codes can be sent automatically once a customer inputs their friends' contact information. Another option is to give your customers a code they can copy and paste into their own email and it'll launch that incentive program for them.

2

DON'T forget about your differentiator.

Brick and mortar stores have the benefit of a captive audience. You don't have to worry about your competition walking in and luring your customers over to the store down the street with better prices and a wider selection. But online? That kind of customer poaching happens all the time. In fact, your potential customers are probably seeking out other options in a different tab as they browse your digital shelf. Your selection, prices, shipping rates, and user experience all come into play to keep your customers captivated on your site—and coming back for more.

That said, what are you going to do to stand out and stay at the top of your customers' go-to list? Start strategizing now about your differentiator. How will your online wine shop be different when it comes to not only your brick and mortar location or the grocery store down the street, but the countless other online wine shops competing with you on the internet?

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DO weigh the options for wine club models.

Wine clubs are a guaranteed way to build relationships with your customers, but they're not without their challenges. Be that as it may, you could consider a few different models for your online wine shop and see which one comes out on top. For example, you could offer a “Staff Picks” club where your team selects the wines. There are set parameters for the number of bottles as well as dollar amounts that members adhere to. You could ship out your selections every month/every other month/every quarter. The downside of this might be if a customer wants to sub every Chardonnay pick for a Reisling, and all of a sudden you're customizing orders for several members.

You could consider creating a membership that gives customers a blanket discount, allowing them to buy at-will, anytime, for a yearly fee. Sound familiar? It's a ubiquitous model first perfected by Amazon Prime, and it's popular for a reason. Customers like choice, selection, discounts, and perks—on demand. This club could not only offer discounts, but also first access to limited releases, and no limits on purchases. If you want to try different club model options at the same time, you can. If you're explicit in your communications to your customers, you could market the “Trust Our Staff Picks” club as a way for wine drinkers to learn more about different wines. The subscription-esque “Customer Selection Club” could be marketed to those who know they only want, say, Châteauneuf-du-Pape and red wines from Rioja. Everyone wins.

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DO engage your customers with authentic content.

What does your current engagement strategy entail? Do you only reach out to customers when you have a promotion or release to sell? Hint: You shouldn't! Give your customers many reasons to visit your website again and again by creating content that hooks online shoppers on your brand. Compelling content includes storytelling, sharing images of your retail space, creating videos of your cellar activities, or even interviewing crew members about their most memorable wine experiences for a blog post. The goal here is to get customers to enjoy visiting your website, because when they do it's more likely they'll come back for more content (and ultimately, to buy more wine).

5

DON'T overdo your communications.

On the heels of the advice to create compelling content, be mindful of how often you're sharing it. End up in your customers' inboxes too often and they could tune you out. If your unsubscribe rates start to tick up, throttle back your communications. Better yet, offer preferences for types of content so people can choose the messaging they're most interested in.

6

DO plan to offer excellent customer service.

Excellent online customer service is just as important as excellent in-store customer service—perhaps even more so because if you offer poor customer service, your competition is only a URL away. That said, make sure you are staffed appropriately to handle your level of traffic for before, during, and after the sale. If this means hiring a staff member whose only focus is online customer service, so be it. It will be worth it.

On your website, make your contact information and hours of operation easy to find. Respond to inquiries the same day whenever possible. And if you have a hard time keeping up with your volume of calls, consider installing a chat widget on your website. Customers often have simple questions and answering them quickly through a chat service can be the difference between completing a purchase on your site and coming back when the bottle's empty—or clicking over to another site with more responsive help.

7

DON'T wait to collect contact information.

You can't engage with your online customers if you don't have their contact information. So let these customers know that you want to connect with them by offering a sign-up feature that's easy to find as well as easy to fill out. Better yet, start building your list before your site launches by collecting your in-store customer's information next time they're at the register.

At a minimum, collect first and last names and email addresses. If you're interested in email targeting your audience, you can ask for a zip code or phone number, too. If your list isn't growing as much as you'd like, consider offering an incentive like a 10% discount on their first online order.

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