



How to conquer the wine glut

Invivo's brave and daring marketing approach is helping them succeed in a tough market segment. By Catherine Beard.

Being better than thousands of other great winemakers in the world and getting over the wine glut hump is pretty difficult. Many haven't made it.

But Invivo has and is winning awards and doubling production. Talking with Invivo's Tim Lightbourne, winner of the Air New Zealand Cargo, ExportNZ Award for Emerging Exporters, I found that it is their daring marketing approach that has given them the edge. Their marketing approach is to make their wine brand fashionable and contemporary, and they're getting good results.

Invivo is exporting to ten countries. Their key overseas markets are the UK and Australia but Asia is also picking up. They intend to be a global wine producer.

Invivo has not only won the Emerging Exporter Award, it has gained gold medals for its sauvignon blanc, Air New Zealand is serving their wine and celebrity comedy show host Graeme Norton has a glass of their sauvignon blanc on his show.

Invivo is in fashion – it is a wine to be seen with.

What is interesting about the company's growth is that from the outset they had the marketing of the product as part of the product itself. Director Tim Lightbourne (previously with L'Oreal in London) brought the marketing and media savvy brains

to the partnership with winemaker Rob Cameron. Starting out in 2007, the first step of the business plan was to invest in the brand. Subsequently, NZ fashion house Zambezi designed their label – a label that would be associated with high-end fashion.

The pair wanted their wine to become supporters of the fashion and art industry's and began sponsorship and placement at fashion shows and art exhibitions. They are currently involved with the world's largest art exhibition in Venice. The image of the wine is that it is for sexy, arty and fashionable people.

Tim and Rob say that although brand 'NZ' is a good start it is really their global marketing approach that's selling the wine. They also have one unique product, a low calorie sauvignon blanc 'Bella'. It has slightly less alcohol and less calories than other similar wines. It's the only New Zealand wine to have a nutritional label on the bottle and sold out in three months last year. The UK Harvey Nicol store bought most of it.

Invivo's Bella is the sponsor the New Zealand Fitness Industry Awards gala event. Again, who would associate wine with keeping trim and being fit?

What these two have done is taken a product that is already highly rated, Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, and made it sexy and modern.

Grupo Codoniu, Spain's largest and oldest wine producer, is now promoting Invivo wine in the UK – the first time it has taken on a foreign brand.

Tim and Rob are also doing the hard yards. They are on the ground promoting the brand and have ambassadors in the main markets. Angela Mount (whose taste buds are insured for millions of pounds) is their UK face – attracted by their marketing approach not just the wine.

Tim and Rob investigate the market and produce for that market. The lesson we can learn from Invivo is that we may need to be daring and turn heads when a product is in a mature competitive market segment. The brave entrepreneurial approach is paying big dividends for Invivo. Taking a stab and being cheeky by just sending a case of wine to Graeme Norton landed Invivo on a TV show watched by millions; producing a diet wine is novel and modern and suits the fashion industry; sponsoring art exhibitions is contemporary.

They have not taken the traditional approach of leveraging off a great wine expecting the product's reputation sell itself. They are selling a package, an identity and a theme.

New Zealand exporters need to push past the fact they have great products, connect with the culture they are selling to and be clever and daring about the marketing approach.

Catherine Beard is executive director of Export NZ.