

Public Relations Plan: International Pinot Noir Celebration

Situation Analysis

Client Overview

The International Pinot Noir Celebration (IPNC) is an annual three-day wine event held on the last weekend of July at Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon, the heart of Oregon wine country. Now heading into the 34th consecutive year, IPNC is considered one of the premier wine events in the United States. The event showcases Pinot Noir (and other wines) from wineries and vineyards all over the world, as well as meals prepared by the finest chefs in the Pacific Northwest. IPNC guests also visit feature vineyards and wineries around the Willamette Valley where they have in-depth tastings with the winemakers. IPNC also offers a variety of informative seminars throughout the weekend so the guests can learn more about wine and the wine industry. Although a decent amount of those in attendance at IPNC are in the industry, most of the patrons of IPNC are simply wine enthusiasts who want to experience one of the top wine events in America. Many of these patrons are returners who have been to IPNC several times before, creating a sense of community each year at the event with people seeing old friends that they may only see once a year. Overall, IPNC strives to create a relaxing, festive, educational and unparalleled wine experience.

External Environment

As mentioned above, IPNC is held each year on the campus of Linfield College in McMinnville, Oregon, the center of the Oregon wine industry. IPNC's offices are also based in McMinnville, allowing for easy connection with Willamette Valley winemakers and chefs. The event has been held at Linfield College since its inception in 1985. Linfield's facilities have proved essential for lectures, seminars and housing industry members who have been assigned by their winery to work at IPNC. The well-maintained exterior of the campus grounds provides excellent spaces for outdoor meals and wine tastings. Because much of the weekend festivities is outdoors, the weather can become a factor in the quality of the weekend. In several past years there has been heavy rain and extreme heat in others. These years are few and far between, though; most years the weather is that of a typical hot but temperate Oregon summer. Another uncontrollable factor that can affect IPNC is the economy. Wine is a luxury purchase and IPNC is not a cheap event (3-day tickets cost \$1,295, without including lodging, travel, etc.), so in lean economic times IPNC can have some trouble selling tickets. IPNC has a large impact on the local community around it, particularly in the tourism industry, as the guests stay in local hotels and vacation rentals while frequenting McMinnville restaurants and bars.

SWOT Analysis

IPNC has many strengths. One is that at this point, it has become an institution and staple of the industry and the region. The name recognition and prestige of IPNC lay a strong base for the success of the event each year. Because of this prestige, both wineries and restaurants strive to be featured at IPNC in order to spread their brands to food and wine lovers from all over the world as well as offering total support to IPNC because of the respect it holds in the region as an institution. Another strength is the customer base. Many IPNC attendees have been to the event before and find that they enjoy it so much, they want to return in following years. Finally, when

it comes to volunteers to help staff the event, many local industry members who have been around the event for a long time come in droves to help support the event. IPNC is also able to partner with their site host, Linfield College, to hire students as waiters, security and clean-up.

The greatest weakness of IPNC is probably the staffing. With only three full-time employees year-round, there is a chance that things can slip through the cracks of the organization or that the staff may be overworked in the weeks before the event. In one recent instance, the director of the event fell seriously ill the day before IPNC started and could not work. This created much larger responsibilities for the rest of the full-time staff, which meant more responsibilities were passed on to the part-time staff, interns and volunteers. Although the weekend did end up going smoothly, the stress of the situation created unexpected duress on the event organizers that year. Another weakness is IPNC's marketing. Until recently, there was little social media presence. Overall, there is very little opportunity for potential new customers who are unfamiliar with the Oregon wine industry to discover IPNC due to no outside advertising.

With that, the biggest opportunity with IPNC is to strengthen the event's marketing, particularly when marketing to a younger demographic. One of the best ways to do this would be by partnering with local wineries and other local tourism-based industries to help promote the event and spread general information about IPNC. Many Willamette Valley wineries, and other businesses like restaurants and hotels, help spread information about other local businesses, wineries, events and attractions to the tourists who come into their businesses, and the same could be done with IPNC. As IPNC already has strong connections with many of the businesses, it can be expected that they will be willing to partner with IPNC. This strategy could also be used outside of the Willamette Valley by promoting IPNC in tasting rooms and wine shops in strong

wine markets such as New York, Georgia, California and Texas. This would inform and attract wine consumers who are not from the region and may not have heard of IPNC before. Another marketing opportunity would be to offer group rates or other discount opportunities. Currently, there are only two purchasing options. One is the full weekend pass tickets, which are sold for \$1295, or a la carte tickets for those who just want to attend Saturday night's Salmon Bake or Sunday afternoon's Passport to Pinot. Those tickets cost \$225 and \$150, respectively. The only discount option is the "early-bird" rate, which takes just \$100 off the full weekend tickets.

Offering more discount opportunities could help attract customers who find the standard pricing too expensive. As far as attracting a younger demographic goes, this opportunity exists partly because so many of the attendees at IPNC are returning customers. Although this has been a sustainable model for attracting customers in the past, IPNC's recent struggle to sell out all tickets early in the year suggests that it is time to start appealing to and building the next base of loyal IPNC customers. This demographic has expendable income for the first time in their lives, earning about \$44,408 a year on average (Josephson, A.). This is also a demographic that prefers to spend on experience rather than hard goods (LaPonsie, M.), so they are willing to travel to attend festivals, events or just to tour areas. In their younger days this may have meant travelling to music festivals or quick trips to Canada or Mexico, but as they age into adulthood they will want to find more "adult" experiences, with wine tasting in Oregon wine country and attending events like IPNC fitting into this category.

The greatest threat to IPNC is usually the economy. Wine and tourism are two luxury items, so in a recession people might not be willing to pay the \$1295 price for tickets, plus airfare, lodging and other travel expenses. Other than that, there are no other major industry events in the region during the same time, creating little competition.

Opportunity Statement

There is a major opportunity to cultivate the next generation of IPNC attendees by starting new public relations campaign through social media marketing, partnering with local businesses and creating cheaper ticket options.

Target Audience

The target audience of this public relations campaign would be young, medium-to-high income, upwardly mobile consumers of Pinot Noir. The specific target age range of this group is 26-39. This demographic is interested in wine, as millennials consume the second most amount of wine of any age demographic (Thach, E.). As stated above, this demographic likes to spend their money on experiences, particularly travel. Targeting this audience would help to grow the customer base, cultivate future IPNC-returners, and help promote the Willamette Valley as a cool place for wine-lovers to visit in general, which is beneficial to IPNC and many of the wineries and restaurants involved with IPNC. Fresh marketing strategies aimed at this demographic can help to grow the current and future brand recognition and customer base of the International Pinot Noir Celebration.

The Plan

Goal

To raise awareness of IPNC outside of the Oregon wine industry and among younger wine consumers in order to grow the long-term customer base and promote outside tourism into the Willamette Valley wine industry.

Objectives, Strategies and Tactics

The first objective of this public relations campaign would be to increase the sale of tickets by 10% among the target age demographic (26-39) by 2021. This objective focuses on

cultivating the next generation of IPNC attendees. The objective's end date is 2021 because it will take some time for the strategies used to fully affect and be noticed by members of the key demographic. The first strategy to complete this objective is to reach young wine consumers through online marketing.

The obvious first step in this is bolstering IPNC's social media presence. IPNC is already active on social media, so our first tactic for this strategy would be using sponsored Instagram posts and Tweets aimed at our key demographic based on the accounts they follow on social media (i.e., targeting those who follow social media accounts of individual wineries and wine blogs and wine writers). The second tactic would be to create a referral program that people can use online when purchasing their tickets. This could be done by creating individualized referral codes that customers can then send to their friends via email, and then the person who referred their friend would receive a discount for the following year if their friend purchased tickets as well. This would help spread the word about IPNC among younger wine consumers as well as help bring back those customers who have a discount in the following year.

The second strategy for this objective would be to reach out to new and young wine industry members. Although they are probably aware of IPNC, it is rare for a younger and less experienced employee to be able to attend the event, which can provide valuable learning experiences and connection opportunities. The Oregon wine industry is also very tight-knit, so if these younger members of the industry begin attending IPNC regularly early on, it could become an integral, annual part of the wine industry experience for the next generation, leading to an overall younger customer base as they recommend IPNC to their friends, both in and outside of the industry.

The first tactic for this strategy would be partnering with wine studies and viticulture departments at colleges around the Northwest. With the industry booming, many schools in the Northwest, from community colleges to research universities, have launched or strengthened these wine studies departments. IPNC could work with these colleges to provide tickets for a select few students and a faculty member from these schools. It would provide a valuable learning experience for these wine students, while making the next wave of the wine industry workforce familiar with IPNC. The idea would be that the students would continue to attend IPNC once they are actually working in the industry, either through their employers or on their own accord. By introducing IPNC to the next generation of the Oregon wine industry while they are very early in their careers, it helps to continue the strength of the legacy and prestige that IPNC represents as an institution.

The second tactic would be creating a “30 under 30” award to recognize young members of the Oregon wine industry. Many industries have some sort of recognition similar to this, whether it’s published by a trade publication or through an institution. Leading up to IPNC, industry members could nominate young employees who they believe are worthy of the award. The IPNC Board of Directors would then decide who makes the list, and those on it would be invited to IPNC and a brief recognition ceremony could be worked into some point of the weekend’s itinerary, likely at one of the dinners. This tactic would help young members of the industry feel welcomed and that their hard work is being recognized, draw them to the event, and then they become an IPNC returners early on in their career instead of later on once they have advanced to further points in their careers.

The second objective of this public relations campaign is selling out all tickets for the event by April 15th by 2021. In the past, tickets for IPNC have sold out as early as March, but in

recent years they've been still selling tickets as late as two weeks before the event. A reason for this is the limited outreach to those who are not already aware of the event or are outside of the Oregon wine industry. So, the first strategy for accomplishing this objective is to market IPNC to wine consumers who may not have heard of the event before.

The first tactic for this implementing this strategy is to partner with Willamette Valley wineries and tasting rooms, as well as other local businesses that benefit from IPNC like restaurants, hotels and vacation rentals to help spread the word about IPNC year-round. Many of these types of companies, particularly wineries, place brochures advertising other wineries, restaurants, hotels and tourist attractions. As customers come in to these winery tasting rooms, they come across the brochures and find out about other stuff to do in the area. IPNC could do exactly the same thing simply by creating brochures and placing them in these local businesses. The tourists, some who may be completely new to Oregon wine industry, would find out about IPNC from the brochures, possibly ask someone working at the business about the event, and assuming that person is in the industry, they can then tell them more about IPNC. The same tactic could also be used by placing brochures for IPNC in markets outside of the Willamette Valley. New York, Georgia, Texas and other places have shown to be strong wine markets. IPNC could also partner with tasting rooms and wine shops in these other regions to advertise IPNC to people outside of the industry and the area, who likely have absolutely no knowledge about IPNC and little about the Oregon wine industry. Many of these businesses would have no problem giving out these brochures because of the reputation of IPNC, particularly within the Willamette Valley. Both of these tactics will help to introduce and inform wine consumers about IPNC who are not already familiar with the event, growing the potential customer base.

The second strategy that will achieve this objective would be to create better discount and pricing options. As addressed in the SWOT Analysis, IPNC is not a cheap excursion. Tickets are \$1295 a piece, with the only discount option being the “early-bird” rate, which allows \$100 off if tickets are purchased before January 1st. Although the cost is justified, a sticker price that high can certainly dissuade more frugal potential customers.

The first tactic is offering several discount options. As mentioned above, one piece of this is offering a referral discount. Another potential discount option would be creating a group rate. This would allow for groups of four or more to receive a discounted price for buying the tickets in a larger quantity. This would also mean that people would be coming with friends and possibly returners introducing friends of theirs to IPNC by bringing them to IPNC at a slightly reduced rate, which then in turn creates more returning IPNC customers if they fall in love with it as much as their friends already have. Another potential discount option would be increasing the discount of the early-bird rate. Only \$100 off on such a high price does not really create that much of a difference for most customers, so that could be more like \$200 or \$295 dollars off, creating a more legitimate discount that allows for the customer to actually feel like they are getting a deal. The second tactic for this strategy is to advertise these potential discounts on social media. People can only take advantage of the discounts if they know about them, so advertising these less expensive options is crucial for the discounts to work. Using social media to do this would also help accomplish our first objective of cultivating a younger IPNC customer base. The younger demographic, and potential first-timers, should be more intrigued in finding out more about the event if they think they can get tickets below market value.

Evaluation

Evaluating the effectiveness of this public relations campaign will be simple. IPNC will simply have to track the sales of the tickets throughout the year. Part of this will be measuring the pace of sales throughout the year, and then also comparing the sales from the next couple of years as the objectives end in 2021. Another will be tracking the age of the customers, which can be done simply by inquiring their age during the registration process. Other forms of evaluation can come through the engagement on social media with IPNC from users who are exposed to the sponsored posts mentioned in the public relations plan as well as adding a referral box on the purchasing page of tickets. This simply asks, "How did you hear about IPNC?", ticket buyers can then select one of several boxed options or respond in their own form in a text box if they choose to. That being said, this would be an optional, so it would only be used as complementary evidence in evaluating the plan. The main evidence for evaluation would be tracking pace of sales and the age of IPNC attendees. These will let IPNC know how quickly tickets are selling out after and if the average age of the IPNC attendees is actually declining, as those are the objectives this plan sets out to accomplish.

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