WINERY SPOTLIGHT

Practical Lessons from 15 Peaks Vineyard's First Virginia Wine Trade Tasting

Every trade tasting is an opportunity to build relationships, gain market insight, and introduce your wines to buyers who can become long-term partners. But making the most of that opportunity requires more than simply showing up and pouring wine.

To better understand what makes a successful trade tasting, we spoke with Megan Seibel, founder of 15 Peaks Vineyard in Roanoke, Virginia. Before launching 15 Peaks, Megan spent years growing grapes for many of Virginia's most respected wineries. In 2025, she introduced her own label, making the transition from grower to winery owner.

The Virginia Wine Roanoke Trade Tasting was one of her first opportunities to present the 15 Peaks portfolio to the trade. Since then, her wines have earned new retail placements, generated repeat orders, and opened the door to tastings, wine dinners, and new industry relationships.

While every winery's goals are different, Megan's experience offers practical lessons that wineries of any size can use to get more out of future trade tastings.

BEFORE THE EVENT

Define Success Before You Arrive

Success doesn't just mean writing orders on the spot. Before the event, ask yourself:

- What accounts would I like to meet?
- Which market am I trying to grow?
- Am I looking for placements, introductions, or market feedback?
- What would make this event feel successful?

For a newer winery, one or two quality placements can be a major win. For an established winery, success may look different. Setting realistic expectations helps you focus your energy where it matters most.

FROM MEGAN'S EXPERIENCE

"I had heard trade tastings could be hit or miss. What I realized afterward was that the relationships and introductions were just as valuable as the sales."

Research the Market

Review the attendee list before the event and identify buyers, retailers, restaurants, and media you'd like to meet. If there are buyers you would like to meet, consider sending them the invitation to the tasting.

Also consider why your winery belongs in that particular market. What makes your wines relevant to buyers in that region?

For 15 Peaks, highlighting their Roanoke roots became a natural conversation starter with buyers looking to support local producers.

Prepare More Than Just Your Wines

Bring materials that make it easy for buyers to continue the conversation after the event. Recommended materials include:

- Wholesale price list
- Tech sheets
- Sell sheets
- Business cards
- VWDC ordering information (if applicable)

Have these materials ready, but don't feel like you need to lead with them.

FROM MEGAN'S EXPERIENCE

"Almost everyone tasted the wines first. Once they were excited about the wines, then they asked for the price list."

DURING THE EVENT

Build Relationships Before You Build Orders

Trade tastings aren't just about making a sale, they're about starting a relationship. Instead of focusing on a sales pitch, ask buyers questions:

- What styles are performing well?
- What are guests asking for?
- What gaps are you looking to fill?
- What kinds of Virginia wines have been successful for you?

These conversations often create opportunities long after the tasting ends.

Listen Carefully

One of the most valuable takeaways from the event wasn't an order, it was feedback.

Buyers, sommeliers, and retailers described 15 Peaks' wines using language Megan hadn't considered before. Those conversations helped shape how she now talks about her wines in future sales conversations and will eventually influence her tasting room experience.

Think of every tasting as free market research. Pay attention to:

- Flavor descriptors
- Food pairing suggestions
- Questions buyers repeatedly ask
- What excites people most about your wines

Those insights can strengthen your marketing and sales efforts long after the event.

Be Intentional With Your Time

You don't need to chase every attendee. Sometimes waiting for the right moment creates a much stronger conversation.

FROM MEGAN'S EXPERIENCE

Rather than interrupting a group of buyers during the event, Megan waited until they had finished their conversations before introducing herself. That interaction led to a retail placement, additional tastings, and future collaborations.

Quality conversations almost always outperform rushed introductions.

AFTER THE EVENT

Follow Up Promptly

The event doesn't end when you pack up your table. Within a few days, reach out to the people you met.

Thank them for stopping by, answer any outstanding questions, and offer to schedule a follow-up tasting if appropriate.

Even if an account isn't ready to buy immediately, staying connected keeps your winery top of mind.

Organize Your Contacts

Keep notes on:

- Who you met
- Wines they enjoyed
- Questions they asked
- Next steps
- Follow-up timeline

Creating a simple tracking system makes it much easier to continue conversations after the event.

Build on the Momentum

One conversation can lead to many opportunities. Following the Roanoke Trade Tasting, 15 Peaks' follow-up efforts resulted in:

- New retail placements
- Repeat wholesale orders
- In-store tasting events
- Planned wine dinners
- Referrals to additional buyers
- Increased visibility within their local market

Not every opportunity happened immediately, but each conversation helped build momentum.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Define success before the event.
- ✓ Research attendees and understand your target market.
- ✓ Bring the sales materials buyers need, but let the wine lead the conversation.
- ✓ Listen carefully. Buyer feedback is valuable market research.
- ✓ Focus on building relationships, not just writing orders.
- ✓ Follow up promptly and stay organized.
- ✓ Remember that trade tastings are the beginning of the relationship, not the end.

Every winery arrives at a trade tasting with different goals, different production levels, and different markets to grow. Regardless of your size, approaching the event with a clear strategy, genuine curiosity, and thoughtful follow-up can turn a single afternoon into long-term business opportunities.