

Virginia Wine Coalition – Industry Speaker Series

Expanding Virginia Wine in the Trade: How to Close the Sale

Featuring: Claudia Chamberlain

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Key Takeaways & Best Tips

1. Leverage Virginia’s Unique Story

- Emphasize the **local appeal**: terroir, history, and food-friendly styles make Virginia wines distinctive.
 - Build a **cohesive brand story** that buyers can remember and share. Stories sell wine far better than technical details.
 - Ensure your entire sales team can communicate this story in 30 seconds or less.
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2. Strengthen Relationships with Buyers and Distributors

- **Engage directly** with key buyers to build trust and loyalty.
 - Schedule **regular distributor visits** to your winery — vineyard tours, blending seminars, or even casual lunches keep your brand top of mind.
 - Organize **trade visits** or “industry days” to foster stronger connections.
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3. Master the Art of Follow-Up

- Always follow up within **48 hours** of meetings, tastings, or visits.
 - A simple **thank-you email or handwritten note** keeps you memorable and builds goodwill.
 - Even if the immediate sale doesn’t happen, thoughtful follow-up keeps the relationship moving forward.
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4. Target and Prioritize

- Focus on your **top 10 target accounts** instead of trying to reach everyone.

- Make trade visits intentional — plan pitches and identify which accounts will generate the highest long-term value.
 - Niche accounts, like fine wine retailers or restaurants that value unique offerings, often deliver better results than broad, unfocused outreach.
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5. Overcome Common Challenges

- **Distributor Neglect:** Build direct relationships with key buyers and position yourself as a partner rather than just a supplier.
 - **Pricing Discrepancies:** Have open, honest conversations to ensure consistent pricing across accounts.
 - **Budget and Time Limits:** Use low-cost, high-impact tactics like personal visits, small trade events, and storytelling.
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6. Adapt to Market Trends

- Pay attention to shifting **consumer preferences**, including interest in aromatic whites, red blends, and alternative grape varieties.
 - Independent retail channels — such as boutique wine shops, clubs, and local newsletters — can be powerful for building visibility.
 - Explore **new opportunities** such as Virginia country clubs or hospitality groups to expand your market reach.
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7. Build Memorable Experiences

- Hospitality drives loyalty. Invite trade to the winery for **tours, tastings, or casual visits**.
- If you can't offer complimentary tastings, consider **discounts or small gestures** that still make guests feel valued.
- Use **visual branding and storytelling** consistently to create memorable, shareable experiences.