

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS COMPANIES TO WATCH

In this series, we've looked at who the important distributors, importers, wine critics and retailers are around the world. Now it's the turn of the public relations professionals, whose work can connect consumers with a brand. Graham Holter starts with the UK.

ANNE BURCHETT, MANAGING DIRECTOR, SOPEXA UK

Burchett heads a French-owned agency with a broad portfolio of French interprofessional accounts. These include the Loire and Rhône valleys, Provence, Beaujolais, Chablis, and South West France. Sopexa also holds the account for the generic French Wines campaign.

Burchett, who took the helm in 2010 following a long spell with Castel UK, is keen to broaden the agency's horizons beyond France if the right opportunities arise.

www.sopexa-uk.com

ALISON DILLON, DIRECTOR, DILLON MORRALL

Dillon and business partner Victoria Morrall set up their agency in 2003, and both come from wine trade backgrounds. The agency counts Wines from Spain, New Zealand Wines and The Wine Society among its clients - it also handles campaign work for Riedel and a number of wine brands. Dillon holds the WSET Diploma in wine and has also completed the Chartered Institute of Marketing's Diploma exams.

www.dillonmorrall.com

NICKY FORREST, DIRECTOR, PHIPPS PR

Forrest is known in the UK as the face of Wines of Germany: the agency has held the generic account for several years and has achieved some positive PR at a time when German wine sales are struggling. Forrest's team have focused much of their effort on premium Riesling, a style which finds favour in the specialist on- and off-trade. Other wine accounts include Champagne Lanson, Rioja, Tio Pepe and Cono Sur.

www.thisisphipp.com

SUE GLASGOW, DIRECTOR, SPEAR COMMUNICATIONS

Glasgow says her 'special relationship' with

France and Spain stems from six years working with Christopher Cannan of Europvin in Bordeaux. She was instrumental in setting up promotional tours for Vega Sicilia, La Rioja Alta and Lustau in the USA. Founding Spear Communications in 1997, Glasgow has orchestrated campaigns for the Port Wine Institute, the Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux, and Rioja. Current clients include Wines from Spain, the Union des Grands Crus de Bordeaux, The Fladgate Partnership and Dourthe.

www.spearcommunications.co.uk

SUE HARRIS, DIRECTOR, WESTBURY COMMUNICATIONS

Harris is one of the most recognised PR professionals in the UK wine market, having established Westbury in 1992 and worked with a number of high-profile clients. The agency has partnered Argentine and Californian wine at a generic level and also counts Burgundy Wines and Languedoc among its customers. Harris also presides over a roster including names such as Champagne Jacquart, De Bortoli Wines, Plaimont and Australia's First Families of Wine.

www.westburycom.co.uk



ROSAMUND HITCHCOCK, DIRECTOR, R&R TEAMWORK

Hitchcock runs R&R with fellow director Rupert Ponsonby, specialising in the wine accounts. The company has one of the most diverse client lists in the business, and has cultivated a reputation - in Hitchcock's own

image - for a playful quirkiness. The roster currently includes Bordeaux, Villa Maria, Louis Jadot, Champagne Taittinger, Errazuriz and Gonzalez Byass.

www.randr.co.uk

JUDY KENDRICK, DIRECTOR, JK MARKETING

Kendrick was once synonymous with the Wines of Portugal account and the organisation of the Specialist Importers Trade Tasting, an acclaimed annual event for smaller wine suppliers, and her stewardship of the Wines of Portugal campaign. Having sold SITT and resigned the Portuguese account, Kendrick - one of the few leading wine PR professionals based in the north of England - is now focused on the Wines of Brazil campaign, Do I Like It market research, and the Three Wine Men (Tim Atkin, Oz Clarke and Olly Smith). www.jkmarketing.co.uk



CHRIS MITCHELL, DIRECTOR, CUBE COMMUNICATIONS

Cube has this year taken over the reins of the generic Portugal campaign, one of the most eagerly contested UK wine accounts to go out to tender in recent years. Working with a smaller budget than its predecessors, Mitchell's team is focusing efforts on the specialist trade and consumers who already have some understanding of Portuguese wines.

Mitchell's agency has also worked with Tesco Wine Club, Casillero del Diablo and Wines of South Africa.

www.cubecom.co.uk



FRANÇOISE PERETTI, MANAGING DIRECTOR, PERETTI COMMUNICATIONS

Peretti founded Peretti Communications in 1993. The company, which also has a Paris office, runs the Champagne Information Bureau in the UK and organises the annual trade tasting. Although the agency has had other wine industry clients on its roster, including Château Marsyas in Lebanon and Domaine Bargylus in Syria, much of its focus is currently on lifestyle businesses including hotels.

www.peretti.com

EMMA ROBERTS, OWNER, EVIVA COMMUNICATIONS

Roberts started Eviva in 2003 after a career spanning PR, journalism and brand management with Bibendum Wine. She holds a degree in European business and French, as well as a marketing diploma and WSET qualifications. She is an associate judge at the International Wine Challenge. Current regional clients include Vinho Verde, Prosecco Conegliano Valdobbiadene, Chianti Classico and Friuli. Individual producers using Roberts's services include Mont Tauch and Badet Clément.

www.eviva.co.uk



KATE SWEET, CONSULTANT, LIMM PR/HILLTOP WINES

Sweet, whose background includes spells with Brown-Forman, Oddbins and Maisons Marques & Domaines, handles a diverse portfolio of wine trade clients. With Hilltop Wines, she is devising a strategy for Oregon wines in the UK, and she also handles publicity for the likes of Fells and Champagne Thiénot. She has also worked with Louis Latour.

www.hilltopwines.co.uk

EMMA WELLINGS, MANAGING DIRECTOR, EMMA WELLINGS PR

Since the company's foundation in 1999, Wellings has worked with a considerable number of wine brands, wine importers and generic bodies. The current client line-up includes Moët & Chandon, Napa Valley Vintners, PLB and Alsace Wines. The agency regularly does well in polls organised by the Circle of Wine Writers.

www.ew-pr.co.uk

WINE PR IN THE USA

Larry Walker talks to top wine public relations companies.

Not long ago, winery PR consisted of lavishing attention on a few wine writers and key trade contacts. There were trips to the winery, long lunches and wine samples. There is still some of that going on, but now it is simply a part of an integrated program involving social media focused on constant reinforcement of the wine story. The following agencies represent a 'power list' of agencies and individuals. These are not the biggest agencies, but they are wine specialists, most with experience in the international market.

ADAMS WALTER COMMUNICATIONS, NAPA

www.adamswalter.com

Lisa Adams Walter: lisa@adamswalter.com

Client sample: Bronco Wine Company, Sonoma Wine Country Weekend, Bernard Portet's Heritage Wines, Napa Valley Symphony.

Key to success: To build a brand, a wine producer needs to clarify their unique message and then make a commitment to stay on course with that story, and repeat that story everywhere.

BALZAC COMMUNICATIONS, NAPA

www.balzac.com

Paul Wagner: pwagner@balzac.com

Clients sample: Union des Grands Crus de Bordeaux, Consorzio Chianti Classico.

Key to success: You have to understand that in the US market there are many different audiences, from distributors and retailers to consumers and media. And you have to touch each of them in a memorable and positive way. And you should stop talking about the science of how the wine is made.

BENSON MARKETING, NAPA, NEW YORK, PARIS

www.bensonmarketing.com

Jeremy Benson: bensonmarketing.com

Client sample: Robert Mondavi Winery, Diageo, Round Pond Estate, the Languedoc AOC tier of wines, and Loire Valley.

Key to success: Make great wine. Use an integrated program combining PR, social media, trade promotions. Long gone are the days of a 'pure' PR campaign. Producer should take a stand. Wear your passion on your sleeve.



BIG BANG COMMUNICATIONS, SAN FRANCISCO

www.bigbangcommunications.com

Mike Lynch: mike@bigbangcommunications.com

Client sample: Chalk Hill, Kuleto, Three Rivers, Lincourt, Sebastiani, Fort Ross, Wrath.

Key to success: Wineries need to define who they are and what they do to separate themselves from the competition. Getting winery spokespersons - preferably a winemaker or owner - on the road to meet with the press is one of the most effective ways to showcase wines and communicate messaging.

BOSS DOG MARKETING, SONOMA

www.bosdogmarketing.com

Jan Mettler: jan@bosdogmarketing.com

Barbara Bowman: barbara@bosdogmarketing.com

Client sample: Trione Family Vineyards, River Road Vineyards, Wines of Argentina.

Key to success: In today's crowded, global market, positioning and differentiation are more essential than ever. All marketing/branding activities must incorporate these concepts. A strong image is the result of an authentic voice and 1,000 consistent gestures.

CALHOUN & COMPANY, SAN FRANCISCO

www.calhounwine.com

Katie Calhoun: katie@calhounwine.com

Client sample: Amapola Creek; Chateau Montelena, Matchbook Winery, Justin Vineyards, Landmark Winery, Lasseter Family Winery.

Key to success: Successful PR is multi-facet-

ed, connecting social media initiatives to wine blogger and online media outreach, leveraging partnerships and events for broadcast opportunities, looking for image and bottle shot placements along with recommendations and wine picks, digging for the hook to pitch feature stories and spokesperson interviews.



C. MILAN COMMUNICATIONS (CMC), SAN FRANCISCO

www.cmilancomm.com

Charlotte Milan: charlotte@cmilancomm.com

Client sample: Dana Estates, Melka Wines, Court Of Master Sommeliers, Domaine Carneros, Vineyard 29, Ladera Vineyards.

Key to success: Launch correctly by retaining an agency or bringing on an in house PR pro. It's incredibly difficult to come in as the second or third agency after a poor launch for a new brand. At the end of the day, what's in the glass matters. It's incredibly difficult to work with a low quality wine. It doesn't have to be the most expensive wine, but it has to offer quality for the money.

DEUSSEN GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS, NEW YORK

www.deussenglobal.com

Christine Deussen: cdeussen@deussenglobal.com

Client sample: Laurent-Perrier Champagne, Cakebread Cellars, Taylor-Fladgate Ports.

Key to success: Any program must be based on a brand's business objectives, and align with its strategies; if the brand has not yet figured out its objectives and strategies, it is our job to help them do this. The first responsibility of the producer is to make wine for their desired target: [yellow tail] bottles great wine for their target; DRC makes perfect wine for theirs. It is also important to be authentic - true to why the brand was made, for whom - and to be patient.

DIAZ COMMUNICATIONS, SONOMA

www.diaz-communications.com

Jo Diaz: jo@diaz-communications.com

Client sample: Charles Creek Vineyard,

Oregon Pinot Gris Marketing Group.

Key to success: Create an action plan. Tell the story. Keep media kits updated electronically. It is still very important to reach out in a one-on-one way with wine writers, as well as wine bloggers. Don't keep changing your focus.

DUNN ROBBINS GROUP, NEW YORK

www.dunnrobbinsgroup.com

Aileen Robbins: arobbins@dunnrobbinsgroup.com

Client sample: Madeira Institute, ViniPortugal, Wines of Argentina, Wines of South Africa, Wines of Spain, Consorzio Chianti Classico, Wine Enthusiast Companies.

Key to success: Initial briefing should outline specific goals, targets and tactics. Communicate a clear and concise message. The unique selling point should be delivered in an immediately comprehensible, dramatic manner - not only setting it apart from similar brands, but also making it truly interesting. For example: Everyone does walk-around tastings. Make them more interesting by choosing an unusual venue, an entertaining as well as knowledgeable speaker, unexpected food pairings.

FINEMAN PR, SAN FRANCISCO

www.finemanpr.com

Michael Fineman: mfineman@finemanpr.com

Client sample: Moone-Tsai wines, Evening Land wines, Parducci/Mendocino Wine Company.

Key to success: Build strong story development, name recognition with consumers, credibility with trade; sensory pleasing, quality product; strong presence in social media.

FOLSOM + ASSOCIATES, SAN FRANCISCO

www.folsomandassociates.com

Sam Folsom: sam@folsomandassociates.com

Client sample: Robert Mondavi Winery, Ravenswood, Mumm Napa, Quivira.

Key to success: A successful program should be broad-based, encompassing media relations, social media, events and creative programs. For media outreach, success comes from targeting a variety of media, including lifestyle, travel, food and business, rather than just trying to get point scores for a wine.

FULLER AND SANDER COMMUNICATIONS, NAPA

www.fullerandsander.com

Monty Sander: monty@fullerandsander.com

Tom Fuller: tom@fullerandsander.com

Client Sample: Judd's Hill, Coombsville American Viticultural Area.

Key to success: Determine what is unique about the client's story and capitalize on it. Properties that initiate trends are properties that get news. Close contact with the client is necessary to determine what differentiates that client from others - often what seems day-to-day to them is actually newsworthy.

J.A.M. PUBLIC RELATIONS, SAN FRANCISCO

www.jam-pr.com

Michelle Armour: michelle@jam-pr.com)

Client sample: Duckhorn Wine Company, Sea Smoke, Cobb Wines, Chappellet Vineyard & Winery, Beckmen Vineyards, Patz & Hall, Talbott Vineyards, Buty Winery, Bella Vineyards.

Key to success: With thousands of wineries, it is important for consumers to make a connection with a winery. A big part of achieving this is telling an authentic, compelling story. First, you start with good clients, making good wines - which there are a lot of - but then you have to understand what makes your client distinctive and relevant.

JARVIS COMMUNICATIONS, CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

www.jarviscommunications.com

Katherine Jarvis: katherine@jarviscommunications.com

Client sample: Frank Family Vineyards, Colgin Cellars, Paul Hobbs Winery, Inman Family Wines, Dalla Terra Winery Direct.

Key to success: Having a clear message and delivering that message to the right audience. Brand building takes time - start with a good quality product and have a long-term plan. Design plays an important role, too. Producers should strive to create an emotional connection with their audience, providing them with an expectation as to what they are going to deliver in the bottle. Never take shortcuts when it comes to quality. It takes years to build a reputation, and just a few sips to ruin one.

KATE JONES PUBLIC RELATIONS, SONOMA

www.katejonespr.com

katejones@pon.net

Client short list: Ducher Crossing Winery, Rued Winery, Londer Vineyards.

Key to success: Define key messages. Devise a plan to coincide with marketing goals. PR is a long-term effort. Results take time.

**KATIE SIMS COMMUNICATIONS,
SEATTLE**

www.kms-communications.com
katie@kms-communications.com

Client short list: Long Shadows, Novelty Hill, Fidelitas, L'Ecole, Quilceda Creek.

Key to success: Segment audience and develop strategies to reach them; craft a compelling story; build media relationships; monitor and participate in online conversations when you have value to add to the discussion; secure buy-in on the importance of PR from senior management.

**MACKENZIE AGENCY, SANTA ROSA,
NEW YORK CITY**

www.mackenzieagency.com

Karen MacKenzie: Mackenzie@mackenzieagency.com

Client sample: Wines from Valencia, Spain, Wines from Puglia, Sicily, Montepulciano.

Key to success: There are two principles to keep in mind. Cadence and consistency. Cadence is an ongoing presence in a market to build equity and momentum; consistency is fostered over time by delivering reliable product, consistent customer service and ongoing media relations. A brand must do everything possible to build a network of American brand ambassadors.

O'DONNELL-LANE, SONOMA

www.odonnell-lane.com

Steve Burns: steve@odonnell-lane.com

Client sample: Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, Wine Institute of California.

Key to success: Producers should do some serious internal work about who they are, what they stand for and how their product stands out in the marketplace. They should not rush out to introduce an overpriced product or one that's not fully ready for the market. They should take some time to review the competitive landscape and get to know the competition well before anything else!

**WINE SPOKEN HERE, TIM MCDONALD
& ASSOCIATES, NAPA**

www.winespokenhere.com

Tim McDonald: tim@winespokenhere.com

Client sample: Fetzer/Bonterra, DFV Wines.

Key to success: Producers should figure out what they have that is distinctive or unique about their brand and tell everyone. Producers should be authentic and get involved with new forms of media.

**PUBLIC RELATIONS
IN SCANDINAVIA**

Scandinavia is dominated by monopolies and strict laws, which can make PR difficult. Nevertheless, Erica Landin has found some names to know.

A handful of wine writers dominate the media in Sweden and Norway, and press tastings of new releases or vintages are arranged directly by the monopolies on regular occasions. Norway still bans any form of consumer advertising, whereas the ban has been reluctantly lifted in Sweden. Consumer advertisements for wines still follow strict guidelines and Swedish importers are not legally allowed to put on tastings for the public, though this is not well regulated.

Several of the wine writers and importers we spoke to were hard pressed to mention any PR agencies whatsoever who were good at wine. With few exceptions, wine writers were quite negative to any contact from PR agencies, regional bodies excepted. Importers who worked with PR companies were well aware of this attitude and thus kept this contact in-house. However, for raising consumer awareness of a brand or for attracting lifestyle writers, PR firms were strategically employed. Otherwise, the majority of agency promotions are for regions, such as Rioja or Wines of France. The local French promotions go through Sopexa and the French Chamber of Commerce, whereas German and Spanish organisations have taken local help from larger PR firms who are not otherwise wine specialists. A few individuals or small firms have managed to make names for themselves.

Sweden

Pretto PR are lifestyle specialists with several wine and spirits projects. Their clients include Freixenet and the major importer PrimeWine. For PrimeWine, they work primarily on key brands such as Pata Negra and the hugely successful Bag-in-Box SomeZin. In the spring of 2012, SomeZin was released in a rosé version, and Pretto teamed up with the famous designer Bea Szenfeld to make a 'summer in a box' - a mini greenhouse with plants and butterflies built around a box of SomeZin. The event was a big hit with online and lifestyle media. Nevertheless, Maria Lager, partner and consultant at Pretto, says that wine communications



**Maria Lager and Fredrik Robertsson
from Pretto PR.**

in Sweden are challenging. "The specialised wine journalists prefer direct contact with the importers, but we communicate with bloggers, food and lifestyle writers, and are in charge of events." They also work on finding new forums for wine communications.

For many years, Hero Kommunikation has been the PR company responsible for Rioja. After a long period of excellent sales, Rioja hit a low in 2005. Since then, Hero has worked on regaining consumer interest in the region. The challenge has been the dominance of Bag-in-Box wines in Sweden and the strength of South Africa and the rest of the New World wines. Results are finally appearing.

Vår pr-byrå is a small communications agency. The agency, which was started by sommelier Karin Pontén and Elin Undén West, focuses on food, wine and travel, and employs a network of freelance consultants for larger projects. Vår pr-byrå has been working with branding Bollinger for years; the Champagne brand now has a high market share and brand awareness in Sweden. Vår pr-byrå, though small, recently won the Torres communications account and has previously been employed by the wildly successful South African co-operative KWW.

IntroPR, now known as Innehållsagenturen, is a specialist food and wine agency. The name change came about because they wanted to present themselves less as a PR agency and more as a creator of content ('Innehållsagenturen' means 'the Content Agency' in Swedish). The team - unusually for a Scandinavian PR company - includes several people with extensive experience from HORECA. They do plenty of in-house research and trend spotting. Innehållsagenturen are also known for running the Swedish Bartenders' Choice Awards.

Bistro Reklambyrå is a small advertising agency in southern Sweden that's focused on restaurants, food and wine. For ten years they've held the account of Wines of Portugal.



Marie Sainabou Jeng and Rasmus Holmgård, founders of mad+medier

They received positive mentions from one of Sweden's top wine writers.

Norway

It is illegal to promote wines directly to consumers in Norway, which means no advertising, events or tastings. Even communication on the web is heavily restricted. For this reason, the number of PR agencies working with wine is limited. "There isn't exactly a wine PR war going on in Norway," says Frøystein Johansen of KOMM, an organisation of certified communications agencies, alluding to the limited number of actors and accounts in the domain.

There is, however, a large interest in wine in Norway and all the leading newspapers have at least one wine feature in the weekend editions. These are mainly written by wine specialists, and as there are only a handful of these, they are usually contacted directly by the importers' internal PR departments. As feature articles are the only legal manner in which to talk about wine with consumers, doing PR work in a manner which entices journalists to write might still be a worthwhile activity.

The Try agency has the Norwegian monopoly, Vinmonopolet, as a client and have been running campaigns to prevent minors from accessing alcohol. Vinmonopolet also has their own 14-member communications department, which publishes newsletters and a magazine. This is not a team you can hire to do your PR, but is nevertheless an important player in the heavily regulated Norway.

MSL, the flagship PR network of Publicis group (which also includes the major PR company JKL) works with Arcus, the largest supplier of wine and spirits in Norway. Currently, MSL mainly supports Arcus in matters of corporate communications and issue management, but that does not exclude more direct

wine PR work in the future, as has been the case in the past. For one of Arcus' in-house spirits brands, Linie Aquavit, MSL set up the very successful Scandinavian cooking competition, the Linie Awards, judged by top chefs including Swedish star Mathias Dahlgren. In matters wine PR in Norway, MSL has assisted Arcus in attracting the attention of the regular press. Their key competence is placing the product into a newsworthy meta-story. An example includes gaining significant attention for the issue of allergic reactions by sensitive individuals to histamines in wine before the release of the low-histamine wine Ken Creek.

Geelmuyden.Kiese is one of the largest PR companies in Scandinavia. The company, originally Norwegian, has the account in Norway for Pernot Ricard. As of May this year they are the local bureau for the German Wine Institute in Sweden.

Denmark

Denmark is the only Scandinavian country with an open, liberal market. This country of 5.5m has 1,631 registered importers, making it something of a challenge for brand building. Few brands spend the money on building a name in Denmark, looking rather to the monopoly-driven Sweden for use of their Scandinavian budgets. Of course, there is still interesting activity in the region. Large, un-specialised PR agencies dominate the pitches for projects involving regional organisations and large brands. An example of this is Constellation Brands, which has placed their communications budget with the international firm Hill & Knowlton. A slew of small companies specialise in food, but they seldom have specific wine experience. There are two dominant agencies with a clear specialisation in wine: Sopexa and Vinens Hus. Sopexa, the French food and wine communications group which is very active in Scandinavia, has their headquarters in Denmark. As it is now only partially financed by French agricultural ministry, they do promotions for non-French brands and regions, as long as they are not in direct competition with their core clients.

Vinens Hus (and De Danske Vinrejser) is the second specialist wine PR company. They work with consultancies and do wine promotions, including public events, journalist events, press releases and travel. The list of clients includes Cava, Chablis, Wines of Argentina, Wines of Chile and many more, and they have represented the Wine Institute of



Kristian Brask Thomsen, Bon Vivant Communications.

California in Denmark for the past 20 years. The approach is traditional in style, with standard press tastings, consumer tastings and basic PR services.

For a more personalised and creative 'think-outside-the-box' style, Marie Sainabou Jeng is one to watch. Jeng recently started her own PR company, Marie Jeng AS. She is a communications consultant specialising in food and beverages, with extensive wine PR experience. In its first year, her new company secured the spirits communication of Denmark's number one selling spirits brand, Aalborg Akvavit, distributed by Pernod Ricard. Together with the well-established freelance wine journalist Rasmus Holmgård, Jeng founded the professional mad+medier network in 2011. mad+medier ('food+media') has nearly 500 members, from journalists to communicators to bloggers, in both food and wine. The team can tap into this network when needed and Jeng's PR agency frequently collaborates with Holmgård for copy and events. This duo might be the most interesting thing to happen to wine PR in Denmark in a long time.

Bon Vivant Communications, run by ex-restaurateur Kristian Brask Thomsen, is an interesting option for luxury brand positioning. It is not a traditional PR or communications company, but with clients in Copenhagen, New York, Vienna and Moscow, Brask Thomsen has placed himself well to do specialty activities in the luxury domain. Bon Vivant does modern, classy, high-end communication and set themselves apart with a monthly gourmet dinner party, that also serves as a networking platform exposing their brands. Apart from wine, which includes projects for Veuve Cliquot and the Wachau wine area, they also promote star chef Mads Refslund (one of the founders of Noma) and various Michelin restaurants. This is all about high-end brand building and communicating the 'good life'.