

The Independent Crew members are:

Hal Wilson, Cambridge Wine Merchants; **Ruth Yates**, Corks Out; **Matthew Hennings**, Hennings Wine; **Ted Sandbach**, the Oxford Wine Company; **Jamie Hutchinson**, the Sampler; **Doug Wood**, WoodWinters

SITT Autumn 2014

Wednesday September 24 from 10.30am–6pm at the Royal Horticultural Halls, London SW1P
2QW. Register: sittastings.com/autumn/register

SITT AUTUMN
2014
The Specialist Importers Trade Tasting



Matthew Hennings: the more suppliers try to sell direct to the on-trade, the less trade they will do with the leading independents



Ruth Yates, Doug Wood: independents are tired of lazy suppliers who put up prices without informing or consulting with the merchants

Serving the on-trade

The key determining factor on how well suppliers are likely to work with leading merchants is their on-trade strategy.

The more they look to go direct, the less business they are likely to do with leading independents, argued Matthew Hennings of Hennings Wine. It is why, he argued, so many are better focused on retail and serving shops looking for a limited number of wine suppliers where they can offer an all-round service.

They do not, in the main, have the required flexibility when dealing with merchants servicing the on-trade, added Hennings.

"They probably wonder how they can do more with the bigger independents, but the problem is they are going to find it very difficult," he said.

Wilson agreed: "They know they have a problem in growing business with companies our size."

It is very noticeable, added other members, that



INDEPENDENT WINE CREW

BOTTLED UP

It is not just the major multiples that are taking advantage of the cost efficiencies of selling wine bottled in the UK. The independents are looking to cash in too.

Ted Sandbach was a big fan of bottled wine, particularly at entry level. "It does not make a scrap of difference. The quality is just as good. Australia is a classic example where there are a number of wines under different labels that you could never match if you tried to ship it yourself," he explained.

Wilson said he "would always ask the question where the wine was bottled".

Doug Wood said that, for example, he can potentially source New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc for £2 a case cheaper if it is bottled in the UK, making a saving of around £1,500 a year on just one wine.

none of the bigger players had put their name to Harpers Best Practice Guidelines, which would make it clear which channels of the trade they were serving with which wines.

"Too many are going direct to the restaurant or pub around the corner," added Sandbach.

But be flexible and get it right and the independent's business is there, said Wood. He said he had switched a lot of business from one national player to another because they understood how their strategy could work with independents in wholesale and the on-trade.

As for the supplier he moved away from, they simply "wanted to have their cake and eat it" and broke promises about serving key customers direct. "I was absolutely gobsmacked when they did that and it really, really peed me off," he said.

Fairness for all

Wilson said he was particularly frustrated by one major supplier which "offers a discount structure" to one customer group, but will not extend it to him.

But there are solutions to be had, stressed Wilson. "The only way we could do more is if we could have a flat discount off their agency list right across the board," he explained. But conversations of this type have failed to "find a solution" in the past, added Wilson.

Yates said that, in her experience, major suppliers were willing to negotiate on price, particularly if it is for tastings, but you have to work for it. "I will look to negotiate with them as they are working on high margins."

The crew appreciated they would be offered different prices based on the volume they were buying and that a pallet rate would be cheaper than a case one. But they were equally frustrated to discover they were being charged different rates for the same wines from the same supplier despite being similar sized operators.

The pricing of wine from some of the major suppliers was also a stumbling block. Hennings said he did not work with one major national player as every time he tasted their wines "they were £2 more" than he thought they were worth.

The merchants would also like to see more flexibility when it comes to minimum case orders.

Sandbach cited one supplier who wanted a minimum 25-case order, which he was struggling with.

Ignorance isn't bliss

That said, all the merchants hoped the major suppliers would listen to their concerns and look at how they could improve their level of service and be more relevant for the larger independents.

In particular, the Independent Crew members called for an open debate with the chief executives and directors of the leading national suppliers to find better ways to work together and to understand each others' businesses.

"The top brass at these companies probably don't get to hear the kind of concerns we have. The reps do. But they don't and the chance to talk to each other would be very productive and help us all long term," said Sandbach. Ⓜ

If you are a supplier and would like to discuss your trading strategy with the Independent Wine Crew, email Richard Siddle at richard.siddle@wrwm.com.