



Ted Sandbach is the owner of The Oxford Wine Company

IT'S THAT TIME of year when we await the Chancellor's verdict on what he wants to squeeze out of the poor old consumer. We gather all the information from a very busy two months of buying tastings and put together a wine list to see us through the next year.

Some wine companies are fairly inflexible with their lists, but we are quite happy to add or subtract a wine at any time during the year. However we have to be careful as the trade sales team are looking for consistency, not only of the product but also of supply and price, whereas the shop managers are looking for variation so their customers don't get bored with the same offerings. The added complication is our new wine café, which requires special one-off parcels – so keeping everyone happy and making the right decisions is a nightmare.

Like many independent merchants we buy from over 100 suppliers and I am always amused by the different approach from the sales teams.

I am always wary of a rep in a suit who arrives unannounced and is desperate to throw samples at me whether I want them or not – most of which prove useful for our charity box! However if I was their boss I would not be too impressed by this unfocused approach. These guys usually represent large, impersonal companies with whom we have no interest in dealing.



A strange breed

A field guide to a species that appears on the thresholds of all independents: the wine company sales rep

Others live in a very controlled environment, often represent well-known mini brands and come armed with endless fact sheets that are rarely read and certainly not needed. These guys try to be frightfully pally but just don't quite get it right. They are big-company folk who no doubt have to sit at home in the evening, completing analysis sheets. Some expect in-depth tasting notes of their wines and a detailed explanation if you don't think it's up to scratch. They seem to take personal offence if a wine is rejected.

THEN WE HAVE the schoolmasterly approach when endless graphs appear on the table showing their company's performance for the year. As if I could care less. My concern is simply to grow my company's business, not theirs. If mutual growth is a byproduct, then all well and good, but these reps would get a far better result if they asked how they could help us with sales and work with us, rather than chastise us for our apparent misdemeanor – not selling enough wine. Take 200 lines, Sandbach – must do better!

Then of course there is the laid-back, casually dressed, relaxed rep who will join in a tasting, has no obvious hidden agenda, and enjoys some good banter. They never

try the hard sell but have flexibility and some decision making elements which make discussions more productive. One glass may become two, a lunch could follow and the seal of a working relationship is established.

Finally we have the owner/MD of the small to medium size company who normally has a no-nonsense logical approach to what we need. Keen to get listings, massively adaptable, happy to support and provide stock if they see responsible use, and keen to develop dinners and events. God bless 'em!!

Two tips for all salesmen though – firstly, please put stickers on all wines listing supplier and price. We all get so many samples and often forget where they come from. It can make a huge difference and makes our decision making a great deal easier.

Secondly, try to have your prices ready by March – it's so frustrating when companies bring out new pricing in the summer. We all want it all to bed in the spring after the Budget so we can concentrate on selling and keeping prices stable; otherwise it becomes difficult to get listings as no restaurant wants the uncertainty of potential midyear price increases.