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Wine
Merchants

INDEPENDENTS

Indies should band together and stand out

By Richard Siddle

Independent wine merchants are being urged to raise their profile with consumers and differentiate themselves from the price promotion tactics of the major multiples.

As the drinks industry continues to come under attack from politicians and the health lobby, independent merchants should be doing more to capitalise on their position as specialist retailers and experts in premium wine and spirits.

This was highlighted at last month's seminar held by Hatch Mansfield with some of its key merchants and Harpers to discuss trading issues.

The event not only showed

how keen merchants are to share experiences and work together in the hope of increasing their buying power in key service areas, but how they can do more standing up as an independent retail group in their own right.

Hal Wilson of Cambridge Wine Merchants called on merchants to grasp the opportunity to stand out against multiple retailers.

"We must all try and be more than just a local wine merchant. We should not just be finding ways to work together to make more money, but how we can come together to promote ourselves as a distinct group of retailers in our own right.

"A group that cares passionately about wine but also how our sector



From left:
Hal Wilson and
Ted Sandbach

is represented to the wider public."

He pointed to last month's National Independents Day, organised to champion the cause of all local retailers, and said wine merchants should be getting behind such initiatives.

Twitter, he added, could make a big impact and he urged merchants to get their customers to "think local" and make wider use of the #indiewinemerchants Twitter hashtag.

Dean Pritchard of Gwin Llyn Wines in Pwllheli, North Wales, said "as a one shop retailer" it was vital he got out of his "comfort zone" and looked at his "business from a fresh perspective".

He conceded there was a danger merchants can become

"complacent with local regular customers". "It's important to put yourself about and not assume everyone knows there is a local independent wine shop in the area," he added.

Ted Sandbach of the Oxford Wine Company said he was "totally in favour" of merchants standing up together as a collective voice. He said not only could leading wine merchants "be ambassadors for the trade" they could help inspire other smaller independents and share their experiences with them. "We don't know all the answers, but we could certainly show them what we have learnt along the way," he said.

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