

# Great product – but who is going to drink it?

What? Where? When? How? Why? These are just some of the questions grape growers and wine makers should be asking themselves to help formulate a ‘route-to-market’ plan at the start of their journey into viticulture.

With figures suggesting vine plantings are set to double between 2019 and 2024 (having already done so between 2011 and 2018) taking production to 40m bottles per year, the GB wine sector is a hugely exciting one, says Grace O'Rourke Veitch, who has over 25 years' experience of route-to-market strategies.

But with production and competition rising, it's vital to plan this aspect early when launching an enterprise. "You don't get a second chance to go in to a market, so how well you do this can make or break your business," says Grace, who's worked with everyone from small start-ups to global multinationals, successfully getting products to customers in the UK, Europe, the Americas, Middle East and Asia.

Answering key questions about such aspects as what you're selling and at what volume will spark other questions, such as what your USP is and what skills you might already have in-house.

Perhaps the very first question, however, should be to identify who you're trying to reach. In which country do they live? At what price point are they comfortable? Is it the younger generation? Perhaps female consumers? Those most sensitive to environmental issues?

Once you've identified who your target customer is, route-to-market planning involves drilling in to further questions such as: How will they find out

about your product? How can you influence them? Where do they go to buy wine?

Much, of course, depends on clearly knowing what your objectives are, explains Grace. "But whether you ultimately are thinking big or are keen to stay small, it's about making a plan that will deliver on your ambitions.

"You can leverage brand GB – and collectively there is great power to be had in coming together – but you also have to find a way to differentiate yourself, so you need to identify your unique selling proposition. This might well be related to the product, but don't forget your own story. Consumers love hearing about producers and their families, so think about what PR stories you have that could really grab attention."

While the wine sector is becoming an ever-more crowded marketplace, getting your message across has in some ways become easier these days, adds Grace. By developing relationships with bloggers and using social media, for example, you can influence your market and build a brand relatively inexpensively.

Online selling, meanwhile, offers an alternative to the traditional route to market, allowing you to potentially claw back some of the margins that would otherwise have been lost to middlemen and retailers.

"I see the new generation of wine producers as

'disruptors' and there are many lessons they can take from other industries, such as technology and medicine," says Grace.

"There are huge opportunities out there for innovative disruptors – just look at the way the likes of Amazon have reinvented retail. This highlights that an underdog with a new and very different idea can appear from nowhere and seize market-share."

According to CLM director Matthew Berryman, an integrated "crop-to-consumer" strategy is vital in the potentially lucrative but at-times challenging viticulture sector.

"As competition hots up, understanding your route to market will be every bit as important as having a thorough grasp of the technical and practical aspects of growing and harvesting the crop," he says.

At the moment – perhaps understandably given that growers and producers have so much else to consider – there can be a 'strategy gap' in terms of adequately planning this aspect.

"But, just as large amounts of research and expertise go in to deciding which parcels of land to buy, how to structure your business and how to manage your vines, so go-to-market strategies will become a key part of the jigsaw puzzle. It could well be what sets the most successful viticulture businesses apart from the rest," Matthew says.

