

# Running a great Wine Event



**A guide from**



**to running a successful corporate  
wine tasting**

A wine tasting event is a great way to reward and motivate employees, entertain clients, support team building and create networking opportunities.

To make sure your event goes well, Taste of the Grape has prepared this guide – follow the steps, work with a good wine event company, and your company will entertain and reward employees and clients with a relaxed, interesting and enjoyable event.

## Step 1

### Make sure the event format fits your business objectives.

What could be simpler – some bottles of wine, glasses and a group of keen attendees? Well of course it isn't that simple. While most wine event companies have a 'standard' wine tasting format, the good ones will also offer events tailored to specific business purposes.

You should discuss with the manager(s) sponsoring the event what they want to achieve from the event, share this information with your chosen wine event organiser, and agree the format for the event with the sponsor.



#### Business objective    Event format

Socialising – a reward or celebration, or an ice breaker.    Wine tasting guided by a professional wine expert covering a specific topic (eg country or region) relevant to the business, for example, wines of a specific country or region. Educational and enjoyable, and a chance to try some expensive wines.

Team building - existing or new teams.    Team tasting challenge – groups compete with each other identifying the grape variety, country and price of a number of wines. Run by an expert facilitator, these events are great fun, and any lack of wine knowledge is no disadvantage.

Networking - internal or external.    Taste of the Grape run the Wine Tasting Network - an organised approach to getting people to mingle, and give senior managers an opportunity to meet everyone in the room. Here the wine serves as an ice breaker rather than being centre stage, but our expert facilitators ensure that people move around a number of wine stations and connect with lots of people.

## Step 2

### Agree timing and budget

It's best to allow 90 minutes to two hours for most wine oriented events. At Taste of the Grape we can do a great tasting in under an hour with smaller groups, but ideally more time is allowed to ensure a relaxed atmosphere. More than two hours is too much for any but the most committed wine enthusiasts. Arrival time should be advised as 30 minutes before the official start time, to allow for some guests' habit of arriving late (even for tastings that are part of bigger residential events).



Avoid Fridays for corporate events if possible - for obvious reasons!



The key determinants of budget are numbers of attendees and costs of venue hire. The wines chosen will also have an impact.

A good event company, with experienced wine speakers who can command the attention of a room full of people and entertain them will charge from £35-50/head (plus VAT), for a minimum of 15 people, excluding venue costs.

This should cover at least six wines in the organised tasting, including some more expensive wines such as Champagne.

Venue costs are much more variable. Most event companies will be able to recommend venues to suit a particular event, and location, time of day and day of week will all have an impact – as will corkage which many hotels and restaurants charge as standard (but may be prepared to negotiate over).

## Step 3

### Choose your venue and room

#### In house?

| Pro's       | Con's  |
|-------------|--|
| Free?       | People who aren't invited might feel left out? |
| Convenient? |  |

It is possible to run a successful wine event in a meeting room, canteen or common area of an office. This has a dramatic impact on cost, and for an employee event has the advantage of being 'on site'. A good event company will work hard to make any space work, but there are some things that need to be considered:

The space should be self contained, or away from people who are not attending the event .

A regular, rectangular space works better than an L shape, or adjoining rooms – it helps the wine speaker gain and keep people's attention.

Depending on the type of event, there needs to be sufficient space for people to be seated. Wine tastings and team challenges work best with people seated around circular tables of 8-10. Networking events are more likely to be conducted with people standing and circulating – but tables for wine stations will be needed, and some people will want to sit down at points during the event.

Acoustics are quite important – most rooms are fine up to about 50 people, but in larger rooms, or ones with high ceilings or lots of hard surfaces that create echoes, your wine event company may recommend using a PA system.

Lighting is summed up in two words: adequate and appropriate. Glaring bright lights don't lend themselves to a convivial atmosphere, but if the lighting is too dim, people won't be able to see what they are drinking!

#### External venue?

If you hold the event in an external venue, things to consider are:

Access to public transport – you shouldn't expect people to drive home from a wine event!

Attractiveness of venue – particularly if you are inviting clients or potential clients. Consider the impression given by different styles of venue - some events need a more 'formal' setting such as a room in a hotel or even a London club, others are far more suited to function rooms in wine bars or pubs.

Size/shape of room – all the same considerations as above.

Flexibility and friendliness of the venue's staff – it sounds obvious but having pleasant staff prepared to go the extra mile makes all the difference to an event!

Talk to your event company about venues that they have used – they should be able to recommend something that works well for your requirements.

| Pro's           | Con's        |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Prestige        | Cost?        |
| No clearing up! | Travel time? |

## Step 4

### Invite your guests.

The more notice you give guests, the better chance you have of a good turnout. A month before the event is about right.

Even if the event is for employees after work or during or after a meeting or conference, announcing it in advance builds 'buzz', allows people who might have questions to get answers, and ensures managers are aware of how many people plan to attend.

If the event is for clients or potential clients, or other non-company people such as suppliers or journalists, a well-designed invitation will add to the perception of value.

Clearly the tone of the invitation depends on the company culture, and the objective of the event, but there is some key information that needs to be imparted.

Here's a couple of examples of invitations setting slightly different tones:



Taste of the Grape always recommend that our clients follow up invitations, ideally by phone. Firstly because it generally results in higher levels of attendance, as people are more likely to consider the invitation and commit if they are approached directly.

And secondly, people are just rather bad at replying, even if they intend coming, and it is really difficult to finalise plans without knowing how many people are going to turn up a couple of days before the event.

Ask the sponsoring manager(s) to encourage their staff and clients to attend – this is much more powerful than an impersonal invitation alone.

## Step 5

### Plan your equipment and extras

Any good event company will bring everything you need for a wine tasting.....

If the event happens at your office, you will need to arrange for suitable tables and chairs, and for the room to be available a couple of hours before people arrive, so the wine speaker can set up.

- Professional wine tasting glasses
- Information/Quiz sheets, clipboards, pens
- Prizes if appropriate
- Food, e.g. cheese for pairing with wine, plus plates, knives etc.—if part of event
- Wine!

If the event is seated, round tables seating 8-10 are perfect, but most table shapes will work, provided there is room for people to move around them! Table coverings make it easier to clear up after the event. If you have them, white tablecloths add ambience, but banqueting roll is fine.

If you want to provide some nibbles, sparkling water, juice etc on arrival, it is probably most cost effective to do this yourself, but your wine event company can of course provide everything if you prefer. Don't make catering too complex and avoid serving hot food during the tasting – making sure it is served at the right moment can be awkward, and the aromas of the food may distract people from focusing on the wine.



All the above can be agreed with an external venue in advance.

If the event is for external clients, some corporate dressing of the room is a good idea, to ensure the event works to build your brand. If there is room, you could place a couple of stands with your corporate logo (most companies have these for exhibitions and fairs). And some corporate material – leaflets or even some business cards, maybe the most recent edition of your in house journal – placed in the room this gives people something to glance if they arrive early. You may want to put a pack together for guests to take away after the event.

If appropriate arrange for a photographer and post pictures onto your company Facebook or LinkedIn pages, or intranet. You could send photos out to guests after the event to remind them what a great evening they had, and so continue to build your brand image.

You may need to make some arrangements for what happens after the event, particularly if it happens at your offices. Ensuring the security team are aware of the event, and that guests and organisers will be able to exit the building easily is a must, and agreeing how any rubbish will be disposed of is a good idea so your cleaners are not faced with an unexpected collection of bin sacks and empty wine bottles.

## Step 6

### The Day Before

Make sure you know the status of everyone invited to the event, whether they are a firm yes, a maybe or have declined.

Calling any guests about whom there is any doubt, on the day before or even day of the event to remind them again ensures the best possible attendance - and a professional briefing about who is attending to sponsoring management on the night.

Do your best to encourage any uncertain to become firm yeses – emphasise how many other (important/influential) people will be there, and of course what fun it will be, and explain you need to firm up on numbers.

Your event company will probably have arranged a call with you to confirm your best idea of numbers (it's amazing how often at this stage our clients still have no idea!). This means they will arrive on the day with the right number of bottles of wine! They will also need to know specific details of where to park, how to access the building and the room, and who they need to contact on arrival.



## Step 7

### On the Day

Call everyone you didn't speak to yesterday who is due to attend (including the firm yeses!), to remind them. It sounds over the top, but a polite reminder will often make the difference to whether someone's best intentions turn into action!

Give the manager(s) sponsoring the event a list of attendees (including your view of how likely they are to come based on your conversations), and a short document outlining the plan for the evening – your wine event company can help you prepare this in advance.

If the event is in house, make sure the room is ready at the agreed time, and that there is someone to meet (and assist) the wine speaker when they arrive and need to unload their equipment.

If the event is at an external venue, meet your wine consultant there well in advance to go through arrangements with the venue staff (and supervise any last minute changes to the room layout that might be required based on numbers attending etc). This would also be your opportunity to dress the room with corporate materials.

Make sure there are people from your company on hand to greet any early arrivals – at least half an hour before the specified arrival time.

## Step 8

### The Event itself

Relax and enjoy yourself. If you have followed the steps in this guide your event will run like a dream, and you will have happy guests and happy managers.



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