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## Keeping the faith: ‘Evangelists’ are good for the wine industry

With sales of local wines steadily rising, and domestic vintages crowding the lists at more and more fine restaurants, Ontario is getting a legitimate rep as a world-class wine destination. But this rising pedigree may be due to more than just quality and value.

Research out of Brock University’s Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI) strongly supports the notion that passionate “evangelists” play an important role in raising awareness and popularity of Ontario wines – which now control 31 per cent of the LCBO’s wine market share.

Expanding on their 2016 paper, “[Evangelism and the amazing spread of quality reputation of Ontario winemaking](#),” professors Maxim Voronov and Wesley Helms, from Brock’s Goodman School of Business, helped lead a study examining years of institutional change in Ontario’s wine industry, the steady improvement to the reputation of domestic wines and the development of a critical mass of support for the industry.

“Domestically, we’ve seen a lot more acceptance and enthusiasm for Ontario wine and internationally, there’s been a great deal more recognition of Ontario wines’ high quality,” said Voronov, who is a fellow of CCOVI.

“If you measured the acceptance of Ontario wines by the number of restaurants that have VQA wine lists, the number has jumped dramatically since 11 years ago when I first came (to Canada from the United States).”

Their article, “*Emotions Uncorked: Inspiring Evangelism for the Emerging Practice of Cool-Climate Winemaking in Ontario*,” is published in the April edition of the *Academy of Management Journal*, and was co-written by Felipe G. Massa, from Loyola University in New Orleans, and Liang Wang, of the University of San Francisco.

One focus of their research was the ritualistic behaviours that drive people to voluntarily spread the gospel, if you will, about local wines and wineries.

“The key seems to be the creation of people who aren’t simply content to buy a bottle of wine and leave it at that,” Voronov explained. “They are not simply buyers or supporters, they really have this almost religious fervour that is going to drive them to advocate on behalf of Ontario wine, and they use whatever opportunity they can to convert their friends and family members.”

Preachers in the consumer space are not a new construct. In relentlessly progressive Silicon Valley, tech companies like Apple create actual “evangelist” roles within their organizations, people whose job is to be visible and vocal in imploring the appeal of a product or brand.

What is less understood, Voronov argues, is how people develop into these passionate ambassadors in the first place - something they explored in-depth in their study.

In the wine industry, he says this occurs through three specific rituals:

- Provenance-themed: Sharing the story of the wine; where it came from, who made it?
- Hedonic-themed: The enjoyment and pleasure of wine consumption and the social interaction associated with consuming it.
- Glory-themed: Emphasizing the praise, distinctions and honours that the wine or winery has garnered.

People most likely to be driven by these rituals are those who connect with them emotionally, such as foodies or locavores.

While the idea of cultivating evangelists is applicable to the marketing of products, Voronov stresses that there’s more to the picture.

“These rituals are about building authentic relationships with audiences, not just consumers. What we want to think here is not just about how to get this person to buy one or two bottles of wine – we want them to become part of the movement, and advocate on behalf of the winery and the industry.”

He also pointed out that these findings aren’t restricted to the wine industry, either, and that the creation of these “evangelists” can be beneficial to many different organizations.

The full study can be found at [brocku.ca/webfm\\_send/43905](http://brocku.ca/webfm_send/43905)

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