Bartolotta: communicating well means investing time in study and research

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Filippo Bartolotta discusses the importance of continuous study and research in wine communication. He highlights the need for unique brand identities and warns against pre-packaged solutions. The conversation also touches on the impact of artificial intelligence and the rising importance of sustainability in wine marketing, offering advice on overcoming industry clichés.

Filippo Bartolotta is a multifaceted figure: a wine expert, communicator, writer, sommelier, and globetrotter. He is known for his work in hospitality and consultancy, as well as his ability to communicate wine culture in an accessible and engaging way to a broad audience.

In the context of the "Amorim Wine Vision" project, we wanted to dive deeper with Bartolotta into key topics surrounding wine communication: strategies and methods, distinctive communicative elements, artificial intelligence, audience, and greenwashing.

Communication in general, and consequently wine communication, is constantly evolving. Every time a higher level is reached, the bar is raised. What are the biggest challenges you face in this complex dynamic?

"I believe it depends on the position of each person, but for those working in training or journalism, it's clear that continuous updating is necessary. The world of wine involves a series of evolutions and changes that affect regions, denominations, trends, and the market: what was valuable a few years ago no longer has value today.

Updating is a vaccine against stereotypes. Sicily produces opulent, soft, and buttery white wines, while reds are jammy and alcoholic. False. Sicily is the first Italian region for hill viticulture (second for mountain viticulture), and a qualitative renaissance is underway that is bringing out the most authentic traits of this viticulture. Is Montepulciano d'Abruzzo just a saturated, extractive wine? False. There are, in addition to the Cerasuolo versions, new trends toward more vibrant, reactive reds. Italian whites don't age. False. There are extraordinary examples to be found from north to south: great whites from Alto Adige, Lugana, Soave Classico, some stunning Vernaccia from San Gimignano, certain Orvietos, and Fiano from Avellino."

The most beautiful part of our work is that of explorers and reporters. We must keep up with the progress of every region,

otherwise, we only spread stereotypes and serve no one. It’s essential to invest time in research, not only from books but especially on the field, literally!

There is a critical issue upstream; often, companies struggle to identify, even before communicating, the peculiarities that make them unique and differentiate them from competitors. For example, tradition, family, and quality are no longer distinctive communication elements in the Italian landscape. What alternative strategies could there be?

“Companies need to find their own voice, and that is done by listening to themselves and seeking help from those who can bring out their business identity. It’s important not to settle for pre-packaged communication solutions because the risk is becoming conformed and diluting the message. So, one must choose companies or communication experts who know how to bring out the most authentic traits of their business. When I prepare my masterclasses, I throw away 90% of what I read online: many words, but often little focus and synthesis on one’s own identity. To communicate well, one must flip the perspective, thinking that communication work is, first and foremost, an investment in one’s future, not just a cost.”

Innovations like artificial intelligence and machine learning, such as ChatGPT, are creating expectations but also fears in various sectors. What are the pros and

cons of using these technologies in wine communication?

“I’m one of those who doesn’t fear these innovations, I was talking about it some time ago with colleagues. ChatGPT is amazing; one day I was overloaded with work and had to deliver a piece, so I tried to do a basic job, and thanks to ChatGPT, I came up with a piece that was factually correct but had strong limitations: it completely lacked a critical and authorial aspect. A writer, a journalist, or an author has a lateral, experiential, and critical vision that these innovations can’t reproduce.

I’ll give you an example. If I want to take a recent vertical tasting of Cerasuolo d’Abruzzo and argue that lightness is a qualitative parameter, I can take a literary path, citing Ovid or Calvino, tied to my life experience. The result is necessarily original, probably counterintuitive, and maybe irreverent. I doubt ChatGPT could come up with that. If artificial intelligence were to someday acquire critical abilities and make original associations enriched by its own experiences, then it would become a real problem.”

Can you identify three key elements that a good wine communicator should always keep in mind, which can make a difference?

“The main thought of a good wine communicator should be to enrich their audience, no matter who they are. What makes the difference is not positioning oneself in a demonstrative way but in a sharing one. It’s crucial to understand who we are addressing. The honor of guiding a seminar or masterclass imposes not only telling technical data and sensory descriptions but also working to make the message strong and understandable. In the past, especially in Italy, we

journalists, sommeliers, communicators, etc. focused almost exclusively on technical content and very little on form, on how to convey the message."

The wine industry is plagued by various types of "washing," such as greenwashing, pinkwashing, rainbow-washing, and white-washing. What is your opinion on this? Do you see possible solutions to limit these phenomena?

"It's a very difficult question because it's universal. It would be up to consumers to make informed choices. A concrete example is the 'SOStain Sicilia' project, a sustainability program for Sicilian viticulture promoted by the Sicily DOC Wine Consortium and Assovini Sicilia, aimed at certifying the sustainability of the regional wine sector.

This project ties the sustainability steps of the participating companies to the possibility of receiving loans and financing (ESG). The growing general interest in sustainability forces companies to set these goals, which must be increasingly credible, demonstrable, and measurable. Sustainability must be 360 degrees, not just environmental. Some companies have environmental sustainability certifications but fail to commit to social sustainability for their workers.

Today, communication is fast and bidirectional. It takes very little to lose trust if we deceive consumers. Environmental challenges are evident to everyone. It is necessary to be aware that almost all industry professionals and consumers will increasingly give weight and attention to these issues. Northern European countries are practically importing only wines from companies committed to sustainability, which is not only a duty but now also an opportunity."

This interview was conducted in partnership with Amorim Cork Italia as part of the "Amorim Wine Vision" project – a network of thought leadership on technical and topical wine-related issues, spotlighting the original visions of industry entrepreneurs and managers.

Key points

1. **Wine communication requires constant study** to avoid stereotypes.
2. **Brands must develop their own voice instead of using generic solutions**.
3. **Artificial intelligence offers assistance** but lacks critical and original insights.
4. **Sustainability is becoming a key factor for wine companies**, especially in Northern Europe.
5. **Communication in wine should focus on sharing**, not just demonstrating technical data.