

Prowein 2024: confronting the crisis and seeking solutions in the wine market

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 20 Marzo 2024



Leaving Prowein 2024, I feel **reassured** because my observations, experiences, and insights align perfectly with the present conditions of the wine industry and its markets.

Prowein is universally regarded as the most accurate indicator for the wine sector, with participation from exhibitors across **65 different countries** providing a comprehensive overview of the industry's health. Furthermore, the German penchant for precision ensures that things are presented exactly as they are, with no embellishments or frills.

Feeling reassured does not mean I am pleased with the challenges our cherished wine world faces. Rather, it

signifies an awareness of both the problems and their potential solutions.

The fair's statistics speak volumes. This year, the number of exhibitors reached 5,320, which, although 1,580 fewer than in 2019 and below last year's 6,000 exhibitors, still represents a **significant turnout**.

Decrease in exhibitors, but good profiling of visitors

The most evident sign of this decrease is Italy itself, which, while maintaining its leadership among the exhibiting countries, was present this year at the increasingly dilapidated Düsseldorf Fair (which requires a deep renovation starting from the bathrooms this year placed outside like at village festivals) with **1,198 companies**, 273 fewer exhibitors compared to last year and almost 500 less than in 2019.

Regarding the visitors, the organizers announced at the end of the three days of the event that they had registered 47,000 operators (there had been 49,000 in 2023) from various levels of trade and media, coming from 135 countries "bringing – as written in the press release of the Düsseldorf Fair – a breath of optimism into a currently stagnant market".

In 2019, before the pandemic, Prowein had recorded a record attendance with over 61,000 visitors.

Reflections on the Costs and Effectiveness of Trade Fair Investments in the Wine Sector

I keep thinking that the number of visitors is not the **main parameter** for measuring the effectiveness of a B2B event, but their profiling is. Listening to the opinions of many exhibitors, the level of satisfaction in this direction has

been good, under the banner of “**less but of good profile**”.

The point, however, lies in defining what can be the investment consistent with the contacts that a company realistically can have, in addition to those already in its customer portfolio.

This reflection allows me to specify something important on which a trusted collaborator made me reflect: “In your article commenting on the second day of ProWein, you made it seem that wine companies now have to desert fairs like those in Düsseldorf, Paris, or Verona”.

If someone interpreted what I wrote in this way, I sincerely apologize because my thought is as follows:

- Firstly, only companies that arrive at the exhibition with a **serious agenda of appointments** should participate in fairs aimed at industry professionals (it may also be the usual refrain, as someone rebukes me, but even the obvious reality should never be silenced);
- An **investment** must be made, in terms of setup and stand size, consistent with the activity that wants to be carried out at the fair;
- An investment consistent with the **number of contacts** and meetings that can be held at the fair should be made;
- The fair must be staffed with a number of **managers** consistent with the activities, meetings that want/can be realized;
- One should participate in events like ProWein only if

there is a **serious and multi-year investment strategy** on the export front.

If one tries to honestly meet the above conditions, I do not believe I am exaggerating by stating that in the next edition of ProWein there could also be half of the Italian companies present this year, and I do not think that this would be a bad thing, neither for those present (who would have a visibility and opportunity for more adequate contacts) nor for the absent ones (who could prepare better for an event of this weight or invest more of their resources on the national front, starting with wine tourism activity with the development of direct sales primarily).

But for those companies that decide to invest in fairs like ProWein, and this also applies to others (perhaps slightly less for an event like Vinitaly, I emphasize perhaps), in my opinion, they must seriously consider whether it always makes sense to build “castles” instead of functional, **pragmatic stands**, created to be functional to business and not to the show.

A manager of a well-known company who begged me not to write the name (and I’m sorry because it would be useful to make it clear that there are companies that are already seriously reflecting on how to change their trade fair strategy), made this “confession”: “This year at ProWein we had 16 meetings, 14 of which with our regular buyers (which we had already scheduled) and only 2 new ones. For this edition between stand, personnel, travel, hotels, and dinners, we invested just under 100,000 euros, which means over 6,000 euros per contact. If I think about how much we will spend for the next Vinitaly and how much already invested in Vinexpo Paris, there’s nothing left for effective marketing and communication actions”.

Greater Diversification of Participants and Potential Reduction in International Importers' Participation: An Export Manager's Analysis

To this last consideration, I also attach the comment that Antonio Romeo – export manager of Bosca Spumanti – wrote on my LinkedIn profile, which seems particularly indicative: “If we exclude the mass participation of Americans and Asians (and this was unfortunately understood from the invitations), it totally loses the sense to spend so much to participate in a fair like ProWein. With Vinitaly coming back strong and Italian wines already present in the portfolios of major importers, those present at both Wine Paris and ProWein were mostly looking for **wines from other countries**. Thus, interest and attendance in pavilions other than the Italian ones (aside from the French ones) were greater. For some time now, both Vinexpo and ProWein and Vinitaly have had satellite fairs in America and Asia, and, therefore, fewer and fewer importers will be willing to make such significant trips, net of incoming, to come to Europe. Add to that, this year the Germans managed to cancel a myriad of flights, forcing the unfortunate ones to journeys of 10/20 hours to arrive in Düsseldorf and on the last day they added a train strike (so even many Dutch and Danes no longer came)... However, quality contacts.”

All observations that lead to a final reflection: industry fairs are and will still be important in the future, but it is undeniable that the investments wine companies must make in them need to be much more **judicious**, rational than what has been done until today.

Towards More Judicious Investments and

New Initiatives

However, the reduction in the economic investment of companies in industry fairs should not be seen negatively by fair organizations because this can and must open new avenues for events and initiatives capable of expanding the consumer base.

This last issue must necessarily be addressed as soon as possible and will require a joint effort from the entire wine supply chain in terms of **creativity and investments**.

If part of the “savings” on fairs will be reserved for new initiatives directed at the final consumer, it will already be a good start.

Last note – although there would be many others, like the issue of low and no alcohol wines, which I will try to propose in future articles – concerns the perennial issue of the setup of the Italian pavilions. As a photo accompanying this editorial, I chose Spain, not by chance, which in my opinion presented itself in the best and highly identifiable manner at an event like ProWein, and not only...