

What I learned from Mumbai taxi drivers

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Drawing inspiration from Mumbai taxi drivers, this article explores three essential strategies for wine businesses: effective communication (the horn), strategic adaptation (the brakes), and proper market positioning (luck). These lessons emphasize that success requires visibility, willingness to change direction, and entrepreneurial competence to navigate today's complex wine market landscape.

Last year I used the metaphor of Mumbai's cats to highlight the importance of resilience within our wine companies, our wine production system.

Like the cats of Mumbai who managed not only to survive but to find their precise place in an apparently hostile habitat like the slum of the great Indian megalopolis, our companies could

not only resist in this complex market phase but also, possibly, evolve and progress.

This year, participating for the second time in ProWine Mumbai, I was inspired by the taxi drivers of this incredible city of 25 million inhabitants, according to official data, but probably many more considering the numerous “non-residents,” homeless.

The taxi drivers of Mumbai, together with those of Delhi, according to authoritative studies, would have the most stressful job in the world. And anyone who has had the opportunity to frequent these two cities would have no doubts about it. Being a taxi driver in cities like these is extremely difficult and requires, in addition to absolute driving expertise, nerves of steel and a good dose of courage (some might even speak of recklessness).

But the lesson that Mumbai taxi drivers could also give to our wine entrepreneurs and managers was unconsciously suggested to me by one of them who explained, along the route that separated my b&b from the fair location, that to do his job three fundamental characteristics are needed: noisy horn, great brakes and good luck.

Undoubtedly Mukesh (my taxi driver's name) is right because the first thing that anyone driving in Mumbai must do is make themselves heard, make their presence felt and, if they succeed, impose it.

At the same time, however, it is equally essential to brake when necessary and, believe me, on Mumbai's roads braking is a constant but incredibly they are almost never abrupt.

And if the first two “strategies” were not sufficient, then one must also appeal to luck.

I then tried to understand if the three determining “skills” of the Mumbai taxi driver were also valid for a wine producer

or manager and, in my opinion, they fit almost perfectly for them too.

Let's start with the audible horn, which we could easily translate into the action of communication. **Can a company have a recognizable brand without communication that has strong content but is also consistent over time? Absolutely not.** I wonder, however, how many Italian wine companies have adequate horns? Very few. And while this silence would be absolutely desirable in cities where noise pollution has become unbearable, if we descend into the arena of the wine market, this peace is synonymous with the company's invisibility.

I must admit that today, more than the problems of markets, I am concerned by the obstinacy of many wine entrepreneurs who continue to delude themselves that communication is not necessary, that it is sufficient to produce excellent wines. But I am also concerned about those who consider communication important but claim they cannot afford it.

If the horns of Mumbai taxis save the lives of taxi drivers and their customers, communication is and will increasingly be a vital factor for our wine companies.

But let's come to the brakes. Knowing how to brake in a wine company is absolutely important because it means recognizing that you have taken the wrong direction, that it is necessary to avoid dangerous collisions.

The metaphor of braking within our wine production system can be translated with the verb "to change." I brake not to stand still but to change direction.

And even in this case the question arises spontaneously: how many entrepreneurs and managers in our wine sector have concretely understood the necessity of change? How many continue to maintain their unchanged course without realizing they have a wall in front of them? I have the feeling that there are many, too many who consider this phase only a

cyclical slowdown, but there are also numerous those who think that wine consumption has reached the end of the line. In both cases the reaction is not that of braking to change direction but the classic “slamming” of brakes that throws everyone and everything out of the passenger compartment.

Those who slam on the brakes are typically those who have not studied the route to follow well, those who look only at their own car but not at the others surrounding them. In Mumbai, as I emphasized previously, you rarely witness abrupt brake slams and this is because everyone, or almost everyone, is alert and ready to avoid possible collisions.

In short, to change it is essential to know reality well and try to find all possible solutions to benefit from possible new opportunities.

And luck? How much does it affect the success of a wine company? If by luck we mean being in the right place at the right time, then the answer is simple...a lot.

But then we must ask ourselves how to find ourselves in the correct position with adequate timing, and in this case luck has nothing to do with it, but once again entrepreneurial and managerial competence comes into play, which allows a company to be and remain competitive.

In proportion to the number of cars, trucks, motorcycles, cattle carts that move on Mumbai's roads every day, accidents are relatively few. And as much as they rely on the “God of India,” I think what saves them is their ability to adapt to crazy traffic thanks to extraordinary driving experience and expertise.

That same expertise and adaptability that is necessary today for our wine companies now dealing with traffic that is certainly intense but absolutely manageable with an active GPS and a serious horn to always be recognized.

Key points

1. **Communication is vital:** Wine companies need strong, consistent communication to establish brand recognition
2. **Adaptation requires courage:** Businesses must break and change direction when facing market obstacles
3. **Strategic positioning matters:** Success comes from entrepreneurial competence, not just luck or chance
4. **Many wine entrepreneurs wrongly believe excellent wines alone** guarantee success without communication
5. **Market awareness and readiness to adapt** separate successful companies from those headed for collision