GDO, integrated physical and online channels: wine distribution at Esselunga

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Esselunga's Daniele Colombo discusses the integration of online and physical channels in wine distribution, focusing on logistics, sustainability, and the personalization of the customer experience. With the launch of Enoteca Esselunga online, the company aims to offer a premium wine selection while utilizing customer data for future wine experiences and improving distribution channels.

The wine industry is undergoing an unprecedented transformation, also related to distribution channels and the digital world. As part of the Amorim Wine Vision project, we interviewed Daniele Colombo, Category Manager for beverages at Esselunga, to better understand the distribution and

logistical challenges faced, the criteria adopted for wine selection, the use of data to personalize the shopping experience, future strategies to meet sustainability needs, and the future of omnichannel integration between online and physical stores.

Esselunga recently launched its online wine shop. What are the most significant logistical challenges you have faced to ensure efficient distribution, and what innovations have you introduced to overcome them?

Let’s start with a premise: Esselunga has been in the e-commerce business for food since 2001, with 18,000 references, so we have more than 20 years of experience managing this service. Regarding wine, we launched Enoteca Esselunga on November 14, 2023, and we dedicated a warehouse to this channel. All the references available on our online wine store are managed directly in our owned warehouse. Thanks to an agreement with DHL, we can deliver wine purchased from Enoteca online throughout Italy, including areas where our traditional Esselunga food e-commerce doesn’t reach.

What criteria do you use to define the selection of wines for the online channel versus physical stores?

In our superstores, which are the largest, we have wine shops with sommeliers presenting around 1,000 references to customers. For Enoteca Esselunga, we offer over 2,000 references, 99% of which are different from the selection available in physical stores. In physical stores, we cover the entry-level range and upwards, while on Enoteca, we focus more on the premium range, both national and international. For

example, in physical stores, we have the Santa Cristina by Antinori, while on Enoteca online, we offer the Bolgheri Rosso DOC “Il Bruciato” and higher-priced wines. In physical stores, 95% of the wines are Italian, while on Enoteca online, 70% are Italian, and 30% are imported. The wines available on Enoteca range from €10 to €1,000, which we don’t offer in physical stores. How did we build this assortment? Through our know-how and collaboration with over 400 suppliers, we selected their top references and included suppliers from the Horeca channel, both domestic and international. Promotions are much more important in physical stores than in the online channel, where consumers are more inclined to experiment and explore. It’s a different customer with a different approach.

Enoteca Esselunga has an important selection of wines and premium spirits. How are you using customer data to personalize the shopping experience and improve distribution?

Why did we create Enoteca Esselunga online? Our company has always been ahead of the curve, and we wanted to be first in omnichannel, covering all consumer needs. We created Enoteca Esselunga online to complete the shopping experience with a more premium assortment compared to what we could offer in-store, due to space limitations. For now, we are storing data to better understand the profiles of customers who shop at Enoteca online. This data will help us offer promotions and exclusive opportunities. For example, in the near future, we could allow customers to purchase En Primeur wines, creating a wine club to offer exclusive experiences.

What is your perception of current

consumer attitudes towards wine purchases?

I'll share an emblematic fact: the online customer spends five times more than the customer who shops in-store. This is probably because in the online channel, customers can choose more thoughtfully, they are less bombarded by promotional activities, and they don't feel the pressure to leave the store quickly.

Regarding preferences, white wines and sparkling wines are surpassing full-bodied reds, which I believe is driven by dietary changes. No-low alcohol wines are also gaining interest, but we don't yet have a large presence of quality products, and we need to assess whether it's a passing trend. For example, in 2023-2024, rosé wines have consolidated their presence, so I don't think it's a "flash in the pan." Rosé production has made significant progress, especially in terms of color and appearance, moving away from the unattractive "onion skin" color and following the trend of Provençal rosés.

Considering the growing trend toward sustainable consumption, how are you adapting your logistics and distribution chain to meet the demands of environmentally conscious partners and customers?

Esselunga places a strong emphasis on sustainability with its suppliers; we can encourage but not impose sustainable choices. We also have private labels (not in the Wine & Spirits sector), and in this case, we can make informed decisions regarding packaging and transportation.

How do you assess the effectiveness of your current distribution network, and what improvements would you like to implement in the future?

We want to experiment with the possibility for customers to order from Enoteca online and pick up their products directly at the physical store. This would allow for a wider time window for pickup, even for customers who can’t be home for delivery.

Another step (still in the ideation phase) is to equip physical stores with touchpoints or kiosks where customers can access and order wines available on Enoteca online. This way, consumers would have both options: they can choose from the 1,000 references available in the store and the over 2,000 references online, giving them an extensive selection of 3,000 wines.

Key points

1. **Esselunga launched Enoteca online in November 2023**, offering over 2,000 wine references.
2. **The online wine customer spends five times more** than in-store customers.
3. **Data analytics will personalize shopping experiences** and introduce exclusive offers, like En Primeur wines.
4. **Esselunga is focusing on sustainability** in packaging and transportation.
5. **Future plans include online-to-store pickup options** and in-store touchpoints for online wine orders.