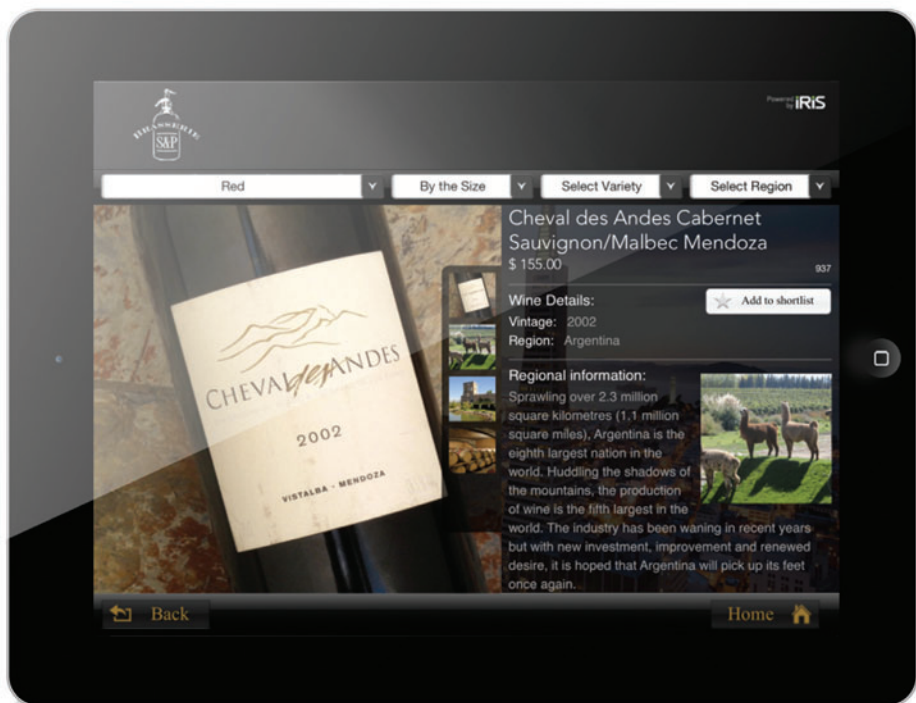


Wine lists meet 21st century technology



By Kate Parham

Wine is having a moment, or rather a lack thereof. While wine certainly remains in the spotlight, the pretentious, stuffy attitude usually paired with it has vanished. Restaurants are making wine more approachable, more of a conversation, and more fun. As many operators are finding, it is a good formula for increasing sales and boosting profits.

To accomplish this, wine managers are increasingly turning to the digital wine list, delivered via an Apple iPad or Android tablet device. All of which offer customer interactivity, which helps diners to truly connect with what they are drinking.

“If you are serious about your wine list, go digital purely for the reason that it allows you to offer your guests so much more information than a paper-based menu,” says Jason Jefferys, CEO of iRiS Software Systems, which provides iPad wine list apps to restaurant and hotels around the world. “Not only can diners make more informed choices, but it’s much easier for a restaurant to manage their wine list digitally. Updates can be made instantly, no internet connection required.”

Jefferys built his app to work offline, so a busy restaurant can always rely on it, and enjoy the flexibility of making updates without delays or printing costs. But perhaps most important of all, wine revenues increase with digital lists.

Sales Booster

“We’re certainly selling a lot more bottled wine and diverse cocktails since launching the digital list,” notes Nicole Kosta, director of food and beverage at the Mandarin Oriental in San Francisco. The hotel’s restaurant, Brasserie S&P, rolled out their iPad wine list in June 2012. “Plus, we’ve saved a surprising amount of money on paper supplies and printing of menus, which also is better for the environment.”

Ruth’s Chris Steakhouse in Atlanta, according to Director of Operations John Harof, saw a 25 percent increase in wine sales within 30 days of going digital with their list. And at Keswick Hall, a luxury hotel near Charlottesville, Virginia, the total number of bottles sold has been constant since their list went digital last March, but the number of more expensive and unique wines sold has increased, boosting overall revenues.

“The exposure of our lesser known wines to our guests is a huge benefit,” claims Wine Director Richard Hewitt. “The digital list allows them to segment their preferences, which often leads them to a bottle that they might not have ordinarily considered just by reading the printed list. Our only regret was that we did not implement this sooner.”

Choosing the Right Partner

Brasserie S&P put their entire beverage list on the digital app, including 600 wines, cocktails, beers, spirits, teas, and coffee. They also have a section called “Project G&T,” which is an interactive menu for their specialty, gin and tonic drinks. According to Kosta, the difficulty was in finding an app that would give the level of interactivity and cache they wanted. “We really wanted the program to stand out on the digital beverage list,” she recalls. “But we talked to five software companies and nobody could make it happen.”

That was until they found iRiS, which, according to Kosta, “had the most interactive and eye catching menu.”

Now diners can go into the section and see all the gins, tonics, and garnishes, allowing them to mix, match, and make their own cocktails. Guests also can choose from pre-matched mixes or search by gin flavor profiles. “iRiS was fantastic in developing our specialty section to accommodate our unique bar program, and they have added additional features as we work together,” notes Kosta. “They also have an incredible in-room dining program, which I am hoping to work with in the near future.”

“Firstly, and most importantly, we are a design-led software company, which means our customers brand is accurately represented,” adds iRiS’ Jefferys. “Our User Interface is easy to navigate, which means customers of any age can use it, and each project is unique with every client, so we’re an ‘out of the box’ solution.” One of iRiS’ biggest draws is their global database for wine regions. “Our customers simply add a wine to the list and can access wine information and pictures for every region, which allows their guests to delve as deeply as they wish into each wine selection.”

Hewitt says they also researched several companies and found the best match for Keswick Hall to be Tiare Technology. “Tiare had experience with large wine lists, which was important for us, as we have more than 650 wines, and they were able to do a very nice live presentation,” he explains. “They were not didactic, and gave us choices for how we wanted to set up the iPads.”

Keswick Hall’s digital list includes wine and all other beverages, in addition to a brief history of the resort.

“Our Wireless Winelist system is a fully customized solution designed for the unique needs of each restaurant,” adds Jeff Krevitt, president of Tiare Technology. “We tailor it to reflect the atmosphere of the restaurant and fulfill the objectives of their wine program. This allows them to impress their guests with a memorable experience, while increasing both wine sales and service efficiency.”

Ruth’s Chris’ digital list features more than 500 wine selections, in addition to beers and cocktails, for which they partnered with Rottweiler Hardware’s Tastevin. “We have a great relationship with Tastevin, so we are constantly working with them on enhancements and updates to make the technology work better for our restaurants,” notes Harof. “Their staff played an integral role in getting everything setup prior to launch. This information will be transferable as we begin implementation at additional locations.”

“Tastevin empowers operators by giving them up-to-the-second control over their guest experience,” says Josh Hermsmeyer, president of Rottweiler Hardware. “Since we integrate with all the leading POS systems, when you sell out of a SKU every menu in your venue automatically drops it from your lists. You never have to say you’re sorry for a sold out wine again. Everything works together so you don’t have to think about your tools. You can just get on with your job.”



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Important considerations

Investment Required: The initial investment is, of course, the iPads themselves. For Ruth’s Chris, start-up costs, which included 20 iPads, software, implementation, and insurance, was around \$12,000. According to Kosta, a 90-seat restaurant really only needs about 12 iPads. Keswick Hall invested in three for their restaurant.

Technology Barrier: Interestingly, nearly every guest knows how to operate the iPad, and feedback has been extremely positive. “The majority of guests love the digital list and want to explore and have fun with it,” adds Kosta, who strongly advises that restaurants train their staff on how to use the app and come up with “a good spiel to introduce the digital list to the guest.” Just in case, Hewitt offers guests a choice of digital or paper, but reports that nearly everyone under 40 opts for the iPad. Kosta says that in six months, only four people have asked for a paper list instead.

Replacement Sommelier: Because the digital list is so comprehensive, some fear that it may make the sommelier’s role obsolete. However, what many restaurants have found is that guests prefer to add several wines to the app’s “consideration list” and then discuss their final decision with the sommelier.

“The iPads just make my job easier,” says Hewitt. “As an organization that strongly focuses on the personal service delivered to our guests, we find that the unique balance between technology and guest interaction is relatively easy to execute.”

Finding the right app for your wine list can be a daunting task. Here are eight companies that offer unique features, design, functionality, and cost structures.

- ▶ iPad Wine List by Conceptic Interactive Menus, emenu-international.com
- ▶ iPad Wine List by Uncorkd, uncorkd.biz
- ▶ iRiSSommelier by iRiSSoftware Systems, irisvalet.com
- ▶ Smart Cellar by Incentient, incentient.com
- ▶ Tastevin by Rottweiler Hardware, rottweilerhw.com
- ▶ Wireless WineList by Tiare Technology, tiaretech.com
- ▶ Wine List by eSommelier, esommelier.com
- ▶ Wine List for iPad by Wine List Pro, winelistpro.com



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