

Clos Du Val Wine Co.

Situation Analysis

“To me, Clos Du Val's wines have consistently failed to improve. Sometimes you're defined not by what you've accomplished, but by what the competition is offering. In that regard, Clos Du Val has fallen off the pace and dropped well back into the pack.” —James Laube, Wine Spectator, July 31, 1996.

This was last news out of Clos Du Val when Milan took the post Director of Public Relations and Corporate Communications in August 2001 . Within 11 months of her role as, she had secured a cover story in the Wine Spectator entitled “Napa Mavericks” featuring Clos Du Val.

When she arrived, Clos Du Val was blackballed from both the Wine Spectator and The Wine Advocate. There had been no proactive media relations in more than five years and no response to Laube's op ed piece blasting Founder Bernard Portet and Clos Du Val. The sampling program was weak: of the 14 writers on the list, 3 had passed away, 5 had moved and 2 no longer wrote about wine. Press releases—on all thirteen wines—were being mailed!

The brand had lost its luster with both consumers and media alike. Clos Du Val was considered your (not very hip) father's wine, and the brand had been cannibalized in the early 90's by two second labels, Le Clos and Jolie Val, whose labels looked quite similar and were half the price. Sales were down significantly, and the wines were being heavily discounted.

Approaching Clos Du Val's 30th anniversary in 2002, the only spokesperson the winery had ever had, Founder Bernard Portet announced his retirement. No other spokespeople had been designated, nor media trained to prepare for the transition or to promote Clos Du Val's age worthy wines for this notable anniversary.

Solution

Milan designated 4 new spokespeople, Clos Du Val's CEO, the Vice President of Marketing, the Vice President of Vineyard and Winemaking Operations and the Winemaker for the Cabernet Program. She developed key messages and media trained them all.

With the Vice President of Marketing, Milan conducted consumer research to learn who Clos Du Val's consumers were—and what they knew about the brand. Surprisingly, the number one thing they knew was the terra cotta color of the label, the second thing was the swirls on the label and the third was that it was from Napa Valley. Sadly the name was the fourth thing they identified with the brand, and moreover they thought the name sounded “faux French”—something that seems amusing to anyone who knows Founder and Bordeaux born and raised-Bernard Portet's still strong French accent!

Milan and Brooke Correll, vp of marketing, launched a product placement campaign with an up-

and-coming young entertainment marketing agency in Los Angeles. Realizing that the number one thing that people knew about the brand was the eminently recognizable terra cotta label color, knowing that this strategy would not work for a white or simple label, and recognizing that there was no high end, luxury wine pursuing product placement opportunities at that time, this seemed to be a sound and innovative strategy.

Simultaneously, Milan realized that she needed to get the wines in the hands—and mouths—of more writers and increased Clos Du Val's sampling program for their upcoming releases (and new packaging) to 300 writers, which went beyond traditional wine media to include the top 100 newspapers, men's, women's, luxury lifestyle, gay lifestyle and business media. Playing up the winery's more whimsical side, Milan included branded terracotta swirl silk boxers and teddies in her media shipment, as well as an updated press kit and DVD of Clos Du Val's greatest TV and film product placement clips.

With a small public relations budget, Milan got on the phone and began pitching a variety of stories: the ageability of the wines and the 30th anniversary, the business story of the brand repositioning, stories about John Clews', vp of winemaking, commitment to Carneros and Pinot Noir, and stories about Clos Du Val's Hollywood strategy.

Believing that only one-on-one press interviews achieved media placements, Milan encouraged writers to visit Clos Du Val and met with them while on the road.

Results

Milan increased media coverage by **100%** and secured **584** positive clips for the winery and wines in 2 years

She secured a front page Los Angeles Times business section story on Clos Du Val's product placement program and the fact that the wines were taking more than 50% of all wine product placements

For Q3 and Q4 in 2002, Clos Du Val was the **#1 most visible brand in television programming**: Budweiser was number 2, Heineken was number 3 and snack products such as Doritos's following the others; significant television placements included "The Sopranos", "Sex and the City", "Just Shoot Me", "Arli\$\$", and Everybody Loves Raymond; film placements included "The Terminal" and "21 Grams"

In 2004, Clos Du Val reported that **sales were up 49% vs. year ago**, proving that the aggressive, creative and proactive media relations, brand repositioning and entertainment marketing strategies had proved successful