



7 Keys to Hosting a Memorable Wine Event

By Michael Bryan

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Help clients explore their senses and enjoy the good life with a wine-tasting event.

As a financial advisor, you undoubtedly recognize the need to invest marketing dollars to attract and retain relationships that make you money. And since your product is you, using client events to foster relationships makes great sense.

Deciding how often to host your events and coming up with an inspiring idea is your challenge as captain of your own enterprise. For many, wine has become a symbol of good living. As an advisor, you can convey that good-living vibe with a wine appreciation event. You'll build an atmosphere of goodwill with your important clientele as well as prospective clients.

A vibrant niche

Wine is socio-demographically identified with the top 10% of wage earners, and it conveys the message of fine living. As a wine lover myself, I have found that wine can help people explore their senses; it brings together science and art.

Wine interest is strong and growing in the U.S. In recent years, wine has become Americans' favorite alcoholic beverage, according to Gallup poll. Consumption patterns have risen for the last 12 consecutive years. So it's most important for you to understand the type of people who are being captivated by wine.

- 65% female
- 35+ years of age
- average household income \$100k+
- cosmopolitan, travel interests, and socially driven

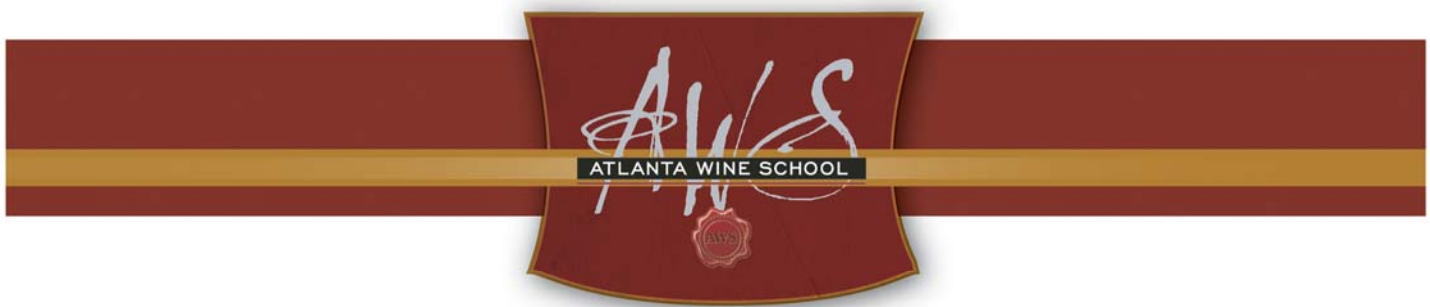
Like the Greeks

Three thousand years ago, the Greek symposium was an important social institution. The word "symposium" literally means "to drink together" (from the Greek prefix syn, or "together," and the verb pinein, "to drink"). After a feast, these parties featured the structured drinking of wine as a means of increasing creativity and lowering inhibitions. Important leaders in commerce, academics, and politics frequented these gatherings, where relationships were built and business transacted.

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Today, wine can bring the same benefit to your events, making them memorable because you're offering an experience rather than just an amorphous gathering. With wine tasting as the lure, you engage subjects by entertaining and educating them about something that benefits the rest of their social life. Financial advisors reap the benefits of the positive feelings and convivial atmosphere that come along with making clients happy.

7 keys to success

Here are seven keys to hosting a memorable wine event:

1. **You had me at "hello."** Effectively introducing clients to your wine event is the critical first step. I owned a staffing company in a prior life, and we noticed that when we put new staffers through a thorough orientation at their new corporate environment, their effectiveness, satisfaction, and retention improved dramatically.

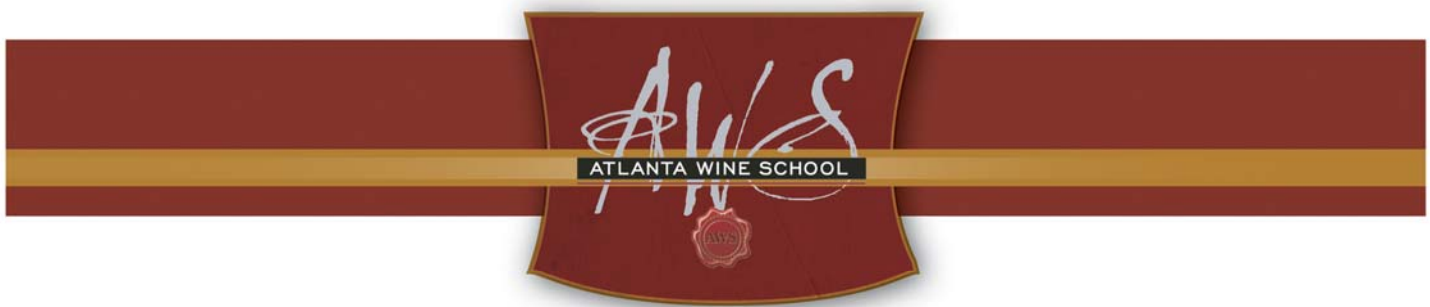
How we first engaged someone was pivotal. Financial industry regulations reduce your ability to be creative on your event invitations, but with enough advance notice, your corporate lawyers may just help you get a tantalizing message across. Remember that all of your targeted clientele are getting the same boring invitations from everyone. You and your invitation need to look different and stand out.

2. **Another wine dinner?** Whatever you do, don't commit the sin of predictability. Boilerplate wine events—"Please join XYZ Financial for another staid wine dinner at Ruth's Chris Steak House"—rarely achieve what you hope. So even if your marketing department has convinced you to "do wine events because wine is chic and attracts the affluent," be aware of the limitations. The wine dinner is ubiquitous and has been beaten to death. On top of that, its seated environment makes it challenging to interact with all of your guests. Instead, invite guests to a hot art gallery that you have rented out, with excellent catered cuisine, high-class stemware, fine wines, and a conversational wine expert (or chef) to entertain the guests.
3. **Less is more.** I have heard of FAs with a group size of 40 who gain two or three appointments from prospects in a single evening. However, we'd have to assume they were not even able to meet and engage half of their attendees. If that's the case, they threw a free party for 20 people. That's pretty expensive. It would have made more sense to send those 20 a piece of junk mail. That's why I recommend pruning your guest list to the number of people you can actually meet and greet in an evening.
4. **My time is valuable.** You're inviting clients and prospects to a function in hopes of earning new business, and no matter how nice the function sounds to them, people know what this is. They know why you are doing it, and they are sensitive about when the event takes place and how long it will last. Make the location close to them, start it after work, and consider primarily Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday evenings, which will not conflict with purely social engagements.

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5. **Liability.** Yes, legal concerns can be a part of any party, professional or personal, where alcohol is being served. Liability is an unavoidable part of our lives, but that doesn't mean we hide in a cave to avoid it. Cultivate an unobtrusive awareness about appropriate drinking among your guests.
 - a. **How much?** The pours for a wine tasting are 1.5 to 2.0 oz. If guests consume all six of your offerings, that still only provides the equivalent of about two glasses of wine (2 x 5 oz).
 - b. **How long?** We limit our events to 2.5 hours, from start to finish. Nine p.m. is normally our strike time, and that's a typical departure time for midweek events anyway. If you allow guests to join you when they are already inebriated, or if it can be shown that your bartender/wine expert served them to excess, you might as well hand over your liquid assets to me.
6. **It's not what you say; it's how you say it.** Just because you know this chef or this wine guy who really knows his stuff doesn't mean you should position that person in front of 25 strangers and expect him or her to perform. While your guests may be impressed with an accomplished chef and credentialed wine expert, what they will remember is how this person made them feel. You will separate yourself by having a persuasive entertainer who shows style and charisma in his or her delivery. I know people who have amassed encyclopedic skills when it comes to wine, but they would be disasters if they were expected to entertain people for any length of time.
7. **Little things mean a lot.** Some FAs will provide custom-made boxes of Belgian chocolates (produced and labeled with their company logo) for guests to take home. For many of our events, we employ a photographer (you don't need to pay more than \$200 for a two-hour evening) who will grab shots of guests having fun. Delivery of the pictures is a good excuse to get in touch with guests after the event. Get creative—something like a quality corkscrew bearing your logo/name can be purchased in bulk for \$4 each. Clients have kept ours for years.

I hope these pointers will stimulate and guide you in producing a memorable, effective wine tasting that will pave the way for more business with ideal clients.

Michael Bryan is the founder and director of the Atlanta Wine School. He helps financial advisors host entertaining and educational wine events for their clients. For more information, visit his website: <http://www.AtlantaWineSchool.com>

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