

The Business Journal

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 37

OCTOBER 10, 2003

Small **BUSINESS**



Guy du Vin has been providing wine consulting services to restaurants for over five years. Prior to that, David Holstrom was employed as wine director for the Heathman Management Group and spent over 25 years in the restaurant business. Guy du Vin assists restaurants with putting together profitable, interesting and unique comprehensive wine programs that focus on complementing the food, rather than overwhelming it. Guy du Vin also aims to put together a wine list that is not your usual fare.

The web site, www.guyduvin.com started late in 2002 with its main focus on Internet sales of value-driven wines—wines that are very high quality relative to their price. The web site also offered some of the more difficult to obtain and esoteric wines to be

DOSSIER: **David Holstrom**

found in the Portland market. The wines are presented in an informative, but humorous style via an email based newsletter.

BUSINESS PAST

Why this location: Portland has a robust food and wine culture. It is one of the best cities in the country for wine availability. Regarding our actual space, we use a home office. Since I visit clients at their locations, there's no need for office space and my costs—and fees—stay low.

The philosophy is the same for the retail business. We aren't looking for the walk-in

Guy du Vin

- **Owner:** David Holstrom
- **What we do:** Restaurant wine consulting for local establishments such as Southpark, Bluehour, McCormick & Schmick's and wine sales via the internet.
- **Location:** 8134 S.E. 15th Ave., Portland. On the web at www.guyduvin.com

customer. In addition, we run on a very low inventory model and don't need much warehouse space. Flexibility stays up and costs stay down.

Reason for startup: We started the restaurant consulting business because so

Dossier: *Guiding wine lovers to the unusual vintages*

many of the wine programs in town seemed to feature a very limited range and styles of wines. It also appeared to us that there wasn't a lot of thought being given to wine lists enhancing and complementing the style of food a restaurant was serving. We offered programs that were designed to make it easy and fun for people to try new, unfamiliar wines.

The site, www.guyduvin.com grew out of the need created by introducing all these wonderful, hard-to-find and esoteric wines in the restaurants. I became tired of answering telephone calls from wine shops that were asking where to find those wines for their customers and decided to start selling them myself. I'm fortunate that I get to taste so many wines every week. I found it frustrating that the average wine consumers would rarely hear about many of these wonderful, inexpensive wines, let alone get to drink them. I also feel that for all the lip service given to making wine more accessible, most wine writers, magazines, restaurants and sommeliers succeed only in keeping an aura of exclusivity around wine. I wanted to try to do something different.

Best business plan advice: Stick to selling what you believe in. Don't compromise your principles just to get a sale.

Worst business plan advice: Need to have retail space.

Smartest networking move: Seeing my sales representatives—from the wine companies and distributors—as sources of information and part of my network. They see the restaurants and companies in need of better wine programs and put them in touch with me. In addition, the decision to do wine tastings at special events and in people's homes has increased our visibility among an important group of targeted consumers.

Main source of startup help: My wife and business partner was earning a good living in high-tech sales and allowed me time to build the consulting business without worrying about paying the bills. Also, we kept our startup costs to a minimum.

Biggest setback: Looking for retail space before we started up www.guyduvin.com.

What set you back on track: Just doing it—getting online and realizing we could do just fine without a storefront.

BUSINESS PRESENT

Customer base: We consult for three local restaurants in addition to a locally based national restaurant company. On the retail

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“Most of our customers have one thing in common—they appreciate discovery.”

DAVID HOLSTROM
GUY DU VIN

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end we have well over a thousand e-mail customers that subscribe to our newsletter. Most of our customers are people who enjoy wine, but aren't “experts.” They have a moderate to substantial amount of discretionary income and are looking for good wine values. While they may vary in income and specific wine preferences, most of our customers have one thing in common—they appreciate discovery. One of our core competencies is the ability to make people feel comfortable in trying something new. It's all about learning. Feedback from our customers is that they are excited about the wines they've discovered through us and that they enjoy wine much more than they used to.

Greatest profit: Certainly the consulting business at this stage. It's matured over the last four years, and I need to be selective about additional clients. However, the retail business is growing quickly and will soon surpass the consulting revenue.

Most important lesson learned: Doing something that you love really can be profitable.

Best advice ignored: The customer is always right.

Most influential business book: None really, however books like “The One Minute Manager” and “Who Moved My Cheese” helped me understand the pathetic state of most business writing in the United States.

What works: The low overhead.

What needs work: The low overhead. Although keeping our costs down allows me to sleep well at night, we need to improve our ability to get in front of the customer. Many of the wines we offer are obscure and some people, especially our new customers, just need to taste them.

VISION

How big you'll get: We always want this to be a small business. We'd like to grow

the business to about four times where it is today.

Where you'll relocate: No plans to leave Portland, this is one of the best places in the country to live and work. We'll be looking for quasi-warehouse space. A funky location where we can store wine and stage deliveries, but where customers can drop in and taste our latest selections.

Who'll design your offices: Bruce Carey of Bluehour if I can talk him into it.

How you'll balance personal philosophy with business: My philosophy is you cannot be anything if you try to be everything. It's still about making a living. I've had to tone down some of the stuff I've written because I tend to go for the joke or the “punch” to get people thinking. But after we had a few folks unsubscribe with some rather pointed comments, I remember why I'm doing this. I stay true to my principles, but soften the tone.

STUFF TO MAKE PEOPLE READ THIS

Most yearned-for customer: Loves wine, has lots of discretionary income, just had a 5,000-bottle wine cellar built and loves Guy du Vin's taste in wine and asks us to stock it. Slightly cynical sense of humor a plus.

Favorite web site: www.guyduvin.com, of course.

Favorite Portland neighborhood: Sellwood

Most admired local businessperson: Karen Hinsdale of The Cellar Door. She's smart, she's gracious and she knows wine. She's always given me great advice.

What you offer that no one else could/would: Wines with soul. We offer a unique perspective on wine. We try to only offer wines that impart a sense of place and that honor the connection between the vine, the soil, the one that makes the wine and the one that consumes it.

Good wine is more than just a beverage, if you are open to it, wine can speak to you in many ways on many levels—just like a good book. Great wine can help you to become a better person, sing on key, become incredibly attractive to others, clear your complexion, and help you to refrain from wearing socks with sandals—Portland fashion statements notwithstanding.

Favorite wine: Vintage champagne. I'd drink it twice a day if it were cheaper.

Favorite place in Portland to drink wine: In my living room with my wife.