

Strategies for Building Your Regional Brand

The Rise and Rise of Brand Barossa

- Peter Sawrey, Chairman Wine Barossa

How does this idiot qualify to talk on Regional Branding? I arrived in the Barossa in 1985 with my wife, a 3-year old daughter and 'old faithful', the trailer, full of personal belongings, an accountant who drank a lot of wine. Some would call my move from Melbourne, to begin life again, a brave sea change experience.

Barossa Mark I impressions still stick in my mind. Abundant natural assets, the granite, old gum trees of Eden Valley spilling down to a tapestry of bright green vineyards, solid steep roofed stone cottages, little villages, dirt roads and smiling people with unpronounceable and unspellable names, smoked meats, magnificent smallgoods, the English in the hills and the Germans in the Valley. But what, assembled listeners, lurked beneath this blissful exterior of history, heritage and wine. I promise you all, it was not the food. There was one restaurant called Vintners, absolutely superb. By coincidence run by an eccentric couple who had emigrated from one of my favourite Melbourne eateries 'Fives' in Fitzroy. This became our oasis in the desert of Barossa food. Often on a Saturday night, Rosy and I, and little Emma under the table or asleep in front of the fire, would often dine alone in the place. Barossans appeared happy enough but one could discern a suspicious disposition to outsiders and the not well known. Perhaps the 25 years story is true, mind you, I don't really care but to this day I have not been invited to break bread and have a schlook in a genuine 5th generation Lutheran home. Not to worry, the powers that be still have 5 years to right this wrong. I can wait maybe it's alphabetical. The villages soon became Truro the spooky, Stockwell the pub, Eden Valley the dope smokers, Angaston the backwater blend of farmers and wine folk, Tanunda bad taste/kitsch and Nuriootpa the soul-less repository of brick veneer.

And wineries everywhere, the seriously large to the miniscule, at a time of an Australian wine lake and an ill-considered vine pull scheme.

Then, suddenly, off to McLaren Vale with the bride, 2 little daughters by now and the well travelled, trusty trailer. Peter Sawrey, Secretary/Manager of the McLaren Vale Winemakers. We loved McLaren Vale, still do actually. A magnificent region of people, wines and humour, where the hills run into the sea, little family owned wineries, good food and local produce, mixed farming and beaches.

It was McLaren Vale where I connected, truly connected with wine, wine as a valid industry not just a drink and I immersed myself, headfirst. I did not become a bore, I became an addict. The locals were only too happy to teach or pass on knowledge. I enrolled in Roseworthy and importantly, some would say presciently, I organised the Winemaker Olympics, a rolling alcoholic ramble of sporting events through the regions of South Australia. And, to be brutally honest, there was certainly no lack of eager helpers, in any participating region. We lawn bowled in the Riverland, tennised in Clare,

cricketed in Barossa, golfed in McLaren Vale and staged the Winter Olympics in the Coonawarra – darts, pool, quoits and naturally, leg wrestling!

McLaren Vale was my watershed 2 years. Great 'craic' as the Irish say. Then back to the Barossa, Barossa Mark II, more focussed, more researched, more knowledgeable. A serious job, back to the little stone home in Eden Valley, a smiling bride (finally the bastard's got a decent job and will cut back on the piss a little), 2 school children and old faithful, the trailer, bringing up the rear. The year is 1988.

I am assigned to Yalumba Public Relations reporting to Robert Hill Smith, he who sleeps with one eye open and works 24 hours a day, every day. The notion of 8am to 6pm, as a working day is new to him. He asks all employees to involve themselves in extra-curricular service, events, vintage festival, gourmet weekend, the community, the council, whatever.....

I decided to involve myself in the Angaston Main Street's planning of a float for the Vintage Festival of 1989. Heady stuff for the new boy from Melbourne via McLaren Vale. I have this huge idea. Here we are the English in Angaston versus the Barossa Deutsche down in the valley. What we needed was a Spitfire, a skilfully constructed Spitfire just like the Battle of Britain with two markings on the fuselage depicting the two World Wars that we won. The Chairman of the Float Committee, a pillar of local society and regular church attendee, was a lovely man named Viv Fiebiger, Barossa Deutscher. He just didn't get it, neither did the committee really.

Anyhow that was my introduction to committees and the process and function thereof. And my takeout from the incident was don't knock anything or anybody who has kindly offered to volunteer their time for their community or region. Volunteers are the backbone of regional effort. Oh, and don't do jokes in the Barossa.

Externalites powerpoint.

Identifying your natural assets and working with them. Then taking your history, culture and personality and weaving it into a magnificent story, your regional story, the blueprint of your identity, your DNA unlike any other region. Your USP, your unique selling proposition, as they say in the music business, your 'hook'.

Building your regional brand requires time and a critical eye cast widely over your defined territory that will forever be your region's mission, vision and modus operandi. Never stray from this path once it is set but make absolutely sure you are on the right path. Have the conviction to change to the right path if you think it's wrong. It is never too late to check or audit your region.

Consider the look of your region. The cards that Mother Nature has dealt you. Flat, hilly, steep, lakes, sea, granite, limestone, forests and gum trees are potentially your assets. I look at Coonawarra and I think bicycles! Everyone should be riding bikes everywhere. It is as flat as an Anzac biscuit in Jane Ferrari's back pocket! And they should include that most serene seaside

village of Robe in everything they do. The Riverland and the mighty Murray River. The Clare has a Riesling Trail, it is fabulous on a bike albeit taxing on the unfit and overweight. We all need to consider walking trails, bike tracks within our regions and, where practical, adjacent regions. The Heysen Trail could join Barossa, Adelaide Hills and McLaren Vale. Redrawn it could become a loop that encompasses Adelaide, Adelaide Plains and Clare then Barossa, Adelaide Hills and so on.

Proximity to your consumer base is a huge bonus. The Barossa is one hour north-east of Adelaide, Adelaide airport and the interstate train and bus service. I would suggest that one to one and a half hours travel is the maximum time for a spontaneous, unplanned visit. Over that and you are committing to an overnight stay. How easy is your region to access if you don't own a car? Personally, I think we are underdone in the transport infrastructure stakes and we need to revisit this aspect of our regionality.

Every region needs a decent event and every region needs diversions of a non-wine nature. Fishing in the sea, the lakes and the rivers. Fishing, the number one leisure pursuit of Australians. A magnificent concert on a floating barge anchored on the sea or lake, fireworks on the watery horizon. Has any region yet revealed the definitive natural granite amphitheatre? Every year within that amphitheatre there is staged the most famous concert, a la Leeuwin Estate.

Also consider what your forebears have bequeathed you. Your vines, your people, your architecture, your ancestry, your historical footprint. I've got old Shiraz, Lutherans, mettwurst and stone cottages and fashioned a bloody good story really. I've also got Riesling in Eden Valley, seriously good Cabernet but not being greedy, we will let Coonawarra have that. Maybe we'll champion Grenache next. Wrattenbully can have Merlot, Victoria South, Pinot and Chardonnay, North, fortifieds. Tasmania can have sparkling. Your region needs a specific champion to focus on then once inside your region you can set about regaling the visitor with your complete offering. Don't waste precious time trying to be everything to everyone.

We've also got Max Schubert, Peter Lehmann and Robert O'Callaghan to name but a few, human champions. People who throughout their lives have travelled, been interviewed, been seen promoting the Barossa. Do you all have a regional human champion because you need one. Ideally, you need a learned, craggy-faced elder, who has seen the industry from the inside for 30 or more vintages and must be a local. This makes for credibility. If you just happen to have someone around who's brilliant with financials, trends, hedging and exchange rates, who can become the foremost authority for the analysts, business editors and brokers enquiries, then you have discovered or uncovered another powerful regional champion.

If you think this is bullshit, reflect for a moment on the huge void that now exists in McLaren Vale with the passing of Greg Trott. He was the McLaren Vale champion.

So let me pull this together for you. You've had a bloody good look around your region. Your story is solid. Your champions are in place both varietal and personal and your regional non-wine offerings – bikes, walks, boats, fishing, surfing, golf, library, events, art gallery, music, monuments stand ready. I could touch here on accommodation but honestly, when it's all said and done, it's only a bed, a shower and a dunny, so I shall leave that to the experts of the hospital corner. Now let's cut to the now and the future.

Internalities – powerpoint.

Your region must be totally integrated. You cannot drive a region when tourism, winemakers, visitor information, local council, events committees and every other driver is working independently. Everything must interconnect NOT “Don't let your left hand know, what your right hand do” as Dave Koerner sang.

So now I'm at the brink, tell you everything or tell you lies. Make out that the Barossa is superior to all others or do those little webbed feet under the apparent serenity really push hard to keep Barossa afloat. I assure you the feet are pumping!

The rise and rise of the Barossa region has been hard slog over a considerable period of time. Much has also been fortuitous. Grange, Hill of Grace, Robert Parker ratings, Langton classification, the big wine companies, the bow tie, Wolf Blass, Peter Lehmann, major awards, Jimmy Watsons, proximity to Adelaide, Shiraz especially old vine Shiraz, continues to point the spotlight on the region. Opinion makers continue to visit and write stories and the visitors continue to visit. We have regular events and happenings, the pot of welcome is always on the boil but what really happens behind the scenes?

There's no doubt I set myself high standards – some would even say I'm a dreamer. But I am frustrated, my committee is frustrated and Fuller is really frustrated. There are 200 producers licences attributed to Barossa and about 35 of those share the dream. There are 300 odd growers and none, yet, share the dream. There are stainless steel experts, vineyard suppliers, irrigators, builders, concreters, all the associated wine industry affiliates and not one shares the dream. There are delis, service stations, restaurants, takeaways, etc. that don't share the dream, actually I would go so far to say that these people don't understand that tourism means consumers, extra business, bums on seats.

And what is the dream? My dream is a united, 100% membership all contributing to the marketing funds pot to drive the Brand Barossa vision. Take winemakers interstate and overseas, host trade, consumers and media in the Valley, conjure up new events and functions, everything conceptualised can be achieved, seminars, technical talks, R & D, I want it all.

Why are you in the Barossa using this proud regional brand on your labels or businesses and not contributing to its financial health.

Professor Lang Lockshin, UniSA, presented a paper titled 'How much is your region's name worth?' Here are some key takes.

Regional Brand recognition influences choice far more than price.

- Well recognised regions outsell the less recognised.
- Add a gold medal and well known will significantly outsell others
- Consumers will pay more for Barossa Shiraz.
- Building a relationship between consumer and producer is essential to increasing recognition.
- regions must commit to a long term strategy.

Years of pursuing the vision have given the Barossa its very own critical mass. We have temporarily encountered 'apathy'. But there still remains a plethora of positives and if you want to transport any of these home, I would encourage it. Competition is healthy and will spur us on.

Barossa food has turned the corner. We now have a plethora of good eateries. We also have the Saturday farmers market, fresh local produce accessible to everyone. I entreat all regions to establish a farmers market, fresh, local and healthy. Our pubs need a kick in the arse though. A huge, piled up plate of pre-fabricated crap is not food.

We have become political animals and I would encourage you to have members you know like and trust sitting in your local councils. Your councils should be assisting you financially and it's nice to have some weight within the chamber influencing that financial largesse and potential policy impacts.

Our Tourism arm now under the control of SATC is focussed on the task and very professional as evidenced by the receipt of the 2005/06 Marketing Plan 3 weeks ago.

Environmentally, we have a champion in Dr Cecil Camilleri and we are committed to the education of relevant groups, APSIM/Vinelogic with the CSIRO, maybe a biosphere project, scenario planning, all aimed at being totally healthy and sustainable at Vision 2025.

We constantly keep an eye out for like-minded and generous sponsors. Personally, I have no issue with a major naming rights sponsor of the Barossa Vintage Festival. As an aside, I have no issue with McDonalds setting up in the Barossa. It would simply be on our terms and conditions not theirs.

Now I would just like to echo a previous sentiment, committees and volunteers. Every region needs at very least winemakers, tourism, and events committees. Personally, most need a creative ideas committee which should include people from winemakers, tourism, and events. Keep regular communications with all members, the community, local council and businesses. Let them know what you are up to every step of the journey. Surround yourselves with likeminded and success oriented people. Not self servers, nor the terminally bewildered. Those who are predisposed to continuous and boring speech should be discouraged. It is your time, there is much to be done, don't drag out the process. Short sharp and shiny should

be the order of business with specified actions X name X time line. Remember this is the second most important function in your branch. The third was reviewing your region – every facet.

Drum roll and the most important asset for regional brand building is a local, totally in the know, thoroughly connected, researched communications company. The Barossa has had Fuller Communications since 1996 and it is members money well spent. He has been the well regarded, local initiator of the Barossa Winemakers marketing push plus our key contact for international and national media, Australian Wine Industry affiliates and many events, visits and trade tastings/shows.

You all need a key contact in your region who can also knock out a press release and be a thorough creative organiser.

Don't waste money on any company or person who does not comprehensively understand the product, the people, the politics and the powerful forces within your region.

Why pay \$200/hour for a consultant who flies in from Sydney or Melbourne? In 6 months time you will drop \$50k on advice and realise that it was all quite within your ability. Nothing is more genuine and real than a real person from a real region having a red hot go. It smacks of sincerity and earnest intent.

Find people in your region with the skill sets you need and nurture them.

I sincerely trust a gem has fallen upon you this morning.

Thanks for listening.