

# On-Premise Trends off the iPad

By Joshua Greene



Just as information technologists see the demise of the newspaper as inevitable, purveyors of digital wine list applications share a similar sense that the future is on their side.

Jennifer Martucci is on her second tech company, having woken up one morning in a hotel room with an idea. "I thought it would be great to roll over and push a button and have the coffee come," she says. Frustrated by what she saw as an inefficient process, she developed the technology for an in-room tablet to streamline the ordering process.

At a friend's restaurant, a conversation about ordering gave her a parallel idea. Her friend's consultant told her he had a client who wanted to put his wine list on a Kindle. The client turned out to be Tony May of SD26, and Martucci convinced May to shift the idea toward a tablet with a "more of a robust, interactive guest experience." She set out to develop a system that allowed restaurateurs to customize and control navigation and user interface. Today, her company, Incentient, claims clients in 17 countries with a current focus in Las Vegas, where her tablet allows restaurants to offer their list in up to 150 languages.

Josh Hermesmeyer, who built a name in the wine industry as PinotBlogger, chronicling the development of his Sonoma County vineyard online, has also rolled out a digital wine list platform. Hermesmeyer says the idea for Labrador Omnimedia and its Tastevin wine list came up while he was in Hawaii, on vacation with John Jordan, of Jordan Vineyards (now on the Labrador Omnimedia board). They were talking about the early digital wine list at *The French Laundry*, wondering how a tablet wine list might be strengthened if suppliers could add labels

and stories to it.

He built a team to design software and services for tablet wine lists. In addition to the efficiencies and sales strategies the software offers, he believes the very newness of the technology helps restaurants move more wine. "If you are on the fence about whether or not to order wine and someone drops an iPad in your lap," he says, "you're probably going to look at it. Guests almost always play with it. Once they are engaged, they may order wine."

The market is packed with contenders, from Uncorkd to Uptown Networks, accubar, vinipad and eSommelier. They all offer varied search and inventory management capabilities, all hoping, as Josh Saunders of Uncorkd points out, to convince restaurateurs that they will see increased sales by moving to digital lists. "It's for people who otherwise wouldn't order wine, because they are less intimidated, getting a chance to use technology to browse the menu," he says.

Not all sommeliers are excited by the technology, but while the debate continues over the relative merits of digital and ink-and-paper lists, the proliferation of iPad lists and other digital platforms is effecting

one major change. By aggregating data from many client accounts, purveyors of this technology may soon be in a position to study wine trends on-premise, a segment that Nielsen and other market analysts have yet to break. Asked point blank if he had plans to move into this space, Hermesmeyer at Labrador Omnimedia said it was part of the business plan. "We have the ability to aggregate and anonymize the data from our clients, to sell or to share. We believe we will be the Nielsen for on-premise. That was our driving idea from the beginning. We're not only interested in what gets sold in, but what gets sold out." Hermesmeyer hopes to answer questions such as: What sells on Valentine's Day? Or: What impact does a wine's position on a list have on sales? "Because we have this rich descriptive data, we can look at how unoaked chardonnays are doing, because they are described that way. Otherwise, that would all have to be entered by hand," Hermesmeyer notes.

For now, the random distribution and limited range of these firms' clients limits the statistical relevance of the data, but as these companies strengthen their positions in the market, one will likely emerge as a major information source. To better understand where things are today, and what may be possible in the future, we asked people working in the digital space to run some data on restaurant wine sales, and offer the results on page 63.

We present these data points as an example of what may be possible in the future, as technology makes the restaurant wine market more transparent. And to balance our own coverage of trends at the highest level of dining culture, we'll continue to report on these developments; we hope to incorporate this new data into our restaurant poll reporting as it becomes more representative and available. ■

"While I was writing this application for hotels, I got talking to a friend at his restaurant about how guests should be able to order from the table. So I started to mock something up for that, same as room service."

—Jennifer Martucci,  
Incentient

