

# THE HUMANS OF WINE VOICES\*

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Where are you based?

Calgary, Alberta (Canada)

What is your job in the wine business?

Importer/Agency

What is your perception of the wine business during the Covid-19 emergency?

My perception of the wine business during this time is that it is an interesting time. We may see a lot of things we find normal to be a lot differently now like how we engage with wineries. There are a lot of organizations who fly importers over to their country for wine tours but are now doing this virtually instead. It isn't the same thing obviously, but I'm impressed the way these people have changed the way they do things and not just give up. I don't mind these virtual meetings as it just isn't the same thing as visiting the winery(s) to get that feel of what it is they are trying to achieve or feeling those same emotions, but at least we can get some kind of idea as to what they are all about and get a chance to speak to them. It's a good start at the least.

How do you think this emergency is going to change the world of wine?

The world of wine may change because, as I mentioned above, there are now ways to cut costs to get people to familiarize themselves with the wineries and wines from your area with our actually being there. But, I do believe we will also go back to what we used to do without just picking up and hopping a plane just to go see someone we may start a business relationship with. I myself love going on the wine tours, but I now know there are less expensive ways to meet people beforehand now. I always encouraged this anyways, but now I see people are embracing this way to do things.

What has already changed in your job?

Not much has changed with my job but now we are all just keeping our distance from each other when we talk or taste. The restaurant business has almost come to a standstill but they are still doing deliveries and curbside pickup for food and alcohol orders. Our business is about 85% retail as we only deal with independent stores and restaurants so our sales haven't dropped off too much really.

### What do you think are the main challenges for the wine business right now?

The main challenges right now are keeping up sales to a point where we can still operate and on the other side is to still look at new products to bring in from new suppliers. The latter hasn't changed a lot but suppliers are definitely more open to sending samples as this is the only way for them to get people to try what they make right now and they still have marketing budgets to spend. There will now also be tons of places shutting their doors so we will also have new people to deal with so the other challenge is to find out who the new owners and operators are and how they do business. Sales still won't spike as the new distancing rules will keep most places maybe 1/2 full. This makes it very difficult for to operate as you are only allowed to be 1/2 full but your operating costs are still the same when you are completely full. This means those places may be trying to cut their costs as much as they can so some places may not want to spend any money on better products. This may make it more difficult to deal with them.

### What do you think could be done to overcome them?

To overcome this here, people need to support these places by going there and/or still ordering from them. We, as a company who needs to do business with these places, have to support them in whatever ways we can. If we have price reductions (LTO's), we need to make sure they know this right away. Maybe we have to give them bottles of wine to help them with their costs of operating, but we also have to run a business as well so this can't happen too often.

### What are your activities on social media?

Social media for us is still the same. Post a time or two a day about what we do but not too much as to make people ignore us if we are doing it too much. Talking about our products but we also have to be careful here as it is illegal to advertise. Posting has to be done in a way to not rush our agency but to push the wines and the wineries instead.

### How is the promotion of wine going to change?

I don't think the promotion of wine will change too much as we move forward. There are already a lot of challenges with younger people not wanting to spend an extra \$2-\$3 per bottle as they only want what we call an engineered beverage here, which is a commercialized wine made in massive quantities but a huge corporation as they think it's the way to go. Maybe now that they have been locked up for a while, this will change. On the winery side, it will be interesting to see what they do. I personally hope they can continue on the way they were previously but that is to be seen.