
Portocork wins California wine country cork supplier award

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Portocork is rolling out in January a 100 percent quality guarantee on each individual cork sold, and the company plans a big expansion to its Napa production and distribution facility.

With more than 40 employees producing 1.5 million-plus natural cork wine and other beverage closures per day in our 50,000-square-foot Napa Valley location, the company sells to over 1,500 customers throughout North America including Canada and Mexico.

Portocork is one of a few companies worldwide solely dedicated to natural cork. That means the stopper is punched from a solid piece of bark, compared with an agglomerate stopper formed from fragments and pieces of bark.

Other cork producers distribute to multiple countries but Portocork International in Portugal is in business solely to serve North America.

What have been recent highlights for your company?

Dustin Mowe: We continue to grow significantly each year for the past 10-plus years. Revenue growth is on track to be 9 percent in 2015. We take this as a sign that our winery partners continue to value specialists when dealing with suppliers. Rather than having multiple product offerings, Portocork continues to believe in being the expert on natural cork and also delivering that with the best service.

How has your operation changed in the past few years?

Mowe: We have become completely customer-focused and, as a result, have made several operational changes. We have added more customer-service personnel and expanded our sensory lab. The latter is to accommodate the more than 500 sensory sessions done annually for customers who come to Portocork to do sensory testing and choose their cork onsite.

We have invested in equipment to upgrade our industrial processes, added additional capabilities for cork customization via an additional laser printer and have added a new coating application process, which greatly improves our product performance.

How is your operation set to change in the foreseeable future?

Mowe: We are going to begin selling cork in January 2016 which has gone through a unique first of its kind process to analyze individual cork for TCA on an industrial scale and offer a 100 percent guarantee that each stopper is free of detectable TCA. This will be a game-changer for us and our industry, and as a result we expect to see explosive growth in the next 12 to 24 months. This was something 10 years ago we would have only dreamed about.

How healthy is the wine business?

Mowe: Very healthy. We just closed on a new piece of land on Gateway Road East in the Napa airport business park where we intend to invest several million dollars in building a new state of the art facility. This investment is a result of our confidence in the health of the U.S. wine business.

What are the top opportunities and challenges facing your business?

Mowe: We have seen enormous growth in sales to both craft beer and craft spirits. Those industries are booming, and each recognizes natural cork as contributing to an overall more premium image.

On the wine side, with the last few harvests' being sizable coupled with the growth in wine sales, we see big opportunities to continue to grow our business in all categories by continuing to be the best in customer service and with new unique offerings such as being the first in the cork industry to offer a 100 percent natural cork without the inherent risk of TCA taint.

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