

# WINE BUSINESS MONTHLY

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## PET Wine Bottles: Will Consumers Accept Them?

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The latest innovation in wine packaging is polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles. These plastic bottles have several technical benefits over glass bottles--lower weight, less space, easier to recycle--but unless consumers perceive that a plastic bottle with a screw cap can contain good wine, plastic bottles won't be widely used. Or, as the head winemaker at a large "value wine" operation said, "We can't use screw tops; people would think we make cheap wine."

### The Study

The study was designed to measure how open consumers are to buying wine in new PET bottles. Further, the study aimed to determine how these consumers perceive the value and quality of wine in PET bottles. We surveyed consumers in San Luis Obispo, California, at six different locations throughout the county. Our sample of 150 respondents may be small and from a geographically limited area, but a 2001 article in the San Luis Obispo *Tribune* reported that San Luis Obispo is "...the best [general] test market in the nation."

Our average respondent drank wine 11 times per month and spent a little over \$6 per bottle, not much different than the national median expenditure per bottle. The most important characteristics they look for when buying wine are good quality and reasonably priced: a low cost, good quality wine is perceived as a good value. In the past year, 80 percent had purchased wine with synthetic corks, 70 percent had purchased wine with a screw top but only one respondent had bought wine in a plastic bottle.

TABLE 1: Consumer likelihood of purchasing wine in a plastic bottle.

	With no information	After seeing bottle	After bottle & concept board
Extremely likely	2%	7%	14%
Very likely	7%	27%	33%
Somewhat likely	30%	42%	31%
Not very likely	28%	9%	16%
Not at all likely	33%	15%	7%

### What Consumers Thought

When first asked about wine in a plastic bottle, less than 10 percent thought that they would be likely to buy it as reported in **Table 1**. Over half said it was not likely

or not at all likely that they would buy wine in plastic. However, their responses changed as they learned more about the PET bottles.

After the initial question about the likelihood of buying wine in a plastic bottle, respondents were shown and allowed to hold a plastic wine bottle. After examining this bottle, respondents were again asked about the likelihood that they would buy wine in a plastic bottle. After examining the PET bottle, 34 percent of the respondents indicated they were "very likely" or "extremely likely" to buy wine in plastic, up from less than 10 percent before they were able to examine the bottle.

**TABLE 2: "Concept board"**

Plastic compared to glass
Plastic is lighter than glass
Plastic is slightly smaller than glass
Plastic is more easily recycled than glass
Plastic saves energy
Plastic can be taken to new locations
Plastic is virtually unbreakable

Lastly, respondents were shown a "concept board" listing several characteristics of plastic compared to glass as reported in **Table 2**. With this additional information about plastic bottles, 47 percent said they would be extremely or very likely to buy wine in a plastic bottle.

#### Next Steps for Wineries

The most significant result from our survey in this test market is that consumers need to be educated and informed about new packaging before they are willing to try it. Less than 10 percent of respondents said they were likely to

try wine in a plastic bottle before they knew anything about the product. However, after examining a plastic bottle and being told about the benefits of PET, almost half said they would try wine packaged in the format.

The first brave winery to sell wine in plastic bottles would likely benefit from point-of-sale information displays and other educational programs. Consumers need to be informed about the positive characteristics of plastic bottles--such as environmental friendliness, good value wine at a reasonable price and portability--to overcome the negative impression about quality and looks. It may have taken 50 years for the Stelvin screw cap to be accepted, but 70 percent of respondents had bought wine in a screw cap in the past year.

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