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Increase Tasting Room Profits

Niagara symposium next week will be Canada's first

by [Jane Firstenfeld](#)



Niagara-on-the Lake, Ontario -- A one-day symposium on Feb. 26 will be the first in Canada to focus on profitable tasting room operations for small and medium-sized wineries. Tasting Room Profitability will be hosted by Niagara College at its Niagara-on-the-Lake campus, which is home to a teaching winery and a 40-acre winegrape vineyard. Speakers from across the continent will address topics designed to maximize direct-to-consumer sales for both start-up and established wineries.

Keynote speaker, author/consultant Kelley Robertson, will emphasize that "Sales is NOT a Four-Letter Word," based on experience with consumer electronics at Canada's Sony Stores. California consultant Theresa Dorr will provide tips on building successful, profitable wine clubs. Other sessions will include increasing PR reach through press releases; newsletters and websites; customer quality assurance, and selling without fear.

John Ogryzlo, dean of Niagara College's wine and viticulture program, told *Wines & Vines* that this first annual program is based on similar sessions organizers had seen in California and elsewhere. Inaugurated within a tight time frame, the symposium will not include trade show exhibits this year. The site can handle as many as 200-plus attendees, and Ogryzlo encouraged all interested parties to sign up.

The 100-125 registrants so far are mostly from the Niagara region and nearby Prince Edward County, but, he said, "We'd welcome our neighbors from New York to attend, too. We think it's going to be really good for people who would like to increase their cellar-door sales," noting that wine tourism seems to be holding steady in the area.

According to Ogryzlo, wines in Ontario are sold through the government stores of the Liquor



Control Bureau of Ontario (LCBO); direct to consumer at wineries or through wine clubs, or direct to retailers. LCBO's cut is 58% of the wines sold at its stores, but only about 20% of direct sales, a compelling motivation to build the direct-to-consumer channel.



Some 35 students are enrolled in Niagara's existing wine and viticulture program, an intensive, 2-year, five-semester curriculum concentrated on grapegrowing and winemaking. A new graduate program on wine business management will be open for 24 students this coming fall, Ogryzlo said. He expects that students in the graduate program will include people from many disciplines, many already in the wine business.

To enroll in next week's tasting room program, please visit tastingroomprofitability.ca.

Registration starts at CA\$79 for members of the Wine council of Ontario, \$89 for other industry members, with lower tariffs for additional registrants from the same company.

The Niagara-on-the Lake campus will also be the site of Uncorked 2008 on May 27-28. This biennial wine industry conference and trade show is expected to host about 60 exhibitors, plus industry representatives from Ontario and neighboring states and provinces. For details and registration, visit uncorked.info. Discounted early-bird registration ends Friday, Feb. 29.



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