

# WINES & VINES

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August 2013 Issue of *Wines & Vines*

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## The Proof Is in the Packaging

Authentication features on bottles track wine for sellers and communicate with buyers

by **Tina Vierra**

Asurprising number of companies have entered the business of protecting products from tampering and counterfeiting. Anyone who has ever seen a street vendor pushing a knockoff Louis Vuitton purse, Apple device or Rolex watch can understand why these brands have moved to protect their products from losing value in the marketplace—not to mention sales—due to these predatory practices.

It is a natural transition for companies offering such protections to turn their efforts to helping producers of high-end wines. For wine, some solutions for counterfeiting and other infringements on intellectual property rights can also enable producers to track products through distribution and connect better with trade and consumer buyers.

The technological solutions can provide three legs of support, and the most effective systems combine multiple techniques.

1. Authentication or anti-counterfeiting technology answers whether or not the product is genuine.
2. Track-and-trace capability requires additional infrastructure and can reveal where a wine goes.
3. Marketing is the third leg, and it enables customers to access multimedia content by scanning a code on the wine package.

One function of anti-counterfeiting is the public recognition feature that is visible to the naked eye and aimed at consumers (e.g. watermarks, tamper-evident seals and holograms). These markers offer some confidence that security measures are in place; they also send the message that the wine is of high quality if it is worth protecting.

Consumers and the wine trade can detect other features using mobile devices; the technology makes it possible to give each individual bottle of wine a

### Information sources for authentication

In 2006, Massachusetts wine collector Russell H. Frye filed a lawsuit against California wine merchant The Wine Library, accusing the company of selling him more than 30 bottles of fake wine. The parties reached a private settlement in 2007. From his experiences as a collector, and in the legal tangle of trying to prove a counterfeiting case, Frye launched a wine industry watchdog website, WineAuthentication.com, which is dedicated to providing resources "to help people determine the authenticity of (rare) bottles."

The site tracks legal actions, bottles claimed to be fraudulent or fake, registries of fine wines and offers articles, editorials and a list of companies like the ones in this article, which offer solutions to wineries and collectors wishing to thwart counterfeiting.

Global research firm Alexander Watson Associates has performed detailed analyses and created large-scale reports of wine labeling and worldwide identification efforts.

IPCybercrime is a firm of investigators who have branched from trademark protection into advising and investigating counterfeiting and fraud. Advice includes where consumers might make purchases, how to be sure the seller is legitimate, what to do if the seller disappears and how fakes are detected and investigated.

**T.V.**

## Wine Industry Metrics

Off-Premise Sales »	Month	12 Months
June 2012	\$595 million	\$6,617 million
June 2013	\$535 million	\$7,109 million
		6% 7%

  

Direct-to-Consumer Shipments »	Month	12 Months
June 2012	\$67 million	\$1,353 million
June 2013	\$74 million	\$1,510 million
		11% 12%

  

Winery Job Index »	Month	12 Months
June 2012	196	152
June 2013	224	182
		14% 20%

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unique and distinctive “fingerprint” for irrefutable proof of its authenticity. Typical features can include bubble tags, deformation sensors, invisible pigments, DNA markings, taggants (microchips and radio frequency identification or RFID tags), rare pigments and even NMR (nuclear magnetic resonance) spectroscopy.

Wine trade members and consumers who scan one of these markers can typically confirm a wine’s authenticity through a linked website where some services offer information, photos and even videos about the winery, the winemaker, food pairings, etc.

A third functionality is aimed at those who need to track the wine and see how it is faring with transport companies, customs agents, distributors and retailers. At this level, the winery or its agents can follow the paths of pallets, case boxes and even individual bottles by knowing when and where they were scanned by a shipper, trade member or customer. The technology can reveal when a product has been diverted to a parallel market, for example.

Below are summaries of what several leading providers of anti-counterfeiting, tracking and authentication technology offer to wineries. *Wines & Vines* chose to focus on companies that already have North American winery customers as well as those that have international winery customers and are now launching operations here.

#### Unique ID marks

Advanced Track and Trace, based in Rueil-Malmaison, France, has worked with the space industry, manufacturers of valuable spare parts, perfumes and cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and now beverage companies. Its technology is called Seal Vector, and it stamps each product package with a unique, digitally created ID mark and traces it via scanners during the journey to the end user. The square, pixelated codes are affixed either visibly, invisibly or both on packages to prevent thieves from repacking bogus goods in the original containers.

If a counterfeiter tried to reproduce the codes, they would be unreadable to scanners. The unique, centrally stored Seal Vector codes for each product ensure that counterfeiters cannot produce “legitimate” brand-packaging IDs for their knockoffs. Digital label printers produce the ATT QR codes and vector seals, which are then applied to capsules of individual wines using existing winery machinery. A consumer or anyone else along the supply chain can check the authenticity of the wine by reading the code with a smartphone.

ATT began marketing in the United States this year, and it is well established with customers in France such as the Alliance des Cru Bourgeois de Medoc.

Sleever International, with business units in seven countries, makes heat-shrink package sleeve labeling; its early benefits were decorative and served to protect wines from ultraviolet light damage and show tamper evidence. Now the company’s sleeve products also include anti-counterfeiting measures. Sleeves that can cover a whole bottle are in use with international brands such as Castel, Chandon do Brazil, Georges Dubœuf and Boisset. The Piper Heidsieck group has a sleeve-labeling facility in Epernay, France, that is devoted exclusively to Champagne.

The most recent Sleever level of protection is the Holesleeve, developed in partnership with a European leader of high-security holograms, Hologram Industries. The heat-shrink plastic label integrates holograms.

Holoptica of Belmont, Calif., offers DNA SmartMarks, developed by an Australian company and used at the Sydney Olympics to protect brands throughout the games, marking official Olympic consumer goods. The synthetic DNA material (a unique DNA sequence marker that does not occur in nature), combined with Holoptica’s holographic markers, can be used in security holograms and hot-stamping foils, holographic HRI laminate overlays, security inks, paper and foils containing holographic micro particles, holographic security tapes, security “track and trace” asset-marking systems, secure printing, brand protection and recognition, inventory management and anti-tampering seals.

Holoptica has just developed and is patenting a product called Authentic Wine QR, which has a holographic QR code (holoQR) embedded in the hologram. The stock hologram works on any security or standard printed matter and packaging, and it comes with several covert and overt security features. The two hologram products are available in silver or gold.

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