

ECOMMERCE CASE STUDY: *FOXEN VINEYARDS*

Who they are

Foxen is a well-known small production Santa Barbara company that's known as much for its personality as it is for its wines and vineyards. The laid-back winery is home to two very popular tasting rooms, including the solar-powered Foxen tasting room opened in 2009 and the nearby beloved historic Foxen 7200 tasting room known as "The Shack," which was featured in the Academy Award®-winning film *Sideways*. Since the winery's beginning in 1985, it has consistently committed to a "minimalist" approach to producing sustainably-farmed wines.



Before

A key foundation to Foxen's internal operating systems is its POS (point of sale) system, VinNOW. Winery staff uses the system heavily on a daily basis in its tasting rooms for on-site sales, to process wine club orders and as its master customer database. Ever since the winery started using VinNOW, Foxen wanted an eCommerce system that could communicate with VinNOW to save time and increase efficiency. Thus, beginning in the late 2000s, the winery found an eCommerce system that was able to do so, and set up their online store. Foxen did get some of the online and integration experience they were seeking with the system, but there were still plenty of pain points.

Although they could transfer eCommerce orders to VinNOW, customer record synchronization options to VinNOW were limited, forcing the staff to manually manipulate customer records, which is exactly what they had been trying to avoid with integration. In addition, Foxen produces several coveted wines that are in high demand but very low supply. The winery wanted to make these wines available on the website for their loyal club customers to purchase, but they were unable to restrict access to club members only and automate enforcement of those availability policies. Thus, the staff had to regularly review every web order, and occasionally cancel orders, resulting in disappointed customers.

From a general usability standpoint, Foxen also felt their site was not very user-friendly. The system lacked features to help customers navigate through the products and easily find their desired wine selection(s). All products were

lumped into a single category, and Foxen was unable to separate the red wines from the white wines, for example, and offer further category delineations, like so many other wineries offer their customers online. And while social media had long-proven its power, Foxen's store had no built-in features to encourage social sharing of their products on Facebook, Twitter, or any other social media sites on which so many customers like to share their preferences with their friends. Finally, Foxen was unhappy that their store was not well optimized for search engines.

Challenge

Since VinNOW was so integral to daily operations, the primary criterion was to find another eCommerce system that was integrated with VinNOW in a more thorough manner to suit their needs in updating customer records as well as passing order data. Foxen also wanted the new online store to offer a clean look and easy navigation for customers, social media and search engine options, and more winery-specific tools and features to help them run their business more efficiently and increase their online sales. With a limited staff, superior technical support was also essential.



Process

After careful consideration of all systems available to them, including consideration of enthusiastic reviews from Foxen members who had worked with Nexternal in the past, Foxen decided to switch to Nexternal, concluding that Nexternal met, and even exceeded, their expectations regarding all of their criteria.

Within ten days of signup, the Nexternal designers had set up Foxen's new online store, coding in the winery's existing colors, fonts and other branding features into the online store for a completely continuous branding experience.

Guided by their dedicated Nexternal Account Manager, Foxen staff plugged in settings, keys and passwords into both Nexternal and VinNOW to ensure the proper flow of data. Foxen took advantage of the controls that allowed them to exclude certain products from in the online store, but to keep a wider array of vintages available for sale in the tasting room. "Getting our information into the system was easy!" said Kielly Lewis, Shipping and Social Media Administrator for Foxen. "Once the products were in, all I had to do was make little adjustments to make it perfect."

Result

Foxen is delighted with the upgrade to Nexternal. "Nexternal does every little thing I wished it could do," says Ms. Lewis. She says the integration with VinNOW is extremely reliable, and eliminates previous customer update headaches. Now, when customers change any of their personal information in their online profile, such as a credit card or address, Nexternal synchs to update the customer information in Foxen's VinNOW database. And when wine club members sign up for the club in one of Foxen's tasting rooms, they are automatically recognized as club members when they log into Foxen's online store, so they can enjoy their club exclusives and club discounts while shopping

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online. Also, using Nexternal's ShipCompliant integration and other features which allow the winery to set alcohol volume limits by state, Foxen now has the ability to check online orders for compliance in real-time, minimizing the risk of inadvertently breaking any laws. Limited production releases are also much easier to manage. "We are not only able to release wines exclusively to our club members, but we are also able to enforce limited allocations per customer, and it's extremely easy," says Lewis.

At the time of this case study, the Foxen Nexternal web store has been active for only six weeks, and the winery reports that it is already several thousand dollars above its projected sales as a result. The winery says they are delighted to be working with Nexternal and to be able to give customers a "Foxen experience" online.

The screenshot displays the Foxen Nexternal web store interface. At the top, a navigation bar includes links for Home, Wines, Store, Winery, News/Events, and Contact Us. The main content area features a 'Current Category' dropdown set to 'Foxen Current Releases', a search bar with a 'Search' button, and a link to 'Advanced Search'. Below this, a 'Navigate: StoreFront' link is visible. The product listings are titled 'Foxen Current Releases' and include four items: 'foxen 7200', 'Foxen Pinot Noir', 'Foxen Rhone Style', and 'Whites'. Each item is accompanied by a photograph of the wine bottles. On the left side, there is a vertical sidebar with the Foxen logo, 'foxen 7200' branding, and information about Tasting Room Hours (Open Daily 11am to 4pm) and Holiday Hours. It also includes links to 'Join the Mailing List' and 'Check out the latest Wine Reviews'. On the right side, there is a 'Shopping Cart' section with a shopping cart icon, stating 'The Shopping Cart is currently empty'. Below this, it mentions 'eCommerce Platform by Nexternal' and a 'TRUST GUARD Security Scanned 10-21-13' badge. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the Nexternal logo and contact information.