

The Scarlet Champion Project: Positioning ‘Atlantic Essence’, a Portuguese Wine, in the U.S. Market

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Abstract. This case study analyzes the strategic process of internationalization of ‘Atlantic Essence’, a wine developed by Horizon Grapes Vinhos, a Portuguese winemaker, specifically for the U.S. market. By examining the strategic decision-making involved in creating an international marketing strategy for a new product, students will work toward the case’s primary objective: analyzing the key elements of building a positioning strategy, with an emphasis on Country-of-Origin Image attributes, to shape the marketing strategy in the United States. This case can be applied in Bachelor’s and MSc programmes in International Business, International Marketing, Marketing and Wine Marketing modules. The events and data described in this case cover the period from 2013 to 2016. While some historical data before 2013 are referenced to provide context, the primary focus of the case is on Horizon Grapes’ strategic decisions, product development, and market entry initiatives during these three years. All figures, trends, and examples should be understood within this historical context.

Keywords: international strategy, international market analysis, country-of-origin image (COI), international marketing, brand positioning.

Case Note: This case is a teaching vehicle based on an actual project. All company and individual names have been disguised to protect confidentiality. The strategic context, key decisions, and data points, however, are authentic and provide a credible foundation for analysis.

1. Introduction

“Welcome to Horizon Grapes, and specifically, to the ‘Scarlet Champion Project’”. The voice of Ana Ribeiro, the Brand Manager and the Leader of the Scarlet Champion project, echoes in your mind. “We’re about to embark on

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something truly transformative for Portuguese wine, and I'm thrilled to have you, our new marketing assistant, on board."

Operating in one of the most dynamic markets¹ in the global economy², Horizon Grapes is one of the largest and most successful Portuguese wine companies worldwide. Its impressive resources, capabilities, and extensive experience in internationalization make it a prime example of strategic expertise. The company initiated its international expansion in the mid-20th century, gradually building a global presence through strategic market entries and partnerships. Today, it exports the majority of its production to over 100 countries and manages vineyards across multiple continents, reflecting a long-standing commitment to internationalization and diversification.

Horizon Grapes maintains a richly diversified portfolio of offerings, growing and marketing multiple wine-style brands. Some wines are tailored for domestic customers with heritage labels, while others are crafted expressly for international markets, featuring differentiated flavor profiles and packaging. In total, its brand mix spans entry-level and premium tiers; its production origins extend across several wine-growing regions (terroirs) to capture diverse aromas; and it complements its core fermented products with related experiences, such as vineyard tourism, brand clubs, R&D, and sustainability-led innovations that reinforce its brand stories.

In 2013, Horizon Grapes' board identified a significant market opportunity and began working with its internationalization team to capitalize on it. After a meeting with Horizon Grape's board, Ana Ribeiro, in her informal way, quickly gathered with her new marketing assistants to have a coffee and give them a spoiler of what the project was about, she stated: *"Based on previous research and on the results of the consultancy on wine hired by Horizon Grapes there's no Portuguese red wine with a strong presence in the premium mass market segment internationally. We're going to seize this by creating a new Portuguese red wine. We're taking a bold risk: launching the new label, 'Atlantic Essence', in the world's largest wine market, the United States of America³⁴".* She continued *"To succeed in the US, we are assembling a multidisciplinary team including winemaking and marketing experts, staff from our US importing company Evalis, and an American consultant (Jasper Ford) specialized in the wine industry. As a newly appointed marketing assistant, you've been hand-picked to join this high-stakes project. You'll be working directly with the strategy team, providing*

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