

Idaho Business Review, Monday, Sept. 8, 2014 – by Teya Vitu (2 pages)

Bodovino is a world leader in self-service wine tasting

Self-service wine tasting is the order of business at downtown Boise's Bodovino wine bar and retail shop. It's the largest outlet in the world for Italian wine dispenser manufacturer WineEmotion.

To sample wine at Bodovino, customers load up a Bodovino card with cash, insert the card in a slot, and press either the 1-ounce, 3-ounce or 5-ounce button. Visitors can try a selection of 144 wines set up in the machines.

Bodovino has 18 of WineEmotion's Otto model. Each Otto holds eight bottles upright with the ounce selection button above. Nowhere else in the world does WineEmotion have more dispensing units than at Bodovino, WineEmotion founder and Chief Executive Riccardo Gosi said from his Florence headquarters. WineEmotion units can be found at more than a 1,000 locations, U.S. distributor Roberto Rinaldini said. But Bodovino is one of only a few WineEmotion clients with the dispensing units available to the public for self-serve tasting. Elsewhere, mostly bars, casinos and retail stores have one or maybe two WineEmotion units, usually behind the counter to control bartender pour portions.

Bodovino managing partners Trevor Hertrich and Mandy Legarreta opened Bodovino in December in the BoDo District of downtown Boise.

"I thought people would taste two or three wines and then ask for a full glass," Hertrich said. "But it's more about the tasting, five, six, eight or 10 tastes."

Bodovino also sells full bottles of some 500 varieties of wines from around the world. It typically has six to 10 Idaho wines in the machines and about 20 available by the bottle.

"We give people a chance to simulate going to Caldwell to five or six wineries," Hertrich said. Bodovino's self-service model has attracted attention from Boise State University's College of Business and Education.

"They have a pretty interesting business model," said Associate Dean Kirk Smith. "Basically, they get the customer to pre-pay. Customers have cards they can't use anywhere else."

Smith finds genius in the 1-, 3- and 5-ounce pricing model, where 75 percent of the tastes range between \$2 and \$3. Some areas low as \$1.25. Comparing a 1-ounce taste with a standard 750 milliliter bottle or even a glass of wine elsewhere would be impractical for most tasters.

"You can't easily use reference pricing. You don't know what it's supposed to cost," Smith said. "Some wine is so cheap (per ounce) that it's in the zone of indifference. You don't care about the price."

The self-service aspect drove the staffing of Bodovino, which has 15 employees. Instead of an army of servers of wine or food, Bodovino's ambition is to have a staff of wine experts, whether bartender, retail, food service, wine steward or kitchen.

Customer service largely is not about taking orders (though there is a bar and food service) but rather guiding customers through the wine world.

"You don't have to wait for a waitress to come to your table," Hertrich said. "If you are standing at a machine, somebody will likely come to you. 'How are you doing?'"

That person could well be Christine Bedard, who started at Bodovino thinking "this was a regular server job as in a restaurant." At first, her approach wasn't much more than "Hi, How are you, what can I get for you?" "I've learned so much about wine," Bedard said. "I'm definitely very comfortable talking about wine and educating people."

Bedard will learn a lot more about wine. In the last week of August, study groups started at Bodovino each Monday and Tuesday for employees to prepare for the Certified Specialist in Wine exam offered by the Society of Wine Educators, a nonprofit that offers professional development and certification.

"The goal is to have 100 percent of the staff certified," Hertrich said.

Bedard eagerly signed up.

"I can't even believe it," she said. "I've been talking to friends and family about it. This is kind of the golden ticket into the beverage distribution business. That's definitely an opportunity for me."

Hertrich said he looks for approachable staff to create a "judgment-free environment.

"Most wine shops can be intimidating," he said. "There's not a snobbish, elitist bone in anybody who works here."