

# Are we Having FUN Yet?

Elizabeth Slater, founder of *In Short Direct Marketing* helps wineries increase sales with insight and humor

*Elizabeth Slater stands on the stage before an audience of winery owners, management and winemakers. “How many of you,” she asks, holding up her hand, “went into this business because of an overwhelming desire to sell something?”*

By Jim Brumm

She waits. No hands are raised. She didn't expect any, and that's why she's here; that's the point.

People do not start wineries or become winemakers because they are or want to be great salespeople. They do it because they love making and drinking wine. But after all is said and done, it's still a business, and a business needs customers.

For the rest of the day Elizabeth inspires, motivates and teaches her audience the secrets and systems that make for a great winery marketing program. With insight, intelligence and lots and lots of laughter, she takes her listeners on a tour of her world, a world of intuitive marketing, customer service, sales and proven techniques to multiply profits.

Elizabeth Slater, known as E, was born in the working class North of England. Her father, a journeyman sheet metal worker, always wanted to emigrate because he felt it would be a better life. When Elizabeth was fourteen, the family came to California. E laughed as she remembered how excited she was, with images of Disneyland, Hollywood and movie stars in her mind.

The magic and fantasy of California wasn't exactly what she had pictured, but E got along well in her new world, making friends and studying people.

“I have always been interested in people and what makes them tick,” she said. “They're my hobby. Marketing is just a study of people. If I hadn't gone into marketing, I would probably have been a psychologist.”

After leaving home, E held several jobs. She worked as a media buyer for an advertising agency. She organized events for hotels. She created catalogues, ads and advertising programs for the motorcycle industry and sold advertising.



She and a friend started a company that put on consumer shows for the ice cream industry. (At one show they helped create the world's largest ice cream sundae.)

Over time, Los Angeles came to be too much for her. "I was driving home one night, and it took two and a half hours to go seventeen miles," she said.

She had friends in Sonoma County (north of San Francisco), and moved there in 1988, hoping to find a less high-paced life and become "downwardly mobile," as she put it, laughing again. But E is not one to sit quietly for long. Falling in love with the wine country, she decided to start a business working with wineries.

She worked in tasting rooms and in marketing, she became involved with local wine organizations and committees, and grew to know the business inside and out.

E noticed a couple of things that seemed to be true at all the wineries she was involved with. First, many visitors are intimidated by wine and their lack of knowledge on the subject. Second, many wineries aren't helping when it comes to this, using "wine speak" with customers who are afraid to admit they don't know what the experts are talking about. And third, no one in the wineries seemed to be selling anything.

"People want to feel important, they want to feel liked and they want to feel right," said E. "It's important that those of us in

Valley," an ongoing, well-attended affair that has become a popular favorite in the region.

Then, one day she had an idea. "I went to the Sonoma County Winery Association and told them I'd like to do a seminar, not knowing how they'd react. The director just said, okay, what date would you like?" E laughed and said, "I went home and began madly putting together a seminar!"

Soon E was asked to teach a class at the local college on the subject of wine marketing fundamentals and public relations.

Her reputation grew. In 1998 she began writing a humorous and insightful column on marketing in *Vineyard and Winery Management Magazine*.

From there, she was asked to create the program for and speak at Vineyard & Winery Management's Tasting Room Profitability Conference. She began receiving offers to speak around the country at wineries and for winery associations. She speaks about customer service, sales, event planning, direct marketing, telemarketing and anything to do with selling directly to the consumer.

E's style is conversational and incredibly enthusiastic, as she delivers her message with humor (really, she's a total smartass, and a



winery. The story, according to E, is as important as the product. "It's how people connect, whether it's a story of two guys in a garage, or an exclusive, rare and expensive vintage." She laughed again. "Never underestimate people's willingness to spend money to impress their friends. It's all about perception."

E has worked with dozens of winery associations and has trained, entertained and helped employees and owners of hundreds of wineries throughout North America. Her wisdom, humor and insight on the subject are much in demand.

Recently she began offering other services to wineries such as a Mystery Visitor Program and a service she calls, "Tasting Room Tune-up," where she spends time in a tasting room and provides a report on procedures, flow, wine and non-wine merchandise, customer service and, most importantly, whether the staff is creating an atmosphere that makes visitors want to buy.

"First visitors buy the people," said E, "then they buy the product."

Whether giving a seminar, mystery shopping or helping reorganize a tasting room, E's message is easy to follow, extremely effective and ultimately leads to more profits and more fun. Don't forget that last part. If you're not enjoying what you're doing, neither will your customers. E knows this better than anyone. She loves what she does and her clients love her. One of her seminars is even titled, "Are We Having Fun Yet?"

For her clients, it's a resounding "yes!"

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## "It's a fact, wine tastes much better when you're having fun." *Elizabeth Slater*

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the winery business don't create the impression that we think we're better than our customers."

With these and many other ideas in mind, in 1994 E started "In Short Direct Marketing." The name is not only indicative of her straight shooting approach to marketing, but to her height, four feet ten inches of fire and quick-witted humor.

"I started working with wineries and the Russian River Wine Road creating marketing plans and programs," said E. "The focus was always on direct marketing—anything to do with selling directly to the consumer. In those days tasting rooms weren't often seen as profit centers. I started helping with marketing, events and wine clubs." She helped organize, and for thirteen years ran, a huge annual event, "Passport to Dry Creek

funny one) and an easy-going manner in her English accent.

"I have a good sense of humor," she said with a smile. "I crack myself up! To quote Oscar Wilde, 'Life is too important to be taken seriously'."

One of the first things she assists wineries and winery employees with is customer service. She helps them understand how people think about themselves and need to be treated to create a buying atmosphere.

She teaches how to create a fun, happy and light atmosphere where the customers *want* to buy wine.

"It's a fact," she says. "Wine tastes much better when you're having fun."

She also helps winery owners and staff learn to tell their own unique story, of the people, the dream and the vision of the