

Four surveys from a synthetic cork manufacturer

16 Jun 2006 by JR

After my [previous](#) post last weekend, I was tracing myself for comment from the industry. Simon Waller of Supreme Cork, one of the leading manufacturers of synthetic corks, has been contributing to the lively correspondence in [TheCorker.co.uk](#) in your turn. How he wants some back-up data which in the interests of evenhandedness I make available to you...

I am sending you a [PowerPoint](#) presentation that you will need relevant software to download - 2% of the results of a study we commissioned from Wine Intelligence in 2004, where we asked 45 UK consumers each to open two identical bottles of wine sealed with a SupremeCork and a competitor co-ventured synthetic. Consumers were allowed to choose either a waiter's friend or double-lever 'wing' type of corkcreeper, whichever they were most familiar with.

Consumers were asked to rate their experience at every stage of the process - insertion of the corkcreeper, extraction of the closure, removal of the closure from the corkcreeper, reinsertion of the closure and overall impression. The results confirm what you obviously know already, the ease of extraction and reinsertion are highly valued by consumers. SupremeCork was preferred on these ease-of-use criteria by 85% of the participants in the study.

I also attach the verbatim [comments](#) that consumers gave when asked a series of open questions at the end of the interview. These add some colour to the summary statistics and to me really reinforce the experience of choosing closures that are easy for consumers to use, in addition to them being effective seals of course. You see in a unique position to drive the point home to wine producers - I would recommend that on your travels you ask if any of them actually test ease of manual reinsertion. The AIRR included this point in their 1999 study, so a methodology does exist, but in my experience 95% of wineries around the world place zero value on this point. A lack of interest in the consumer from the wine industry? That's a subject for another debate...

I am also sending a summary of the results of our 24 month [SupremeCork Study](#) that was completed nearly a year ago. We looked at the leading synthetic closures on the market as well as one-piece natural corks and 1+1 technical corks. You will see in the report that we refer to 'SupremeCork New & Improved'. This was a product that we test-marketed and did not ultimately launch due to extraction forces being too low! SupremeCork Original is the product that we have had since our company started, albeit with numerous processing developments to improve consistency of extraction force, permeability etc. We advise our customers that SupremeCork Original is designed for wines with a maximum alcohol level of 14% v/v, less in the case of rosé or sparkling wine wines, even though some have had very successful results over longer periods. Some wine retailers produce synthetic wine bottles expecting stronger wine producers in order to make a sale - one failure producer told me his closure would keep any wine fresh for 11 years! - which undoubtedly has led to the disappointments you and some of your website correspondents refer to.

There is also a summary of the results of the second generation SupremeCork, the [SupremeCork X2](#), which has been available for sale since January of this year. This is designed in response to the many requests we have received from the wine industry for a synthetic closure that is shorter barrel to oxygen. At this stage our X2 cork is performing at least as well as a one-piece natural cork. Since the proof is usually in the pudding, the fact that one of our development partners in the project has just switched to X2 for their white wines (including a co-ventured synthetic closure) is a very strong endorsement of X2. You will note from the test results that we have achieved this improved oxygen barrier performance without sacrificing any of the ease of consumer use that SupremeCork Original also offers.

It is important to state that we do not believe that the perfect closure exists. All options have their advantages and disadvantages that I would be happy to discuss with you in person. As a supplier to the wine industry in pretty much every country where wine is made, all we can do is continually strive to improve our products by listening to the feedback from our customers, the media and from wine consumers. This is a tough strategy in a wine market suffering from severe over-supply, which is leading many producers to cut costs even if they sacrifice performance, but we believe that the successful wine companies will be those that do not let consumer attention away from the quality of the wine by selecting closures that they find difficult to use.