



## Guild of Sommeliers Creates Interactive Community of Wine Professionals

Guild of Sommeliers is a nonprofit, member-run organization, committed to excellence measures, development, inspiration and exchange of information for wine service professionals and wine enthusiasts across the U.S.

Through an online community and in-person events, it aims to help members broaden their knowledge of the world's wine regions, enhance their beverage service skills, network with other wine enthusiasts and stay up-to-date on industry news and trends.



Guild of Sommeliers promotes collaboration, inspiration and ongoing education for sommeliers in an online community for wine professionals.

### Challenge

#### Create online community for wine professional to network and share knowledge with peers

Guild of Sommeliers ("Guild") is a leading educational nonprofit for sommeliers to learn more about the wine industry. It wanted to create an online space

for sommeliers to network with one another, share knowledge and personal stories as well as distribute relevant, timely industry news and updates.

In its early stages, Guild distributed educational resources, but wanted to connect members online and communicate in a fun, social environment to enhance the wine profession by increasing access to wine knowledge and networking opportunities.

### Solution

#### Foster member education and peer networking in a global online community

Guild wanted to expand its reach and create one central area on the Web where sommeliers could broaden their knowledge of wine.

---

*"After researching platforms, we chose Telligent to create our online community, which acts as the central hub for ongoing discussions, knowledge sharing and networking for our members."*

**Geoff Kruth, COO, Guild of Sommeliers**

---

Guild implemented its main website and the Telligent platform in less than three months. Access to the community is exclusively for dues-paying members who are working sommeliers, pursuing a career as a wine industry professional or wine aficionados interested in learning more. Members are also invited to tasting events across the US and enrichment programs, such as regional tours of wine regions around the world.

The community features relevant articles by professionals who share their knowledge, industry best practices and news. Guild asks seasoned professionals to write blogs based on their expertise to ensure that the quality of the content is top notch. They are featured on the home page so members have quick access to current, trending topics.



The Guild features its members' educational tips and pictures in 'Features' on the home page of the community.

Members actively comment on featured blogs to give thanks to the author, which encourages further contributions and rewards members for sharing their knowledge. They also rank the content with stars so other members can easily find the most valuable, vetted content. Plus, the readers can talk directly to the authors in comments below the blog to address follow-up questions.

Members join interest-based forums to talk about different areas of practice in the wine industry, upcoming events, food and wine pairings, travel recommendations and legal issues. Community members actively share information in more than a dozen different discussions every day.

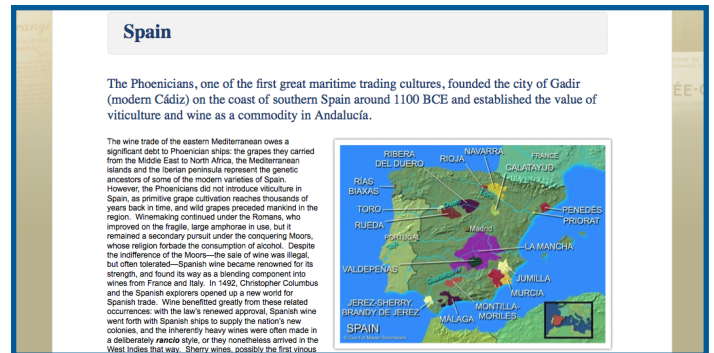
One popular post is about the top wine estates in the world. A community member posed a question to members asking them which producers and wines rank supreme. Following the post, more than 100 members chimed in with their opinions over the course of a year and a half. All of these conversations are captured in the community, creating an online knowledge base for current and future members to discover helpful advice vetted by professionals.

Through these discussions, members get to know other professionals and network in the community. Members post job listings in the community, and professionals can post their credentials to find jobs.

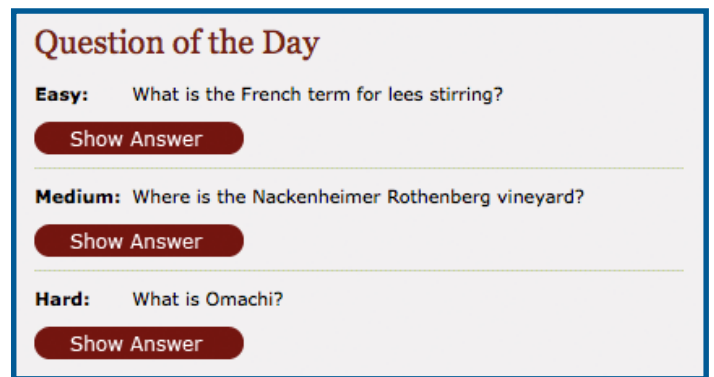
Community members are at different levels in their career and, at any given time, are taking courses and exams for various levels of sommelier

certification. In order to help members advance in the field, Guild created a "Study Guide," a comprehensive resource to learn about the world's major wine regions. Members can post comments and questions at the end of each section as well as take tests at three different levels of difficulty to gauge their knowledge.

Topics include region-specific wines, such as Bordeaux, Northern Italy and Spain as well as related topics including coffee, champagne and sake. Each area contains non-editable content in wikis for members to read, see maps and watch videos. They can discuss any questions with peers related to content in the forums based on their level of study – advanced, certified and masters.



Members read online study guides, discuss key topics and test themselves on the material to achieve varying levels of sommelier certification.



With a "question of the day" feature, members can learn new facts and test their knowledge based on their skill levels.

In addition, Guild created a comprehensive "Compendium" as a reference guide for the world's wine and spirit laws, classifications and appellation systems. Made up of wiki articles that members can create and edit, this is a resource for members

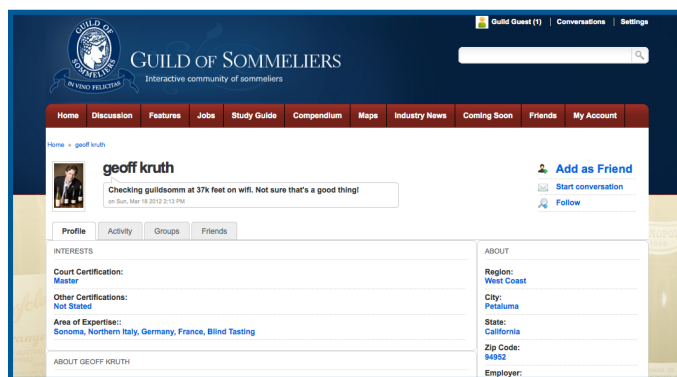
to learn and actively contribute up-to-date information from around the world.

*“Wow. I stand absolutely jealous that I didn’t have this resource when I was studying. Just browsing through, I have found such clarity of the salient issues with incredible depth... Thanks for providing this resource.”*

### Quote from community member

Members are allowed to edit this content and share their expertise. Everyone in the community is identified by personal profiles featuring their background and credentials. Because members stake their reputations and professional relationships on the knowledge they share, the content is high quality.

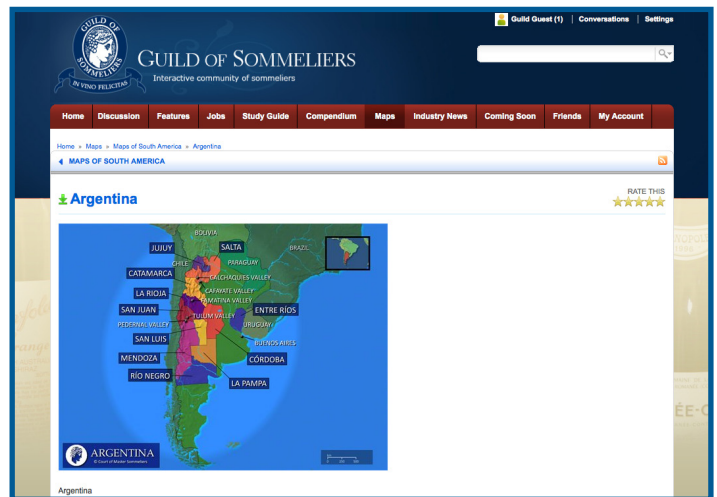
Members can easily find experts based on their comments throughout the community. Plus, each member has a profile featuring their picture, certifications, areas of expertise, affiliations, employers and biographies. This helps other members network and share knowledge with peers. They can also add members as “friends”, which gives them direct contact to one another, including private messaging.



Members post profiles featuring their professional experience, areas of expertise and contact information to network with peers.

Members also learn about regional sites famous for their vineyards. Guild uploads maps of wine and spirit-producing regions around the world to ensure that members can quickly visualize the wine regions

and locations they study. Guild also posts audio clips so members can learn how to pronounce wine terms and regions correctly in different languages, such as French, Spanish and German.



Guild shares maps of wine regions so members have easy access to visual learning aids.

In addition to community-generated content and its own educational resources, Guild compiles external news and information relevant to the wine industry. It pulls in RSS feeds from publications such as WineBusiness.com, Decanter News and more so members have a one-stop shop for finding wine news.

Combined, the educational resources and ongoing engagement creates a knowledge hub that is central to the Guild’s mission of promoting collaboration, inspiration and ongoing education for the sommelier community. “Our entire business is built on our online community,” says Kruth. “The whole model of our organization wouldn’t exist without our community – it’s the centerpiece of our social strategy and everything we do.”

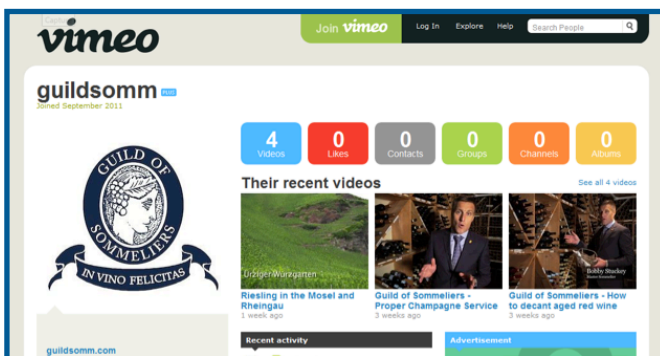
Part of Guild’s interactive strategy is to encourage membership through ongoing engagement in its online community as well as through niche social media networks. On Facebook, the brand engages members by posting popular content from the community – such as new blogs, topics of the week and events – as well as results from competitions, photos from recent events, videos and industry updates from wine publications.



Guild engages its members on Facebook with industry updates, photos and links to new content from the community.

Using Twitter, Guild promotes similar content with its followers and interacts with members engaged in the larger Twitter ecosystem. They post “questions of the day” to spark discussions about wine-related topics and share relevant information with followers using the #gsqod hashtag. Members share responses and can follow the conversations on an ongoing basis.

Guild also shares videos from its Vimeo channel about popular topics to members, such as an inside look at how to crush grapes or a demo walk through of how the online community works and what benefits it offers. Guild shares these videos on Facebook, Twitter, in the community and on its website to spread relevant content broadly to members wherever they like to interact or consume content.



Guild shares videos from its Vimeo channel on Facebook, Twitter, the community and its main website.

This unified social strategy engages members across the social networks they use, while driving them to the community for more in-depth conversations and access to exclusive, member-only content. Plus, Guild creates a

consistent brand experience across channels by continually promoting its core goal of education through the different social channels its members prefer to use.

## Results

### Increased membership sevenfold over four years through social engagement and knowledge sharing

“Telligent’s community is the foundation of our business,” says Kruth. “The community is scaling seamlessly to meet the needs of our growing membership base.” Some of the benefits the Guild is experiencing with its online community include:

#### Increasing active, engaged membership

Within its first year, Guild attracted 500 new members, and has since increased membership seven times over to more than 3,500 members within four years.

#### Achieving high membership renewals

Membership renewal rates are at 70%+, which matches Guild’s goals for the community. Often members renew their memberships after the expiration date to come back to the community for networking and learning.

#### Establishing thought leadership in wine community

“Guild of Sommeliers is part of the everyday lives of our members,” says Kruth. “Members really rely on the community to further their education, share knowledge and meet peers. It’s a fun, interactive way to boost your career as a wine professional while learning more about a passion.”

### Learn more about Guild of Sommeliers

- > Watch a demo of the community in action
- > Follow @guildsomm
- > Find Guild on Facebook

### Custom tailor your community experience

To learn more about Telligent Community, visit [www.Telligent.com](http://www.Telligent.com)

- > Find Telligent on LinkedIn
- > Follow us on Twitter @telligent
- > Join Telligent on Facebook
- > Join Telligent on Google+