

In wine, there's truth," wrote Roman philosopher Gaius Plinius Secundus (aka Pliny the Elder). But based on the results of Derse Inc.'s wine-themed integrated program, in wine there's both truth and about \$6.5 million worth of potential new business. Going from grapes to greenbacks, however, involves a long-term fermentation process — one with which Derse is well-acquainted.

Founded in 1948 as a sign-painting business, Derse developed into a leading trade show exhibit builder.

# Table Talk

To foster client relationships and establish itself as a consultative strategic-marketing agency, Derse Inc. devises an integrated program that pairs a communal table with customized wine tastings — and squeezes out \$6.5 million in potential business in the process. *By Linda Armstrong*

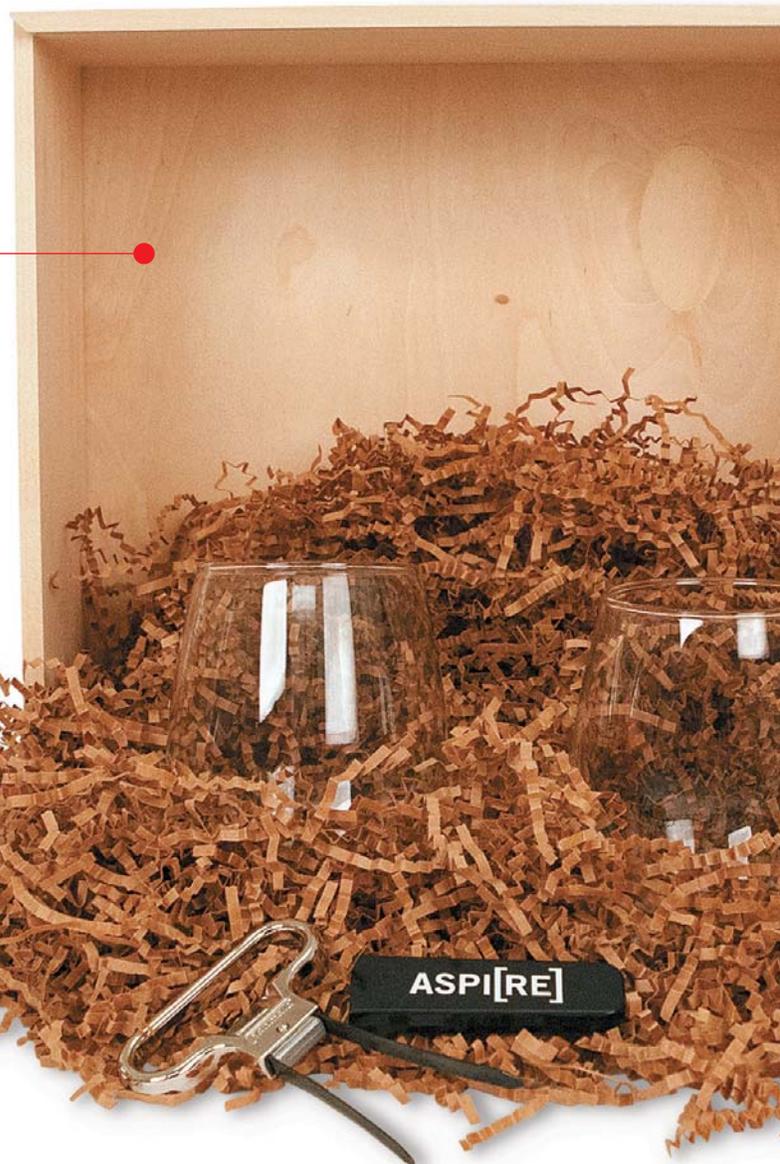
**ASPI[RE]**

is success  
reimagined



**Pre-Show Mailer**  
Derse Inc. sent a 3-D mailer to 49 key customers and prospects.

**Post-Show Mailer #1**  
After the show, Derse sent wine glasses and a bottle opener to VIP attendees' supervisors.



In recent years, its top notes have included planning and executing events and various other face-to-face marketing endeavors. In fact, by late 2015, Derse was well into its next evolution. A few years back, the firm began to shift its focus — adding consultative services typically associated with an integrated-marketing agency.

“Most exhibit builders provide a quality product, they deliver on schedule and on budget, they offer lots of ancillary services, and more,” says Rick Stoner, Derse’s director of

marketing. “However, those deliverables have become a commodity nearly to the point that if you can’t provide them, you have no business being in this industry. And Derse is far more than a commodity exhibit builder. So in December of 2015, we set out to differentiate ourselves as a strategic marketing partner with a consultative, agency-like approach.”

So as the marketing team sat down to plan the company’s strategy for EXHIBITORLIVE 2016, an educational conference and exhibition for exhibit and event managers, they needed a concept that would foster Derse’s consultative approach.

“We knew we wanted to cut through the show-floor clutter and provide a relaxed environment to promote the establishment of authentic relationships,” Stoner says. “And we hoped our efforts would

## INTEGRATED PROGRAM

**Exhibitor:** Derse Inc.

**Creative/Production:** Derse Inc., Milwaukee, 414-257-2000, www.derse.com

**Show:** EXHIBITORLIVE 2016

**Budget:** \$75,000 – \$99,000

**Goals:**

- ▶ Collect 70 qualified leads.
- ▶ Prompt submission of seven requests for proposal (RFPs) worth a minimum of \$1 million in potential business.

**Results:**

- ▶ Generated 121 qualified leads.
- ▶ Fielded nine RFPs with a potential value of \$6.5 million.



generate 70 new qualified leads and seven requests for proposal worth at least \$1 million in potential revenue. But our overarching goal was to draw attendees to our booth space and then sit down and talk more with them and less about us.”

**Planting the Seeds**

Like many other exhibitors, Derse began searching for a unifying theme that would deliver on all objectives and provide the perfect pairing for attendees’ needs. “Our creative team quickly fell upon the idea of using a communal table as a critical element,” Stoner says. “Gathering around a table for food or drink says ‘authentic’ and ‘familial,’ and it fosters an atmosphere where relationships are born or solidified.”

With a shared table at the core of the program, Derse’s team soon established wine as the second central element. Wine tastings are a logical communal-table activity, and wine was a subtle metaphor for Derse’s evolution. Plus, many relationships are fused over a glass of wine, and as a favored social lubricant, the fruit of the vine would not only attract attendees to the exhibit but



**Post-Show Mailer #2**  
Meanwhile, each VIP attendee received a bottle of wine to share with his or her supervisor.

**Post-Show Mailer #3**  
Less qualified leads received a Silent Butler bottle opener.

also further the relaxed, connection-fostering environment the company sought to create at EXHIBITORLIVE.

Derse corked off the proposed experience with a unifying concept: Aspire. "The campaign needed a broad idea aside from simply 'wine' or 'table,'" Stoner says. "We wanted to talk to attendees about our consultative approach, but more importantly we wanted to know what they aspire to achieve — or improve or develop — with their programs."

To give exhibit staffers talking points around the Aspire theme, marketers visibly emphasized the "RE" letters at the end of the word. So in print "Aspire" became "ASPI[RE]." Then, marketers developed three styles of wine labels that incorporated that emphasis: REthink, RElax, and REsults. Each label, however, came in multiple varieties, all of which underscored case studies and key

messages. For example, one RElax label included the words "Better Way Red. We found a better way to blend grapes to create the perfect partnership of balance and taste for Moen." Another highlighted Derse's budget-conscious efforts for a different client.

The idea was for staffers to tailor attendees'

wine tastings and booth conversations around what each visitor aspired to achieve — and if appropriate would weave in case-study examples to illustrate how Derse has helped other clients with similar aspirations. For example, if an attendee was looking for help with budgeting issues, staffers might offer a sample from a bottle labeled "RElax. Heart to Heart Red. Unwind with Thoratec and experience heart-pounding flavors on a flatlined budget." The

**Natural Touch**  
Derse Inc.'s 20-by-30-foot exhibit comprised mostly wood-grain surfaces and materials. Designers felt the wood tones furthered a relaxed, authentic aesthetic far more effectively than metals, fabrics, and high-tech monitors ever could.



PHOTOS: DERSE INC.; EXPOSURES LTD.

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conversation might then naturally flow to a discussion about how Derse helped Thoratec Corp. resolve its budget conundrums. The Aspire theme, along with its clever, case study-related labels, would be a vine loosely woven through the campaign.

#### **Early Germination**

Roughly three weeks before the show, Derse began a

pre-show campaign centered around these core concepts. First, it sent a 3-D mailer to 49 key customers and prospects. A total tease instead of a tasting experience, the mailer comprised a 4-by-4-by-14-inch wooden box. Its sliding cover featured the Derse logo and the tagline “AspiRE is Success Reimagined.”

Inside the box, recipients found an empty wine bottle with a black label bearing the words “REthink Red” or “REthink White” along with the phrase “Blended to Continually Innovate Face-to-Face Marketing.” Meanwhile, a label on the back of the bottle offered the words “Grown from the honest belief that face-to-face marketing is simply the most effective form of marketing. We invite you to aspire to a purer vintage of face-to-face marketing.” Finally, a call to action drove attendees to the booth: “Interested in the proof? Stop by the Derse booth (#1621) at EXHIBITORLIVE 2016 for a taste — and visit our new website, now with more insight.”

Shortly after the mailer went out, Derse sent a similarly themed email blast to a select group of attendees. Front and center in the missive was a link to a black-and-white teaser video, which showed a woman setting a table and pouring two glasses of wine followed by white text that read: “We’ll meet you at the table.” Below the video link, email text opened with “A purer vintage of face-to-face marketing. AspiRE is ... success reimagined ...” and closed with “Attending EXHIBITORLIVE? Let’s meet at the table. Booth #1621.”

#### **Setting the Table**

With their curiosity — and their thirst — piqued, attendees beelined for Derse’s space when the EXHIBITORLIVE doors flung wide. What they found carefully married the aesthetics of a stately wine cellar with those of a highly functional marketing vehicle.

The brainchild of Derse designer John Murray, the 20-by-30-foot exhibit featured two C-shaped freestanding structures that had, in effect, been laid on their sides and crisscrossed in the middle. Made of wooden slats connected by minimal metal framework, the structures clearly defined the space yet preserved almost every inch of the open, airy footprint for relaxed conversations.

Murray and his design team set aside the heart of the exhibit to house its very soul, i.e., the communal table. Accompanied by a handful of wood-and-metal bar stools and topped by a rectangular light fixture through which four 44-inch-diameter lampshade-like fixtures dangled, the 18.5-foot-long table dissected the otherwise sparse space. Aside from a cabinet with a built-in wine refrigerator, various wall displays flaunting the available wines, and white, cutout, wall-attached letters that formed the Derse logo and tagline, the space was



void of ancillary elements — a feat that maintained a laser-tight focus on the communal table itself.

Derse's communication strategy was laser focused as well. It stationed some of its most extroverted salespeople along the aisles. Here, they made eye contact with each passing attendee and simply asked, "Can I interest you in face-to-face marketing of a purer vintage? Would you like to come in for a quick taste?" When the attendee entered the space, the engager quickly collected his or her lead information and then posed one question to spark a conversation: "Our theme is *Aspire*, and for us that means success reimagined. If you could aspire to improve one thing in your program, what would it be?"

Engagers then carefully listened to attendees' responses and proceeded to converse with them about their individual needs. Then the engager walked the visitor to one of Derse's "storytellers" stationed around the table. "These people were a mix of Derse's creative and management

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professionals with a broad knowledge of the company, its capabilities, and its past projects," Stoner says.

The storyteller offered the guest a seat along with a branded pen and notebook, the latter of which was topped with a cork cover. Ultimately, the storyteller asked the attendee a few more questions about his or her program but then just sat back and listened. "And at some point in the conversation, we asked attendees if they preferred red or white wine and then selected a wine whose label and associated case study was loosely linked to the attendee's aspirations," Stoner says. "If the attendee seemed interested, we mentioned the case study associated with the wine and possibly pulled up images of the project on our iPads. But again, the interaction was all about authentic conversation, not a sales pitch."

**A Remarkably Good Year**

Derse's at-show wining and dining didn't stop in the booth, however. On Monday, Feb. 29, Derse treated 39 VIP clients and prospects to a wine-infused Italian feast at the Grape Vine Café Wine Bar & Cellar. Email invites sent roughly three weeks before the show instructed recipients to meet at the Mandalay Bay concierge desk at 6 p.m. From there, a private shuttle transported them to the venue located in northwest Las Vegas.

Upon arrival, guests discovered a roughly 4-by-6-foot chalkboard on the venue's exterior that read: "Tonight, we *Aspi[RE]* to ... eat, drink, and be merry. Derse welcomes you all like family." In addition to wine and cheese tastings, guests enjoyed a family-style Italian meal served around five wooden tables that harkened back to the table in the Derse booth.

**Raise a Glass**  
Thirty-nine of Derse Inc.'s VIPs assembled around communal tables at an off-site Italian dinner.



"The off-site event was another opportunity for us to have deep, authentic conversations with our clients and prospects," Stoner says. "It helped us foster a sense of trust, which leads to successful partnerships."

After the show, Derse employed two tactics that scored big points with Sizzle Awards judges. As in-booth storytellers analyzed attendees and their needs, they initiated a special post-show promotion for VIP leads. "At the end of a conversation with a highly qualified visitor, staffers pulled out a black label featuring the word 'REsults' at the top," Stoner says. "The staffer then wrote the attendee's name along with some notes about the aspirations he or she had just discussed." After the show, Derse attached the label to a bottle of wine and sent it to the attendee. It also sent two wine glasses and a bottle opener to the attendee's supervisor. An enclosed card urged the recipient to ask his or her employee about Derse's EXHIBITORLIVE experience and to open a conversation about his or her exhibit-marketing aspirations.

"Often, the attendee isn't the sole decision maker, and

choices about agency partners and purchases are made by a larger team, of which the attendee's supervisor is most likely a member," Stoner says. So Derse wanted to put its name on both of their lips — and to sweeten the experience with a splash of wine. While 30 VIP attendees received the wine mailer, Derse also sent something special to less-qualified leads who had spoken with a storyteller: a Silent Butler wine opener along with a card that read "It was a pleasure talking with you at EXHIBITORLIVE. We'll connect soon to REsume our conversation. Cheers!"

While the post-show tactics no doubt led to memorable connections with recipients, they also left a sweet taste in judges' mouths. "The post-event portion of the program was pure magic," one judge said. "To connect the attendees with their internal champions (or supervisors) and create that post-show conversation over a glass of wine took this program from 'good' to 'amazing.'"

Derse's metrics were equally amazing. While the company hoped to secure 70 new high-quality leads, it actually walked away with 121. What's more, Derse's exhibit took home EXHIBITORLIVE's Best of Show award in the Large Booth category. But perhaps best of all, Derse scored nine requests for proposal worth an estimated \$6.5 million. Even if only

half of those bids end up in the "win" column, that's a whopping \$3.25 million — an astounding yield considering Derse's \$82,000 investment. So raise a glass to Derse, whose full-bodied program scored not only a Sizzle Award but also dazzling dividends that

will surely make 2016 a very good year indeed. **E**

## Fruits of the Wine

Derse Inc.'s integrated campaign exceeded all pre-event expectations, generating stellar results worth toasting.



## NEW QUALIFIED LEADS

Derse went into EXHIBITORLIVE 2016 hoping to generate 70 qualified leads, but ultimately garnered 121.



## 9 NEW RFPS

As a direct result of its campaign, Derse netted nine requests for proposal, two more than it had hoped for.



## \$6.5 MILLION POTENTIAL NEW BUSINESS VALUE

Derse's nine RPFs could bring in \$6.5 million in potential new business, trumping its goal of at least \$1 million.

