



MARK SMITH

Cyber site for the
peripatetic 'epicurious'

VisitVineyards.com

WRITER
Mark Smith

ABOVE
Charles and Robyn Lewis
OPPOSITE TOP TO BOTTOM
Gourmet food
Daniel Alps at Strathlynn
Stillwater River Café

It is well known that it is very easy to make a small fortune in the wine industry – all you need to do is to start with a large fortune. And it's a modern myth that having a website can be a way of making money.

Tasmanian wine marketer Robyn Lewis speaks with the voice of experience. She's the CEO and principal partner of a highly successful Australia-wide Internet business for wine and food Net surfers called VisitVineyards.com. The business model was so successful that it has now been extended to include travel. First launched in June 2008, VisitVineyards.com has attracted more than 22,000 subscribers. Tasmania-based, it has also become the country's most comprehensive guide to Australian regional wine, food and travel.


It has taken almost a decade to build the kind of working capital and intellectual property needed to launch this innovative business. The concept began as a result of the frustration Robyn and her husband and business partner Charles experienced while seeking credible advice on visiting wine, food and lifestyle tourism destinations in Western Australia's Margaret River.

'There's a huge interest globally from people wanting to connect with makers and growers ... There are more than 60 wine regions scattered throughout Australia, and very few of them are linked or marketed in any systematic way. VisitVineyards.com is essentially a wine travel guide which aims to connect "epicurious" travellers like Charlie and me to the many fantastic wine and food producers we have in Tasmania and the rest of Australia. It saves travellers anxiety and frustration, and ensures that they get the best holiday experiences and make the most of their precious time ... And I love being able to run a vibrant and successful business like this from Tasmania.'

Internet users logging on to this site can access more than 100,000 pages that include recommendations, reviews and up-to-the-minute itineraries for planning and booking travel. Searching it is free of charge. Its database brings together details of more than 30,000 products. Information can be obtained about wine, vineyards, food, cellar-door sales, restaurants, produce, shopping, wine and food events, golf, accommodation and tour options. The site doesn't require a participation fee from its listed businesses, and it enables very small, boutique producers to be included.

VisitVineyards.com also has international wine connections, courtesy of Jancis Robinson, Britain's most widely read and respected columnist on wine, food and travel. An alliance has recently been formed with the long-established Wine Society, based in Sydney. It alone has 60,000 members.

'Our experience indicates that people prefer to be guided by expert opinion rather than by self-appointed commentators or by on-line forums,' Robyn explains. 'A popular addition to the site is a facility to post feedback on listed products.'

More than 2,200 web pages have Tasmanian content. All are hosted on computer servers located in southern Tasmania, and supported by local know-how and state-of-the-art information technology. 



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