

Getting out there selling themselves

Running blind horizontal tastings of wines sourced from their vineyard, creating a brand identity and logo, publishing and distributing a glossy marketing package to wineries, advertising their produce in local newspapers and running a promotional and information website are not standard operating procedures for most grapegrowers.

But for Barossa grapegrowing couple turned 'wine-growers' Anthony and Jodie Scholz, it is the only way to remain competitive in the industry downturn.

Like thousands of other farmers across Australia who have turned to branding their produce and managing their own marketing, sales and distribution, the Scholzes now talk about wineries as their "customers"—and with a portfolio including luminaries such as St Hallett, Henschke, First Drop Wines, John Duval Wines, Seppeltsfield and Tim Smith Wines they must be doing something right.

"Scholz Estate was borne out of necessity," Anthony says. "With extra fruit coming into production at the very time that our traditional winery customers were tightening up, we had to make a conscious decision to spread our risk.

"We don't see ourselves as grape-growers, we're wine-growers. We are changing our mindset to valuing our fruit more highly, understanding the supply chain and spreading the number of wineries we sell to."

The couple have taken inspiration from the way wineries themselves market their wine and have set about developing a "grape brand" that has a lasting impact in the marketplace.

This has included proactive meetings and door knocking to present their range to wineries and creating an information kit "to leave a lasting impression of the story behind the grapes and examples of the wines being made".



Anthony and Jodie Scholz.

They also run a website with a family story and detailed viticultural information.

"We are now thinking like marketers and trying to see it from the customer's point of view—we have to put ourselves in the winemaker's shoes," says Jodie.

"We know that like any other business we have to build long term relationships and give our customers what they want in terms of quality and consistency."

With 41 hectares of some of the Barossa's most prized Shiraz growing country at Ebenezer, Scholz Estate grapes have certainly contributed to some of the region's flagship wines, ranging from St Hallett Blackwell and Faith Shiraz to Henschke's Henry's Seven and John Duval's Plexus.

As part of their customer relationship program Anthony and Jodie recently

invited the 10 Barossa wineries that buy their fruit for a blind tasting, followed by a discussion on the nuances of the wines led by each winemaker.

First Drop Wines winemaker Matt Gant said the tasting revealed a genuine expression of place. "The event was really interesting and a credit to Scholz Estate," he said. "It's the first time a grower has taken such a lead in my experience. Scholz Estate is really showing a sense of innovation, not only in the vineyard but also in grower-winery relations."

Anthony and Jodie said the event reinforced the Scholz Estate aim of cementing strong business relationships and over-delivering. "Our prime focus is growing super-premium Shiraz grapes in a sustainable way for local top tier wine brands," says Anthony.