



THE WINERY IN GRAND PRAIRIE

▶ meals. "At one time, we thought having a stand-alone store was the way to go," he says. "While that location still has an appeal, it is not the only option."

When customers walk into a Wine Not store, Cats says "they feel like they're in a working winery." Wine paraphernalia, stainless steel winery systems behind a glass wall and a small wine bar create the atmosphere. "It's like going to the Napa Valley," Cats continues. "Some stores give tours and have free wine tastings or customers can sit at the bar and order a flight."

"All the wine is fermented in the stores," he continues. "It comes from all over the world. We work with Constellation Wineries, the largest provider in the world. They send us products from all over the world, including New Zealand, France and Italy. The processing is done on site. All of our stores are licensed as a full manufacturing facility, just like any other winery."

Wine Not provides thorough franchisee training, so previous experience is not required. The company looks for franchisees with an entrepreneurial spirit and a passion for wine. Cats says, "Franchisees must have people skills and an enthusiasm for wine. They don't need to be wine connoisseurs because we teach them everything."

New franchisees undergo a five-day training program at the Wine Not head office. They learn wine making, wine knowledge, wine-tasting skills, how to operate the computer systems and financial planning. The second phase of training involves nine full-day sessions on how to operate the wine systems in their stores. Cats says wine manufacturing representatives visit the new Wine Not stores along with a corporate representative

to further review the wine-making process, including filtering and bottling. "After that, we have a follow-up visit every two or three months," he says. "Lori [MacDonald, franchise development,] works with the franchisees in the store on marketing initiatives, and making sure everything is up to standard."

The company is currently upgrading its software programs and enhancing its point-of-sale systems. Franchisees are involved in the decision-making process, Cats notes. E-mail marketing and e-commerce are also future initiatives. In some states, online shipping is permitted, and Wine Not hopes to expand on this opportunity, Cats says.

"We've also just finished upgrading our Web site," he continues. "Customers can view our stores, watch interviews with our franchisees and learn more about the company."

Many of Wine Not's wines win medals, and Cats says this is a point of pride. "Our winery in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. – the heart of the wine industry – won a bronze medal for an Italian wine. Producing an Italian wine in California and winning an award is incredible," he says.

Wine Not is also exploring other concepts, such as a wine bistro, which opened in Denver. Cats says the concept was so successful, a second bistro is scheduled to open in September. American Eagle Wine Making Co. is another concept the company is launching, which is similar to Wine Not, but at a lower price point.

"It still has the entertainment value of Wine Not, but there are no wine systems and this business caters to the home wine-maker, as well," Cats says. 🍷