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# WINE BUSINESS MONTHLY

The Industry's Leading Print Publication for Wineries and Growers

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## Product Review Update: Mobile Bottling

Mobile bottlers talk about today's packaging and provide a template for a successful bottling day.

by Bill Pregler

# winemaking

Product Review Update:

## Mobile Bottling

Mobile bottlers talk about today's packaging and provide a template for a successful bottling day.



For many years this compact trailer of La Petite Bottling Company has plied the backroads of Napa Valley. LA PETITE BOTTLING COMPANY

In just a few years, mobile bottling has experienced dramatic growth—from a handful of operators in California to 41 companies now operating across the U.S. and Canada.

In this update about the industry, we talked with mobile bottlers about their regional businesses and heard their advice about packaging. In many ways, they wrote this article. They covered bottles, labels, closures, foils and, in general, offered a template for a successful bottling day.

### The Industry Just Keeps Growing

Mobile bottling has succeeded and will continue to grow for two basic reasons: It relieves wineries from the stress of bottling and saves them from buying rarely used and expensive equipment. And while they now offer more services to more wineries in more wine regions, their collective expertise is elevating them to the role of consultant.

An experienced mobile bottler is like the canary in the coal mine. Each day they handle all parts of the bottling puzzle so they identify problems in the field quicker than anyone. They can qualify vendors, and their advice will help direct a winery accordingly.

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### ISSUE



**September 2011**

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### WINEMAKING

[Product Review Update: Mobile Bottling](#)

[Varietal Focus: Pinot Noir](#)

[Industry Roundtable: The Mechanics of Closures & Capsules](#)

[Hogue Cellars Closure Study](#)

[Seminar Investigates Screw Caps, Corks](#)

### GRAPE GROWING

[The Indescribable Concept of Vine Balance](#)

### SALES & MARKETING

[Off-Premise Wine Sales Increase 5.3 Percent Through June](#)

### FINANCE & ADMIN

[Wine Warehousing](#)

[Using CRM and Mobile Technologies to Enhance Customer Relationships](#)

### DEPARTMENTS

[Month in Review](#)

[News](#)

[What's Cool: Products to Prevent Heat Illness](#)

[People](#)

[Wine Investigation 101](#)

## Mobile Bottling Service Providers

Product Review Update: Mobile Bottling		Mobile Bottling Service Providers															
Company Name	Phone	Web	Region	Cans/Bottle	Score Cap	Zork	Labeled	Clean	Optional Options	Integrator	Steam	On Board Power	Phone	Trailers	Case Closure	Net Shrink	Laser Code
America Bottling	205-558-5279	<a href="http://www.americabottling.com">www.americabottling.com</a>	Midwest	1,000	No	No	RS	Yes	No	No	No	1 or 3	2 - 12/14"	Trailer	No	No	
Alpha Bottling	205-459-5558	<a href="http://www.alphabottling.com">www.alphabottling.com</a>	British Columbia	1,000/1,000	No	No	RS	Yes	No	No	No	1 or 3	2 - 12/14"	Trailer	No	No	
AT Mobile Bottling	707-257-3777	<a href="http://www.atmbi.net">www.atmbi.net</a>	No. California	2,000	Yes	Yes	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	1 - 48"	Trailer	No	No	
Bay Area Bottling	408-488-1702	<a href="http://www.bayareabottling.com">www.bayareabottling.com</a>	Central California	2,000	Yes	No	RS	No	No	No	Yes	2	1 - 38"	Trailer	No	No	
Blue Moon Bottling	540-540-5748	<a href="http://www.bluemoonbottling.com">www.bluemoonbottling.com</a>	Virginia	1,200	No	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1	1 - 25"	Trailer	No	No	
Boutique Mobile Bottling	707-447-2000	<a href="http://www.boutiquemobilebottling.com">www.boutiquemobilebottling.com</a>	No. California	1,000	Yes	Yes	RS	Yes	No	No	No	2	1 - 48"	Trailer/Container	No	No	
Brew Bottling	205-254-5540	<a href="http://www.brewbottling.com">www.brewbottling.com</a>	No. Calif./Oregon	1,000/2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	No	No	No	2	1 - 48"	Trailer	No	No	
Central Custom Bottling	317-237-7784	<a href="http://www.centralcustombottling.com">www.centralcustombottling.com</a>	Oregon	1,000/2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	No	No	Yes	2	2 - 40/50"	Trailer	No	No	
Carver Bottling Co.	805-447-2002	<a href="http://www.carverbottling.com">www.carverbottling.com</a>	California	1,500/3,000	Yes	No	P/S-Glass	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	3	5 - 49"	Trailer	No	No	
Chateau Labeling	707-943-2322	<a href="http://www.chateaulabeling.com">www.chateaulabeling.com</a>	Labeling	N/A	N/A	N/A	P/S-Glass	No	No	No	No	3	1 - 24"	Trailer	No	No	
Elio Bottling	805-237-2133	<a href="http://www.eliobottling.com">www.eliobottling.com</a>	Central California	2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	1 - 48"	Trailer	No	No	
Emilia Bottling	707-943-5905	<a href="http://www.emiliabottling.com">www.emiliabottling.com</a>	No. California	1,000	Yes	No	RS	No	No	No	No	2	1 - 48"	Up In Winery	No	No	
G3 Mobile Bottling	205-254-5540	<a href="http://www.g3mobilebottling.com">www.g3mobilebottling.com</a>	Central California	1,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	No	No	No	2	1 - 48"	Trailer	No	No	
Haley Bottling	205-495-1148	<a href="http://www.haleybottling.com">www.haleybottling.com</a>	No. California	2,000/3,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	3 - 48/50"	Glass	No	No	
Holiday Cellars	407-243-2392	<a href="http://www.holidaycellars.com">www.holidaycellars.com</a>	New York	1,800	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	1 - 40"	Glass	Yes	No	
Hill Country Cellars	800-648-2221	<a href="http://www.hillcountrycellars.com">www.hillcountrycellars.com</a>	Texas/MidWest	200/1,000	Yes	Yes	RS	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	3	1 - 40"	Trailer	No	No	
Hunter Bottling	951-486-1100	<a href="http://www.hunterbottling.com">www.hunterbottling.com</a>	East Canada	1,500	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	1 - 40"	Trailer	Yes	No	
J & J Bottling Company	707-524-2884	<a href="http://www.jjbottling.com">www.jjbottling.com</a>	No. California	1,000/2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	2 - 48/50"	Trailer	No	No	
JC Bottling Company	805-619-7234	<a href="http://www.jcbottling.com">www.jcbottling.com</a>	Central California	2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	1 - 48"	Trailer	No	No	
Jersey Bottling	707-436-2302	<a href="http://www.jerseybottling.com">www.jerseybottling.com</a>	No. California	2,000	Yes	No	P/S-Glass	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	2 - 48/50"	Glass	No	Yes	
Le Petit Bottling	707-942-1415	<a href="http://www.lepetitbottling.com">www.lepetitbottling.com</a>	No. California	500/1,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1 or 3	2 - 14"	Trailer	No	No	
Lodi Bottling Unit	540-246-4009	<a href="http://www.lodiunitbottling.com">www.lodiunitbottling.com</a>	East Coast	2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	1 - 40"	Trailer/Container	No	No	
Mark Canning Bottling	707-252-8777	<a href="http://www.markcanningbottling.com">www.markcanningbottling.com</a>	Midwest/Sotheast	1,200	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	1 - 32"	Trailer	No	No	
Mobile Bottling	162-428-1199	<a href="http://www.mobilebottling.com">www.mobilebottling.com</a>	California	1,000/2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	1 - 40"	Trailer	No	No	
Mobile Wine Line	206-740-2871	<a href="http://www.mobilenewline.com">www.mobilenewline.com</a>	California	2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	3	1 - 40"	Trailer/Glass	No	Yes	
Moisen Wines	402-254-3431	<a href="http://www.moisenwines.com">www.moisenwines.com</a>	Upper Mid West	425	Yes	Yes	RS	No	No	No	No	1	1 - 18"	Trailer	No	No	
Outer Mobile Wine	707-387-1163	<a href="http://www.outermobilewine.com">www.outermobilewine.com</a>	No. California	1,000/2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	1 - 40"	Trailer	No	No	
Paragon Mobile Bottling	707-254-2548	<a href="http://www.paragonmobilebottling.com">www.paragonmobilebottling.com</a>	California/Oregon	2,500	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	1 - 40"	Trailer	No	No	
Performance Bottling	205-260-2600	<a href="http://www.performancebottling.com">www.performancebottling.com</a>	No. California	1,000	Yes	No	RS	No	No	No	No	2	1 - 40"	Trailer	No	No	
Premier Wine Services	609-385-0400	<a href="http://www.premierwinesservices.com">www.premierwinesservices.com</a>	No. California	1,000	Yes	No	RS	No	No	No	No	2	1 - 40"	Trailer	No	No	
Premier Bottling, Inc.	707-521-2017	<a href="http://www.premierbottling.com">www.premierbottling.com</a>	No. California	1,500	Yes	No	RS	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	3	1 - 40"	Glass	No	Yes	
Ryan-Mojes Bottling	707-258-7388	<a href="http://www.ryanmojebottling.com">www.ryanmojebottling.com</a>	No. California	2,000/3,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	2 - 40/50"	Trailer	No	No	
Select Mobile Bottling	707-252-8777	<a href="http://www.selectmobilebottling.com">www.selectmobilebottling.com</a>	No. California	1,500/2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	2 - 40/50"	Trailer	Yes	No	
Small Batch Bottling	800-420-2000	<a href="http://www.smallbatchbottling.com">www.smallbatchbottling.com</a>	Midwest	1,000/2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	1 - 40/50"	Trailer	No	No	
SMO Bottling Services	800-421-4493	<a href="http://www.smobottlingservices.com">www.smobottlingservices.com</a>	California	2,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	1 - 40"	Trailer	No	No	
The Berle Maltziner	805-460-1271	<a href="http://www.berlebottling.com">www.berlebottling.com</a>	California	2,300	Yes	Yes	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	2 - 40"	Trailer/Double	Yes	Yes	
Toe It Off Bottling	707-433-0391	<a href="http://www.toeitoffbottling.com">www.toeitoffbottling.com</a>	California/Oregon	1,500/2,000	Yes	Yes	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	2 - 24/45"	Trailer	Yes	Yes	
Ultimate Mobile Bottling	707-348-7403	<a href="http://www.ultimatemobilebottling.com">www.ultimatemobilebottling.com</a>	California	1,000/5,000	Yes	Yes	RS	Yes	No	No	No	3	2 - 28/48"	Trailer	No	No	
Valley Bottling	206-648-4379	<a href="http://www.valleybottling.com">www.valleybottling.com</a>	Central California	2,500	Yes	Yes	RS	Yes	No	No	No	3	1 - 40"	Trailer	No	No	
Vine Mobile Bottling	206-247-5862	<a href="http://www.vinemobilebottling.com">www.vinemobilebottling.com</a>	Central California	2,000/4,000	Yes	No	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2	1 - 17"	Trailer/Container	No	No	
Virginia Wine Bottling	540-344-0003	<a href="http://www.virginiawinebottling.com">www.virginiawinebottling.com</a>	East Coast	2,400	Yes	Yes	RS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3	1 - 36"	Trailer	No	No	

SA September 2011 Issue

SA September 2011 Issue

Because mobile bottlers stay current, often changing out equipment every few years, they can easily surpass any installation most wineries can afford. Today it is not unusual for a new 48-foot rig to easily cost more than a million dollars.

What is absolutely key is mobile bottlers also offer choice. New rigs arrive with state-of-the-art equipment to accommodate new marketing concepts so winemakers can experiment with designs. A sharp winery marketer working with an experienced mobile bottler can stay "package fresh." In the words of Jose Cuevas of JC Bottling Company in Santa Maria, California, "Wineries can grow because of mobile bottling."



Large polished big rigs need plenty of access room to maneuver at the winery.

## Attributes to Consider: Words from the Pros

### Be Prepared

Because the mobile bottling industry continues to grow, it now negotiates with a wider spectrum of customers. As a result, mobile contracts have become very specific about who is responsible for what. These companies also expect wineries to do their homework.

A winery's first step is to hire a reputable bottler that can produce the desired number of cases per day. Remember, however, advertised production speed is relative as any number of things may go wrong to interrupt the flow of bottling.

Mistakes and misinformation will also cost a winery dearly, and the meter is running from the

moment the mobile trailer heads toward the winery, beginning with a setup fee. The meter is also running when wine is not properly filtered or at the correct temperature or when the winery is not ready with a crew at the scheduled time.

One of the more common complaints from bottlers is that wineries do not have everything on site (bottles, corks, foils) when the trailer arrives. Landwirt Bottling in Virginia, among others, is quite specific as its price sheets specify charges for hundreds of dollars per hour for "winery-caused downtime."

Local mobile bottlers advise wineries to research their production capabilities before designing a bottle. Bottlers said over and over to discuss the design concept early. Trailers all vary, and some may not be able to handle a winery's package—be it types of bottles (dimensions and shape), the preferred closure, foil and label. Bottling companies' websites detail their services and equipment.

All 41 bottling companies interviewed offered very good advice because they have seen the mistakes. Without question, their number one concern is the bottle.

### **The Bottle**

Mobile bottlers tell you everything begins with the bottle. It is the packaging "canvas" to which everything is applied. Bottling is a "downstream flow," with each step contingent upon the success of the prior station.

"Whenever we have a problem, often the 'hiccup' started long before we showed up," said Derek Palm, owner of Select Mobile Bottlers. "Our job is to take each piece (glass, cork, foil and label) and try to assemble a package according to marketing's concept."

He continued, "If everyone does their job, we can have a good bottling run. From the beginning it is important to get marketing people meeting with all other parties involved with samples, preferably in the same room." Accordingly, it is imperative to get current, accurate bottle specifications and dimensions.

That said, something that has really plagued mobile bottlers in the past few years has been bad glass. Bottlers suggest things are getting better, but they still advise caution and "buyer beware." You get what you pay for, and cheap glass will cost you—certainly in money for downtime and lost production on the bottling line due to breakage, poor cork, foil and label application.

Julie Hagler Lumgair, Pinot Noir winemaker of Windsor Oaks Winery in Windsor, California, has a simple suggestion. "Get to know your vendor customer service representatives quickly. These are the people who will respond when an issue arises. The next thing is to establish a rapport with the Q&A people. When you start bottling, service is the absolute key."

The word on the street was problematic Chinese glass, but it is finally starting to improve. Initially, China saw an opportunity to make money prior to the U.S. market crash but unfortunately invested heavily in used equipment. Now they have new machinery, but mobile people again advise to be careful. Today not all domestic glass vendors will handle Chinese products.

A Sonoma County custom facility bottling 3.5 million cases per year told me, "We all say we have run Chinese glass, but we cannot talk knowledgeably about which plant produced the bottles. The problem is there are seven different plants, and not all of them are good. Our advice is to survey the importers and ask who is ISO-compliant."

Problems arise when manufacturers do not maintain their molds or pull the glass before it can set properly. You will hear expressions like "heavy seams, bulges, sunken bulge and flat side." For mobile bottlers, this translates into a number of problems, primarily poor label application.

A sag can result in a crooked bottle, which explodes when a fill spout is inserted. Too thin a bottle will also burst. Obviously, both are expensive problems on a bottling line. Loss of production is one thing; a bent fill spout will ruin a winery's day, and the bottler will be extremely unhappy.

Bottlers will often want to see your glass prior to bottling day and will compare the glass to the specification sheets. Bottlers advise wineries to review spec sheets from the manufacturer annually. A simple test is to get samples far in advance and simply roll a bottle across a table. You will see bulges immediately, and the neck will waver if the bottle has sunk.

It is always best to hold the salespeople's feet to the fire and consult with fellow winery references and mobile crews. The bottlers can tell you who is having problems.

### **The Label**

The most critical application to the bottle will be the label, so involve everyone, from marketing and label printers to bottle reps with samples and the mobile bottler.

For a successful application every bottler will tell you to "think KISS" or "keep it simple, stupid." Much has been written about label application but, in short, the bottler would recommend nothing larger than a six-inch label panel, and smaller is better. Smaller makes it easier to avoid bottle seams and accommodate the "flat" bottle.



BILL PRECLER  
A perfect 360-degree full-wrap label on a bottle at Merry Edwards Winery, applied by Peregrine Mobile Bottling.

Most mobile trailers have clear label capability but do not like them because application and separation from the web can be difficult. Anything less than a perfect bottle can result in bubbles. The original idea with clear was to make the label look like a silk screen. A sidenote: Only three bottlers in the entire country are able to apply glue labels.

Approximately one-half of bottlers do not have optical orientation for arranging and spacing complex label packages, so it is advisable to consult with bottling companies before you allow marketing to run free in design. Getting truly accurate orientation requires a rotary labeling system versus an inline vacuum belt. Rotary labelers are expensive, more difficult to operate and therefore rare in the field, but they are available if needed.

Aside from orientation, mobile companies also offer full-wrap label application. One of the best I have seen was executed by Peregrine Mobile Bottling of Napa on a Merry Edwards Winery's Pinot Noir, a full 360 degrees and absolutely perfect.

Finally, many label designers will tell you digital printing is the future, simply because design and last minute changes are easy. Endless infinite adjustments can be made based on your bottler's recommendations before committing to a press run.

If you really want a flawless bottling day, ask if the bottler will take a few cases of sample bottles and do a trial run with your entire package, from label to capsule to closure. That is the kind of bottler you will want to stay with.

#### The Foil

In WBM's November 2006 issue, I wrote extensively about properly sizing foils to the bottle and the importance of demanding exact specifications from the manufacturer.

"I had some foils from a bottling three years earlier; and when I reordered, they were completely different. The specs were simply wrong," said Lumgair at Windsor Oaks.



BILL FREGLER  
Mill Creek Bottling demonstrates how properly sized foils result in trouble-free application.

Experienced bottlers will make sure foils are sized correctly to fit the bottle. Too tight and they will not go on; too large results in excess material, causing wrinkles.

Mishandling (from the supplier or at the winery) will cause out-of-round foils that hamper automatic application. This results in the winery paying for someone to physically hand-apply the foil to each bottle, which can slow down production. The bottler will be helpful in matching the foil to the bottle so, again, have samples on hand with the sales representative present in the room.

A problem that emerged recently was separation rings showing up too close to the skirt. The rings are an integral part of the design, which allows for individual foils to release from the "tube" or stick of foils from the manufacturer. "This resulted in no separation or a late delivery to the bottle," said Bill Kreck of Mill Creek Bottling.

He added, "I always advise people not to save money on foils. I recommend they avoid 80 microns (thickness) because they are too thin and can easily be damaged in handling or during application. Upgrade to 90 to 110 microns. The cost difference is minimal compared to the host of potential problems eliminated. Custom foils may go as high as 120."

#### Closures

It is important for wineries to discuss the bottler's equipment prior to designing their package. Some years ago when I sold bottling equipment, I suggested mobile bottlers consider adding screw cappers, and they thought I was crazy. Today 36 out of 41 mobile companies offer the service. In WBM's 2011 Closure Survey Report (June), 46 percent of all responding small wineries were using screw caps.

Again, wineries today are experimenting with more than one type of closure so make sure the trailer can handle your packaging. They all offer corking, both natural and synthetic. Only 13 trailers nationwide would consider the Zork closure.

Closure preferences are regional, but the same closure survey shows screw caps are on the rise. Hunter Bottling in Ontario, Canada said 60 percent of their production is now under caps. Artus Bottling in British Columbia started at zero, and now half of all production uses caps. Other bottlers will suggest 20 to 30 percent, which is still significant.

#### Trends: Be flexible & experiment

The mobile industry works to stay nimble. Over the past few years, with new pressures from a sour economy, wineries have had to make changes and, in turn, mobile bottlers have had to adapt.

#### Shorter Runs

In a major departure from the past, the majority of bottlers say they are seeing shorter, more frequent bottling runs. A winery's typical 12-month packaging schedule (and release dates) may now be extended to 18 months.

What might have been a single 3,000-case run is now split into two runs of 1,500 cases. As the economy slowed, wineries, distributors and end users (restaurants) did not want case goods growing dust.

#### More SKUs

Mobile operators expect shorter runs to continue because wineries are also learning to diversify. A dozen or more labels under one roof is no longer the exception as wineries are offering choices or "something for everyone."

### More Frequent Packaging Changes

Increasingly, marketing is experimenting with packaging, and this is one reason behind the explosive growth in digital label printing. WBM's recent update on Digital Printing (August 2011) discusses how immediate turn-around time is becoming a marketing prerequisite.

From design to proof to finished labels, digital label production flows effortlessly. Just as important, last-minute design changes—shapes to colors to verbiage—are a snap, so working with the bottler gets even easier.

All this means wineries can produce more wines, in shorter runs, with different packages to accommodate a wider selection of customer. "You simply cannot afford to sit on product," said the Mobile Wine Line. "We see small wineries of 5,000 cases doing numerous small lots. If you are not selling, then change the labels or go to screw caps instead of corks. Experimenting appears to be the key." Accordingly, wineries are also demanding more mobile bottling flexibility with closures and foils.

At the same time, mobile companies are bottling more shiners (unlabeled but sealed bottles), enabling marketing to experiment at a later date. If need be, shiners can also be sold as excess inventory to other parties and labeled under a different brand. All of this is a calculated attempt to stay abreast of trends, price-points and tightened inventory levels.

Lastly, we are already hearing of container changes. La Petite Bottling Company of Napa is doing trial runs with the new aluminum bottles. G3 Mobile out of Modesto is currently running five trailers, one of which is dedicated to bag-in-box containers. Box and pouch-filling equipment is rapidly evolving, and I predict will start showing up as an added service in future trailers. [wbm](#)

### Sparging

Another area to prequalify is the sparging process, both prior to filling the bottle and applying the closure. Depending on the age of the trailer and level of sophistication of the monoblock, this may be the make-or-break deal for a winemaker when deciding on a company.

Many types of fillers now have a combination of a rinser and sparger prior to filling. Some winemakers may shy away from rinsing their bottles, especially if their on-site water is questionable, and some claim the slightest amount (drop) of residual water will taint their wine.

Ultimately, if you need to clean box dust from bottles, a sparger alone will not accomplish the task. All a sparger does is evenly distribute the dust on the entire inside of the bottle.

Dust does not come out of a skinny neck with an air blast. In the old days, to prove the point, we would ask a cigarette smoker to drop a large ash inside a clean bottle then sparge and marvel at the perfectly-distributed gray powder-coat inside. Buying better glass helps prevent dust.

The latest breakthrough in sparging is the introduction of the new on-board nitrogen generators. I predict this will follow the same path as screw caps, and most bottlers will soon have them. Providing 99.99 percent pure dry nitrogen at a constant flow rate 24/7/365 is the first step in eliminating the dewers and nitrogen bottles from bottling day.



BILL PRESLER  
Today's mobile trailers, such as this one belonging to Peregrine Mobile Bottling, are models of high-speed efficiency and technology.

It is uncanny how often rented dewers go empty halfway through the bottling run. This is usually the result of a winemaker underestimating nitrogen demands (flow and duration) for sparging.

Generators will relieve winemakers of another bothersome task and prevent another expensive hiccup. Remember, while the bottler is waiting for another dewer to be delivered, they are looking at their watch.

Ryan-McGee Bottling in Napa said it was so tired of dewers that it immediately considered a

generator. They offer the service as an up-charge but feel it will more than offset the cost and problems with rental nitrogen bottles.

## Other Services

There are many other things to consider before hiring the mobile trailer. Source of power is important as most bottling equipment is 220 V-three phase. Wineries may have to step up or step down electrical to meet the demands of the trailer. Here again, the best solution is the trailer that arrives with on-board power.

The physical size of a trailer is often overlooked, and a bottler will usually require a site visit. Remember, on bottling day the meter is running, and that highly polished trailer just came to a halt at that low-hanging branch off the heritage oak tree you proudly display on your label. Chain saws, anyone?

In the past, mobile bottlers would sanitize their equipment with hot water, even ozone. Not only are hundreds of gallons of water wasted but much depends on the quality of the water coming from your well. Also, hot water does not penetrate into the hiding places of bugs. Only latent transfer of intense heat (steam) will raise the kill ratio to sterile.

Today, 35 of the bottlers interviewed now rely exclusively on steam for sterilization. Steam saves time, energy and water consumption. If a winery is considering investing in steam for other applications, like barrels and tank cleaning, take notice of what the bottling professionals are doing.

Lastly, there are other issues, like case closing (tape versus glue) and whether heat-shrink capsuling is available, though we seldom see that any more, and finally, laser or ink jet coding.

Coding is growing, and trailers are now beginning to offer the service. It affords the winery traceability for product, marketing and overall quality control. If the trailer is without a coder, it is easily rented and added into the conveyor system. I was advised that laser can be touchy; inkjet is easy so find what is comfortable for the bottler.



Nissen Wine, a small bottling line, arrives in the snow of Nebraska.

## Plan Ahead, They're Busy

If I question my ability to perform a task, I generally defer to people who do it for a living every day and have experienced the good with the bad and the ugly. Mobile bottlers fit this description perfectly.

Winemaker Lumgair at Windsor Oaks had a great line about mobile bottling. "We are a small artisan winery that cannot assume ownership of bottling equipment so we rent the service. It is a lot like doing exercise for my abs. I may not want to do it, but the results are great so get a detailed plan and get it done."

At the same time, make sure to look closely at the bottling trailer. Merry Edwards of Merry Edwards Winery said, "Cleanliness and organization are an indicator of how well it runs. It is a reflection of the owner/operator."

Not surprisingly, these companies are very busy as more winemakers are beginning to understand their education was more about winemaking than bottling. I predict this nationwide service industry will continue to experience nothing but growth. With 6,700 wineries in the U.S. and Canada alone, and the vast majority of these producing less than 10,000 cases per year, there is plenty of potential.

And it is across the board. Mobile bottlers arrive with short fifth-wheel rigs and cater to small wineries at the end of dirt roads with barking dogs. Large operators will often park a high-speed rig at a major facility for a month or longer.

One of my favorite stories this time came from Nissen Wine in Hartington, Nebraska that transports its bottling equipment to the winery, offloads and moves everything inside the warm cellar. Apparently, when it is minus 30 degrees outside on bottling day, adjustments need to be made.

The trailers are getting better, with equipment upgrades in both speed and capacity, and operators are offering added services to their clients. Already there are plenty of mobile bottlers out there that are in the enviable position of having to maintain a customer waiting list. **WBM**

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