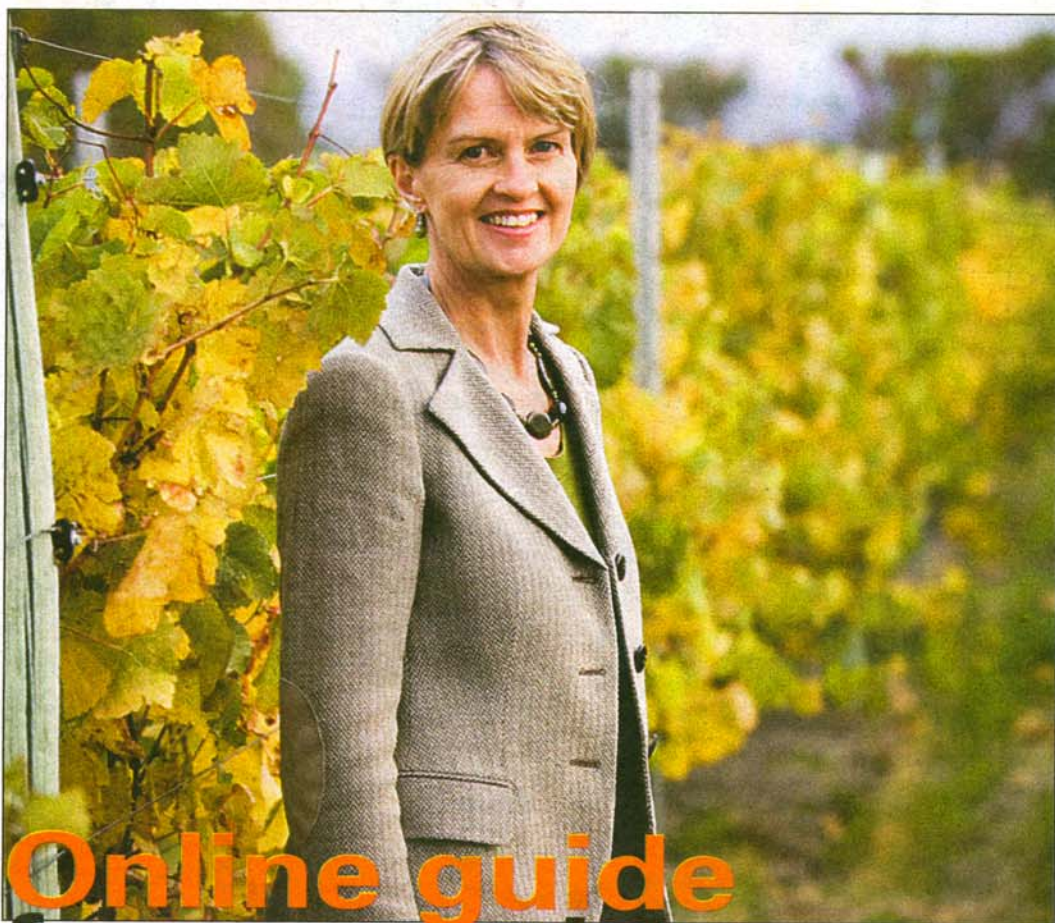


midweek



Mark SMITH
GRAPEVINE



Online guide for everything food and wine

Hobart's Robyn Lewis, the chief executive of a new online wine and food travel business.

It takes 20 years to become an overnight success.

At least, that was time-frame for success when comedian Eddie Cantor was around. In this Internet age, you might need somewhere around 10 years, Hobart's Robyn Lewis concedes. Ten years and a whole lot of strategic planning and carefully targeted brand development.

And that's probably the easy bit, says the chief executive of a new online wine and food travel business called VisitVineyards.com.

"People think that having a Web site is a nice simple way of making money," Mrs Lewis explains.

"That's just not true. You have to feed it with money and good ideas before you can begin to get anything out of it."

The former food and tourism marketing consultant describes the venture as Australia's first comprehensive guide for wine and food explorers. Her site is hosted and supported in Tasmania by local know-how and state-of-the-art information technology. It provides online users across the planet with up-to-date information and news and reviews of the best regional wine and food travel experiences in Australia.

Mrs Lewis says her business first sprang to mind eight years ago as a result of the personal frustration she experienced in having to sift through mountains of brochures and Web sites to seek credible wine, food and travel information and advice.

"Having travelled extensively internationally and within Australia, I was well aware of our fantastic regional food and wine experiences and was keen to explore more," she explains.

"But I found I was wasting far too much time searching and planning when I could have been on the road exploring. The aim of VisitVineyards.com is to connect

epicurious travellers to the many fantastic wine and food producers we have in Australia, saving them time and ensuring they get the most out of their travels."

The site's database brings together details on more than 30,000 wine, food and travel experiences across every Australian wine and food region. More than 2200 Web pages have a uniquely Tasmanian content.

"It helps people discover what's going on, the places and products not to be missed and up-to-date information about their next wine or culinary destination," Mrs Lewis says.

Visitors to VisitVineyards.com can search the site free of charge and utilise more than 100,000 Web pages of information in planning an itinerary that suits their particular needs.

Much of the site's online content came by way of an astute purchase of archived pages belonging to www.winepros.com, a Web-based venture once backed by Australian wine critic James Halliday. The former Coldstream Hills owner

and present-day wine judge no longer has any association with the site, but visitors to winepros.com still gain the benefits of his palate and experience nonetheless.

That said, VisitVineyards.com does have genuine international connections — Jancis Robinson, Britain's most widely read and respected columnist on wine, food and travel.

"We developed a relationship with Jancis last year and it's been working very well for us," Mrs Lewis says.

She's quick to point out that her site does not request a participation fee from its listed partners.

"It simply provides them with a complimentary way to market their products and services to an interested and active audience, thus enabling the inclusion of very small, boutique producers," she adds.

For further details on user benefits, log on to www.VisitVineyards.com.