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Branding strategies in Greek wine firms

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate and discuss the main branding strategies used by Greek wine producers and to highlight the opportunities. An extensive literature review relative to the question under investigation is presented. Empirical data were collected by using secondary and primary data sources. Primary data sources include semi-structured interviews with 33 Greek wine producers. This study highlights several areas of opportunity for a holistic approach of branding strategies by Greek wine producers: (a) Producers try to take advantage of PDO/PGI quality signals, as well as International wine exhibitions awards either as promotional tool or as secure for their established reputation (b) Greek producers have to invest on a more professional and less passive attitude in terms of wine's brand image, its associations, the lifestyle and experiences it represents, improving all intangible elements those ultimate affect consumer choices.(c) Networks and clusters with tourism industry improve "brand loyalty" and "brand awareness" (d) Greek wine producers have to adopt new electronic forms of communication and distribution channels, very valuable for brand recognition, stimulating word of mouth and targeting of opinion leaders. The findings could aid producers in Greek wine industry in providing them valuable considerations and guidelines.

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1. Introduction

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competition (Keller, 2003). On a general level, the firm's brand identity and what it represents is the most important intangible asset for many companies and is arguably a primary basis for competitive advantage (Aaker 1991). At its most simplistic, a company's brand identity represents a set of promises that, for the buyer, implies trust, consistency, and a defined set of expectations (Davis 2000). Building a brand is very important in a wine market where the consumer can

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be overwhelmed by too many choices. Wine branding is defined by Nowak et al (2008) as “ the perception of the wine product and it’s name in the consumer’s mind”. The authors argued that it is important to have a successful branding strategy for a wine because: a)it makes shopping easier for consumers, b)it reduces wineries’ selling time and effort; c) it helps to improve wineries’ image; d) it favors a differentiation in consumer’s mind, through the intangible, emotional and symbolic meanings that buyers attach to the brand; and e) it makes the wine successful by blending all its constituent elements (product quality, price, promotion, packaging) in a unique and memorable way that appeal to the target customer. However, it has been argued that wine sector is a very difficult market place for brand differentiation, because of the presence of thousands of brands and labels (Johnson and Bruwer, 2007). A wine brand is much more than a wine label. Also, the branding strategies in the wine sector historically tended to focus more on the characteristics or attributes of the product (for example, country of origin, appellation, grape variety, the name of the producer) and their ability to stimulate more consumer consumption, with the aim of deriving from the information useful suggestions for the management and marketing of a product, rather than on more traditional branding paradigms (Brondie et al , 2008). Casini et al (2009) summarized some references on what literature considered the most important product choice drivers, for example, grape variety, the attractiveness of the front label, and the alcoholic content of wine. The results of Miller and Chadee (2008) for Australia indicate that people use ‘the brand’ when making wine choices, regardless of their experience. Dimara et al (2004) for Greece proved that the type and source of information received by consumers, place of origin, disposable income, education and marital status all exert an independent effect on attitude formation. The use of quality cue such as certification, bottling, aroma and taste may be potentially useful in creating nich markets and advancing rural localities. Beyond the recommendation that wineries place an increased emphasis on branding in their strategy, very few studies detail the concept of branding from the perspective of the winery.

The main objective of this work is the analysis of the current state of wine branding strategies mainly from producer’s perspective, in order to understand and discuss which the branding strategies are used by wineries and which are their expectations from branding. The analysis will focus on branding strategies like geographical indication, label-packaging-dress, exhibition awards, involvement in wine tourism and e-branding in case of Greek wine firms, with empirical evidence from 33 wineries in Northern Greece. The structure is as follows: After this Introduction section, branding strategies are discussed theoretically along with an overview of the literature on the notion of wine branding. This is followed by the research study undertaken with the purpose of analyzing a sample of 33 wineries in order to shed light onto their main branding strategies, along with the results. In the fourth section, the main conclusions and implications are presented.

2. Branding and brand associations literature

According to the literature (Lockshin, and Spawton, 2007) brand associations are the various aspects outside the wine itself that help the consumer remember the wine and winery. Brand associations help consumers retrieve the brand from memory when faced with a choice among many brands (Aaker, 1996). Symbols on the label, are strong brand associations that last and can be transferred to new wines. Other packaging cues can also act as brand associations, if they are used consistently. The winery itself can be a positive brand association through its buildings, people, and visiting experience. Linking a brand to a region is also a good tactic, if the region is better known than the brand. Some wineries look to sponsorships as another way to build positive brand associations. The key concern should be consistent and long term linking of the associations to the brand. In the following we’ll try to summarize the literature about the main strategies used by wineries according to how they want the brand to be perceived like: geographical indication, label-packaging-dress, exhibition awards, advertising, involvement in wine tourism and e-branding strategies.

2.1. Geographical indication

Geographical indications like trademarks are distinctive signs that enable producers to secure their established reputation against imitation and fraud. However, trademarks are individually owned rights

whilst geographical indications can be considered as club goods (Josling, 2006). Geographical indicators should be divided into two categories: protected designations of origin (specific geographic, environmental and human influences on the region) and protected geographical indications (the quality, reputation or other attributes specific to the region). In most cases the PDO/PGI certification scheme is primarily a mechanism to protect national producer interests rather than a marketing tool (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000). Durrieu (2008) summarized the three ways of defining the Regional Branding concept in case of French: geographical characteristics such as PDO and PGI, umbrella brand, that takes into account the interactions between individuals and collective reputation, and brand constellation, which is a combination of wine color, origin, vineyard, price, varietal names or combinations, winemaker and style have on the buyer's perception of the product. Dimara et al (2004), for Greece, argue that regional denomination certification can be considered either as a promotion or protection strategy from the producer's point of view. However, their results suggest that for most producers PDO certification is not evaluated as an important marketing indicator but as a protection strategy raising barriers to entry. Regional brand or "Brand Constellation" combines the following cues used by the consumer: color of the wine, country or region of origin, vineyard, price including discounts, varietal names or combinations, winemaker(s) and style (Lockshin & Hall, 2003). Batt and Dean (2000) found that the origin of the wine was the third most important variable influencing consumers' decision to purchase wine in Australia, following price and brand as first and second most important factors. In Europe, research by Skuras and Vakrou (2002), Dean (2002), Koewn and Casey (1995) and Gluckman (1990) suggest that country of origin is a primary and implicit consideration of consumers in their decision to purchase wine. Recent research by Lockshin et al. (2006) and Goodman et al. (2007) confirmed region to have an important impact on wine purchase depending on the country. The regional certification label, which guarantees that the product is the authentic product and not an imitation, is supposed to influence consumers in their purchasing behavior through two different dimensions. The first one is the quality warranty dimension, which represents consumer's beliefs about the way and degree the label can support the economy in that region (Van der Lans et al., 2001; Van Ittersum et al., 2007). Moreover, Van del Lans et al, (2001) pointed out that the success of a marketing strategy based on the region of origin crucially depends on consumer's awareness and favorable image of the region. These findings are fully in line with findings from the country of origin and branding literature (Kotler and Gerner, 2004; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999). Accordingly, a marketing strategy based on regional certification labels resembles a branding strategy in many aspects, particularly in terms of reputation building and promotional activities (Teubor, 2011).

2.2. Packaging/Label

Rundh (2005) stated that the structural changes in the European food industry require a need for competitiveness, where packaging can make a difference for many consumer products. Rocchi and Stefani (2005) found that individuals respond to wine packaging around two fundamental dimensions. In the first dimension, consumers seem to be affected by the bottle's shape, size and color, while in the second dimension they consider the dress of the bottle on the basis of other packaging elements, such as labels and capsules (Wansink, 1996; Wansink et al, 2005; Silayoi and Speece, 2007). Often associated with a brand, or used as a synonym for a brand, is the label on the wine bottle. Prompting the brand discourse is the label, as the label is the tangible evidence of the brand. Along with the brand name, image, picture or logo, a label also provides a consumer with information about the style of wine (taste and aroma), a description of the wine, wine and food pairing options, awards and medals won, the wine maker, the wine region, and vintage. Findings from Atkinson (1999) and Barber et al. (2006) indicate that the label factors into consumer decision making and that consumers use the label to reduce anxiety in their wine choice. Rocchi and Stefani (2005) show that color is the most basic level of perception and is used by respondents both to stress differences of opinion and to express preferences. Reactions to labels are more complex. Labels provide important extrinsic cues (*i.e.*, attributes that are not part of the physical product) to be used by consumers to assess quality (Chaney, 2000; Reidick, 2003; Verdú Jover *et al.*, 2004). While the front label is usually considered for evocation, the back label is expected to provide technical information about the wine (Charters, Lockshin and Unwin, 1999; Barber, Almanza and Donovan, 2006). Barber et al. (2006)

found that women, in contrast to men, were more likely to use the front label of the wine bottle, whereas men found the back label less confusing and were more likely to use the back label to increase their wine knowledge. Moreover, Boudreaux and Palmer (2007) show on the basis of survey data with wine drinkers that color and imagery are strongly associated with purchase intent and brand personality. The more colorful the label, the stronger its effect was found to be on perceived quality and willingness to pay. Dark, rich colors are associated with high quality, whereas colorful labels tend to be perceived as indicative of less “serious”, more “frivolous” tasting (Teague, 2004). Luiz de Mello and Ricardo Pires (2009) proved for Spanish consumers that there are strong preferences for selected combinations of colors and shapes in the composition design of labels. Surprisingly, color alone does not elicit as strong preferences as selected shapes do, at least when they are assessed irrespective of the shape that dominates the label composition.

2.3. *Wine Exhibition Awards*

Wine exhibition awards can be categorized as third party certification marks. According to the information content provided by third party certification marks those may be classified into three major categories: factual certification, evaluative certification and warranty certification (Laric & Sarel, 1981). Wine exhibition awards belong to the group of evaluative certifications providing attribute-specific evaluation (Orth and Krska, 2002). They are of special interest to the retailers/producers since they are considered to be easy recognizable and support consumer’s choice by communicating superior quality (Sattle, 1991). It is assumed that consumers rely to a great extent on easy recognizable labels or tags (i.e. medals) when choosing products instead of carefully studying all the information written in usually small letters on the main bottle. Customary options for the label “wine exhibition award” are “gold”, “silver”, or “bronze” medal awarded during a particular wine exhibition. Orth and Krska (2002), proved for Czech Republic that attending wine exhibition for the purpose of receiving prestigious awards that are recognized and appreciated, appears to be a basically promising strategy for producers. The results of the study seem to suggest also that the origin of the award (place of the exhibition) affects consumer preferences. The findings of Schiefer and Fischer (2008), suggest that although some consumer segments may find expert awards to be useful decision cues, for a large portion of the market, there is demand for a more consumer-orientated system of sensory quality evaluation and labeling.

2.4. *Involvement in Wine tourism*

The development of wine routes forms an integral part of the wine tourism industry. In fact, they are “the roadways” to the core attraction in wine tourism-the wines and the winery production facility (Bruwer, 2003). Lockshin, and Spawton (2007) prove that the key issue is to create enough awareness to get the consumer to visit the winery. The wineries nowadays become “talking” structures capable of communicating not only the distinctive product features, but most of all the intangibles aspects of wine, the story of winemaking generations, a company philosophy. The winery is built following the experiential, symbolic, social and emotional values concerning the product and the place. The visitors participate to the winery activity witnessing the production process, watching the landscape from privileged points of observation appropriately created and being able to benefit from the hotel, spa, restaurant and specialized wine & food or landscape bookshop and follow guided wine tasting. Consumers are attracted directly to the winery, allowing the producer to build direct and long term customer relationships, which allow reducing the power of distribution channels and building both territorial and firm brand awareness, where emotional experience values play an important role. From a “hidden” and almost inhospitable place of production, the winery becomes “transparent” connecting the production, ageing and stocking areas with the external landscape. It is a new relationship among landscape, winery and consumer, and the territory is the element of connection. This is why these wineries can be considered cultural markers. The value of the brand can be associated with functional and symbolic value. While functional values relate to the tangible product features satisfying customers’ practical needs, symbolic values refer to the intangible values satisfying customers’ self-expression needs. (Bhat and Reddy, 1998; de Chernatony, Harris, Dall’Olmo Riley, 2000; Sevil and Yuncu, 2009). Functional and symbolic benefits can be both included in the brand and marketers may choose to stress them according to how they want the brand to be perceived, creating

the brand identity. Jingxue Yuan and Jang (2007) found that customers will likely visit a winery after a visit to a wine festival based on their awareness of what a winery can offer. The event helps build affective associations between potential visitors and wine destinations. Visiting a wine festival may translate into visiting wineries in a search for authenticity (e.g., seeing the actual grapes, the physical plant, and the personnel that produce the wines) (Brown and Getz 2005). One of the most notable ways to provide wine tourism experience would, therefore, be events and festivals in which wineries are granted an opportunity to educate consumers and sell their product directly to them (Charters and Ali-Knight 2002; Bruwer 2003).

2.5. E-branding

Kozinets (1999) found that there are viral communities of consumers on the Internet which are quite active in communicating about their purchase experiences. Related to this concept, Andersen (2005) researched online relationship marketing and the development of web “brand communities,” and discovered they can be helpful when users have an interest and a long-term relationship with a key brand. This is the type of relationship many wine consumers have with wineries when they enroll in a wine club, which suggests that wine blogs established by wineries can take advantage of this type of online relationship marketing with their wine club and mailing list members (Thach, 2009). Other experts (Watts et al. 2008) suggest a combination of traditional web advertising with viral marketing. They define viral marketing as online content that is so compelling that people will forward it on to friends. Examples include innovative online promotions or concepts that include humor, sentiment, fun videos, contests, another intriguing content that an online user would want to forward to others). In general, the wine industry has been slower than other industries to adopt online applications, but they have made progress in the past few years (Gebauer & Ginsburg, 2003; Quinton & Harridge - March, 2003; Thach & Eaton, 2001; Bruwer & Wood, 2005). This suggests that paying attention to the growth of wine blogs and other Wine 2.0 components would be useful for maintaining and enhancing winery relationship marketing and public relations efforts.

3. Research Method and Findings

In Greece, the first organized wine roads were outlined in 1993 by the Wine Producers Association of the Northern Greece Vineyard (WPANGV) and given the official name “Wine Roads of Northern Greece.” Today, there are 41 members in the Association and 8 different routes covering Northern Greece by distinguishing the different variety of wine but also the historical and cultural particularities of these regions. The research methodology consisted of both primary and secondary data. Case studies of 33 established, ultra-premium wine producers involved in wine tourism were developed. Face-to face semi-structured interviews were conducted with wine producers at their place of business. Questions evolved around the firm’s history, guiding philosophy, marketing practices, positioning, production processes, international wine exhibitions, exports and competitive pressures and e-branding strategies used. Following this interview and observational information was integrated with secondary information from the general wine press, news media, specialist wine books, and secondary data gained from the firms.

For each wine producer a questionnaire was developed, where first all the brands and labels of the *company* are asked to be characterized in terms of certification of origin (PDO, PGI) or biological or innovative. Later they are asked to evaluate their brands in terms of choice of brand name, kind of packaging, labels and messages on the bottle and then to give information about each brand’s number and kind of exhibition awards in 2010. Then, the managers are asked to evaluate the total firm branding strategies for improving the brand awareness through three dimensions: a) advertising strategies, b) their participation to wine routes and wine tourism and 3) their access to internet marketing strategies. The descriptive data show that most Greek wine enterprises are private (92.7%). Their size in terms of employees is relatively small since only 9% have more than 50 employees, while 38% of firms have less than 10 employees. The mean number of brands per firm is 10 brands, while only one firm has 50 brands. Regarding the brand names and labels of our sample Table 1 shows the total brands and also brand categories. It is very important to mention that from the total number of 340 brands, 84% are PGI or PDO, while the rest 16% referees to bio-cultivated, or innovative brands. The latter is in line with the results of

Paolini and Poledrini (2008) for Italy and Durrieu (2008) for France, who stated that branding strategies in both countries always preferred to link their products to a specific territory, land and tradition. The latter also shows that Greek producers wish to differentiate their products through certificates that are recognizable and guarantee the authenticity and the tradition related to their product or production method. Since Greek wineries have small size it seems easier and more efficient to invest in qualitative products with distinctive signs either as promotional tool or as secure for their established reputation.. Also, the choice of a brand name for Greek wine producers is an interesting aspect. According to the results of our study (Table 2), there are no rules, since 43% of the brands use names with no particular meaning, while brands associated with vineyard name is 21%, with location or region reaches 19% and with winemaker's name is about 5.5%. 11.5% of brands use names that are restricted usable only for PDO or PGI. Greek wine producers want the packaging to communicate the quality of their products in relation to price, also to promote connotations and messages to consumers that the products are reliable, diverse and distinct. However, no winery use alternative packaging environmentally friendly (eg label from recycled paper). The designs of the labels that are usually preferred by Greek wine producers are mainly landscapes and scenery while there are label designs or patterns with more modern compositions 27% (93 labels) that promote associations that this is an innovative and differentiated product. Concerning the colors of the labels, it is interesting that most of the labels are white or semi-white (53%), while other colors used for labeling are: colorful / bi-color (14%), black (13%), red (5%), blue (5%) etc. Producers believe that white or semi white label color is associated with high quality and less risky decision. This result is in line with their belief that most of the wines are produced for most of the market audience. In the question "which is the target market audience for each brand", 80% of producers share the view that more than 60% of their brands targeting both to young and mature ages of all income and educational levels. A small percentage of each winery's brands target to more innovative, gourmand and bon viveurs, sophisticated, hedonics, eclectic and collectors.

The results concerning the participation of wineries in international exhibitions prove that attending wine exhibition for the purpose of receiving prestigious awards that are recognized and appreciated, is a promising strategy for producers. It is evident that quality labels are most frequently employed by Greek producers since the quality wine information is distributed asymmetrically. That makes quality labels an important cue in consumer quality perception. Wine exhibition awards belong to evaluative certifications which provide attribute specific evaluation. All the wineries of the sample participated in international competitions during 2010 and won important awards. Table 3 presents the international wine competitions that Greek wine firms participated and the awards. The total number of awarded brands is 180 for 2010 (mean number of awards per firm 5.3), while silver medal represent 59%, gold medal 31% and the bronze medal 10%. It is important to note that the place of competitions is highly related to export activities of firms, since Greek firms export about 20% of their production mainly to European countries and especially to Germany and UK. The latter means that Greek wine producers wish to participate in wine exhibition in order their brands to be easy recognizable and to communicate superior quality, especially in export-target countries.

During the second part of the questionnaire, respondents are asked to evaluate the importance of being a wine route member for their branding strategy. According to Vlachvei and Notta (2009), for the same sample firms, wineries have invested a lot for being a member of a wine route with a large number of facilities available at wineries such as: vineyard walking, winery organized tour, cellar door sales and wine tasting are facilities available at all wineries of the sample, while the majority of the firms have printed information (92%), conference and electronic presentation facilities (61.5%), other educational seminars and tour and visitation to museums and/or other contests. It is important to note that all wine producers recognize the benefits of being involved in wine tourism. The empirical results highlight that in line with the literature (O'Neil et al, 2002; Sevil &Yunku, 2009) visits to the cellar door offer the development of brand equity. 66% of Greek wine producers argue that visits to the cellar door help to improve reputation of the firm brand, while the benefits of promotion and publicity are characterized as very significant for

56% of them. It is interesting to note that 22% of the winners agree that not only the visits to cellar doors, but also the creation of networks and clusters with tourism industry improve “brand loyalty” and “brand awareness”. Although there are no statistically differences in perceived benefits according to the winery size, wine tourism is characterized as a very important marketing tool especially in case of smaller wineries. Respondents are also asked to rate their adaption of electronic marketing communications. The questions are related to which components of web presence are utilized and how effective is the communication with consumers. From our survey, it is evident that all companies have a basic brochure-style website that includes information on winery and on production techniques, its products, photos of the establishment and maybe videos, conduct data and a simple e-commerce engine for visitors to put an order for wine. Most of the producers (88%) believe that their webpage is effective and informative. They also believe that the role of website is merely informative about the new products, establishments and the innovative techniques used by the winery. Most of them however (more than 80%) admit that they are not familiar with the philosophy of reaching out to consumers and actively engaging with them, by using Web 2 or even “Web 3” concepts.

It is evident that Greek wine producers have not interactive websites since only 1 winery website (3%) included a blog, in 3 websites (10%) there is “share on Facebook”, while 25% of the wineries have online videos, maybe due to growing popularity of You Tube, Google video and other online video sites. One possible explanation for that is lack of time and resources, since many small wineries do not have the stuff, time or resources to online interaction, such as blog or social networking comment. According to the experts the wineries that choose to create a blog must have dedicated person who enjoy writing and interacting with blog visitors (Thach, 2009). No winery sell directly through its website while 17 wineries (50%) make sales through on - line platforms for wine sales. 87% of the winery websites suggests to the customer telephone, email or fax an order to purchase wine. It is highly likely that they are not selling as much as wine online because they are not actively engaging with online consumers. Also, since most of producers representing SMEs with limited experience may explain their reluctance to introduce complex online selling and payment functions on their web site. The above prove that with the marketing environment changing, Greek wine producers have to adopt new electronic forms of communication and distribution channels, very valuable for brand recognition, stimulating word of mouth and targeting of opinion leaders.

4. Conclusions and Research implications

Trying to summarize and interpret the above primary and secondary data and results, this study highlights several areas of opportunity for a holistic approach of branding strategies by Greek wine producers: The first important conclusion is that producers try to take advantage of the long tradition and recognition of the above signals and invest in communicating these attributes, in a sense that they communicate qualitative products with distinctive signs either as promotional tool or as secure for their established reputation. The second conclusion is that the designs of the labels that are usually preferred by Greek wine producers are mainly landscapes and scenery with white or semi white label color associated (according to the producers) with high quality and less risky decision. The names used for branding have no particular meaning, while brands associated with vineyard name, location or region reaches 40%, while more than 60% of brands targeting both to young and mature ages of all income and educational levels. The above highlight the importance of a more professional and less passive attitude in terms of wine’s brand image, its associations, the lifestyle and experiences it represents. Greek producers have to invest on improving all intangible elements those ultimate affect consumer choices. The third conclusion relates to the study of the awards according to which participating in wine exhibitions for the purpose of receiving prestigious awards that are recognized and appreciated, is a promising strategy for Greek wine producers who want to communicate superior quality of their products. The fourth conclusion is that Greek wine producers are highly involved in wine tourism through wine routes and they all agree that being a member of wine routes is an important marketing tool. They agree that visitations improve reputation of firm brand, while the benefits of promotion and publicity are also significant. However, through wine

routes, the benefits are multidiscipline since the creation of networks and clusters with tourism industry improve “brand loyalty” and “brand awareness”. The fifth and last conclusion is the absence of electronic marketing communication strategies of Greek wine firms. It is evident that marketing environment is changing and consumers demand more interactive relationships with the producers, via social networks, blogs, vlogs, podcasts and online virtual communities. Greek wine producers have to adopt new electronic forms of communication and distribution channels, very valuable for brand recognition, stimulating word of mouth and targeting of opinion leaders.

The research provides the owners, operators and managers of Greek wineries with a better understanding of the operational and marketing processes that can contribute to the development of their brand. As the industry is becoming more competitive and the customer seeks for quality and differentiated products, Greek wine companies that wish to survive should adopt a better designed integrated marketing communication approach. Rather than interpreting the brand as the name of the winery or the label on the bottle, it is essential that managers adopt a holistic approach to the management of their brand and ensure all business processes consistently convey the values desired for the winery’s brand. Focus should be given to the adoption of internet and social media marketing branding strategies, since in the near future the competition, is assumed to shift marketing communication’ target area from the tangible to intangible.

TABLES

Table 1. Number and kinds of Brands

No of firms	No of brands	PGI	PDO	bio	innov
33	340	229	56	44	14

Table 2. Choice of Brand name

Categories of brand names	% of brands
Vineyard name	21%
Region/place	19%
Winemaker name	5.5%
Other name	43%
Names only for PGI or PDO	11.5%
Total	100

Table 3. Awards in International Wine competitions

International Wine competitions	Brands %
Concours Mondial de Bruxelles	11%
Decander world wine awards, UK	15%
International wine and Spirits Competition London	8%
International Wine Competition Thessaloniki Greece	31%
Oinothiki	6%
ProWein Dusseldorf, Germany	5%
Total Brands awarded	180
Gold medals	31%
Silver medals	59%
Cooper	10%

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