

Total Wine & More Concierge Sales

Innovative buy online and in-store pickup storefront for VIP wine customers

Meet Total Wine

With more than 200 retail store locations spread across 20 states, Total Wine & More is the largest independent wine retailer in the United States. A visit to one of its retail locations is a treat for anyone who enjoys a good bottle of wine.

When customers walk into a Total Wine & More retail store, they know they are going to find a huge selection of competitively priced, high quality wines from countries all over the world. But many visitors to these stores are often unaware that Total Wine & More also has a growing Concierge Sales division that offers high-end services to serious wine enthusiasts and collectors. Concierge Offers are available to customers who are looking for unusual vintages that they rarely, if ever, will see in a retail store.

The screenshot displays the 'Shopping Cart' page for Total Wine & More's Concierge Sales. The page features a dark header with navigation links: 'MY ACCOUNT', 'SHOPPING CART (1 ITEM)', a search bar, and 'Concierge Offers', 'Bordeaux Futures', 'Private Consultation', and 'How It Works'. The main content area shows a single item in the cart: '2021 L'Eglise Clinet' wine, priced at \$294.97 per bottle, with a quantity of 2, totaling \$589.94. A '50% Deposit' badge is visible next to the product image. Below the cart item, there is a 'Your Preferred Store' section with a dropdown menu showing '1406-Olympia 625 Black Lake Blvd SW STE 405 Olympia, WA, 98502'. To the right, there is a 'Enter Promo Code' field with an 'Add Promo' button. At the bottom right, a summary table shows the following details:

Subtotal	\$589.94
Tax	\$55.45
TOTAL	\$645.39
50% Deposit	\$322.70

Buttons for 'Clear Cart' and 'Continue to Checkout' are located at the bottom of the page.

The Concierge Sales division also offers private consultation services for people who are searching for a hard-to-find wine or looking for expert assistance in building a wine collection. But perhaps the most interesting and intriguing feature of Total Wine & More's Concierge Sales is its Bordeaux Futures business.

Known in the industry as en primeur, futures refers to wine that is still in barrel and has yet to be bottled. With futures, there is literally no physical inventory—just the promise of something that will be available six months, one year, or even two years down the road. So how do you sell something that doesn't even exist yet? And for that matter, how do you buy it? Therein lies our story...

Growing Pains

Total Wine & More's Concierge Sales division was facing a serious challenge, albeit a nice one to have. "Concierge Sales was growing faster than we could create manual workarounds for," explains Petar Milutinovic, IT project manager. "Our homegrown system wasn't working anymore, and we knew we needed to automate. On top of that, we had no real inventory management system to manage sales of product that was not physically in our stores." Until earlier this year, Concierge Sales was a manual process that caused endless inefficiency for staff and customers. As Cyrus Hazzard, Director of Concierge Sales, notes, all of those manual workarounds were time-consuming and frustrating for customers. "My team was spending more time on manual workarounds than speaking with customers," he notes. "Success caused an immediate need to create a better experience for staff and our customers."

Highlights:

- Concierge Sales website replaces the company's legacy systems, eliminates costly manual work, saves time, and automates the division's ordering and inventory management functions for special order wine
- Ultra cloud-based eCommerce platform creates efficiencies for both Concierge Sales team members and customers



We had a horse-drawn carriage before—now we're driving a Lexus. My favorite part of the system is the flexibility and customizability of the software.

Cyrus Hazzard, Concierge Sales

Finding solutions and gaining an advantage

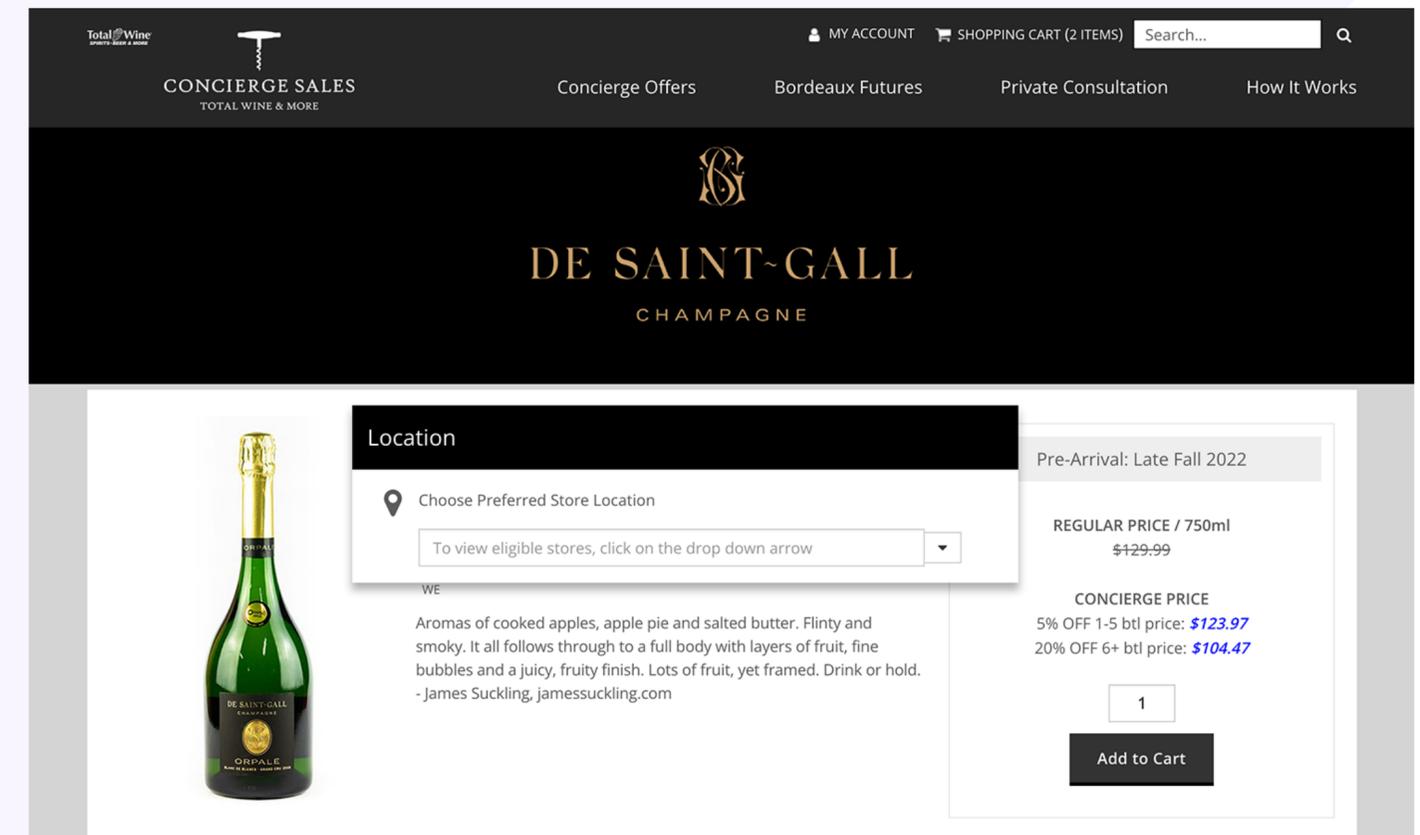
In search of a system provider with wine experience, Milutinovic and Hazzard were referred by the Adams Wine Group (the company behind the Vinesse wine club website) to Ultra Commerce. The first order of business was for Ultra to audit the process. “We wireframed what the Concierge Sales user experience would be,” says Dave Crouch, Ultra’s COO. “That involved working closely with Total Wine & More’s Concierge Sales team to see exactly how users would interact with the site.” Crouch and the rest of Ultra’s staff also reviewed in detail how Concierge Sales transactions would be processed.

As it moved through the engineering process, the Ultra team identified a mission-critical requirement for Total Wine & More’s Concierge Sales website: It had to be able to handle a 50% prepayment on wine futures. (Customers pay the remaining half of their balance when their bottled wine arrives at Total Wine & More; upon receipt of the final payment, the wine is shipped to the retail location nearest the customer for pickup.)

“This was going to be a major differentiator for Concierge Sales—nobody else in wine futures is able to offer a 50% prepayment capability,” explains Sumit Verma, CTO of Ultra Commerce. “Other sites that are designed for futures require full payment up front. That’s a problem for customers, of course, because they’re not getting anything for that up-front payment—they have to wait a long time.”

The wait can be even more frustrating when you consider that the average order with Concierge Sales ranges anywhere from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

The alternative to that scenario, however, is equally worrying for the retailer. If no up-front payment is required for futures, then it’s easy for the customer to back out of a sale—and that means lots of unsold inventory when the wine is finally bottled, released from the chateaux, and delivered to Total Wine & More.



A Giant Leap Forward

Following a soft launch only 6 months later, the Total Wine & More Concierge Sales website went live. Both Hazzard and Milutinovic agree that the new website has already transformed their business and changed it for the better. “We had a horse-drawn carriage before—now we’re driving a Lexus,” Hazzard says. “My favorite part of the system that Ultra Commerce built for us is the flexibility and customizability of the software.”

One of the biggest improvements with the website has been automated inventory management. For example, when a futures consignment arrives, the Concierge Sales system can now take the liters in any given futures consignment and calculate them into multiple SKUs (including 375ml, 750ml, 1.5-liter, and 3-liter units) that correspond to what was presold to customers. The Ultra Commerce platform intelligently and automatically reduces inventory as orders are filled and shipped.

And because so many manual functions have been automated with eCommerce workflow, Hazzard’s team no longer needs to spend precious time processing orders. “The value of the time savings alone is enormous,” he says. “The new website’s functionality means that my team members aren’t tied up with data entry anymore. They can focus more on customers.” But the automation and the associated time savings also extend to other areas. “The site has solved just about all of the problems we were experiencing before,” Milutinovic comments.

“Take research, reporting, and analytics, for instance. What used to take us days to accomplish takes just minutes now.”

Benefits for Everyone

Customers are benefiting from the new website as well. “The site that Ultra Commerce worked with us to build includes a customer account screen, something our clients never had access to previously,” Hazzard points out. “Now, customers can manage all aspects of their accounts. They can create orders, amend orders, and add credit cards—everything you’d be able to do with any other web-based sales program.”

Looking Back and Thinking Ahead

“Throughout the entire project, there was so much intuitive problem-solving on Ultra’s part,” Milutinovic explains. “We felt like they often finished our thought process—they understood the issues we were facing, knew exactly what we wanted, and came up with solutions we never would have thought of.” Milutinovic adds that he was especially impressed with Ultra’s responsiveness. “Whether it was 11 o’clock in the morning or 11 o’clock at night, it didn’t matter,” he says. “Everyone at Ultra is accessible. We got answers to our questions right away.” Hazzard notes another plus of working with Ultra. “Nothing was outsourced with Ultra,” he says. “It was important to us that we’d be working directly with the people who would be supporting our commerce platform.”