

Helping Wine & Spirits
Wholesalers of America (WSWA)
Reinvent “Convention” to Access LIVE!

Reimagining a Signature Event Post-Pandemic

The **Challenge**

Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA) is the national trade association representing the distribution tier of the wine and spirits industry, dedicated to advancing the interests and independence of distributors and brokers of wine and spirits.

WSWA's 2020 Convention was canceled a month before the event due to Covid. The organization opted not to have their event in 2021 or 2022 due to Covid and they needed to modernize the event. Therefore, the pressure was on to have a very successful event in 2023. WSWA brought in Design Studio by Maritz to help them reimagine this event with a brand refresh and big changes for 2023.



The **Opportunity**

WSWA was poised and ready to introduce a new model that put a fresh face on their event for 2023. It was an excellent opportunity to update the annual B2B “buy/sell” event with a new approach, a new design aesthetic and a new brand. And the timing couldn’t be better:

- A pandemic-induced two-year pause provided the time/opportunity to find solutions that worked well for all stakeholders.
- The addition of virtual technologies provided the opportunity to reduce the number of on-site business meetings, therefore enhancing WSWA’s ability to deliver greater ROI for the supplier community, generating greater loyalty and reducing attrition.

But getting these results meant a bold vision and disciplined execution against that vision... and the Maritz team was up to the task.

Enter the Maritz

Design Studio Team

The Solution

- Our team started with a deep discovery process before engaging WSWA with four separate design engagements.
- We conducted a robust brand exploration and created an executive visioning document to help communicate the essence of the reinvented event.
- **It was time for a brand refresh.** The name “Convention” is an old-fashioned term that everybody agreed had to be replaced with something more modern, dynamic and memorable. The new brand is a meaningful extension of WSWA Access, the program that helps producers better connect with wholesalers through education and mentorship.



INTRODUCING... ACCESS LIVE!

- Access to the right people
- Access to skills and knowledge
- Access to media and influencers
- Access to growth marketing asset creation
- Access to exciting brands and products
- Access to all three existing tiers & emerging players
- Access to the deals & dealmakers that make the difference

It now becomes a brand that reflects the value that WSWA and wholesalers deliver to the wine and distilled spirits ecosystem. It is a departure from its predecessor, but still intimately tied to the WSWA brand. It feels modern and high-end but also suggests that it will be easier for attendees to fulfill their individual objectives.



HERE ARE SOME OF THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REINVENTED EVENT THAT HELP FULFILL THE VISION:

- Wholesalers remained the center-point of the event.
- A focus on generating media coverage and creating assets helped all three tiers gain greater ROI, visibility and attention.
- A media training and production studio jump-started media asset creation and helped foster stakeholder expertise in developing and pitching stories, creating usable assets for growth marketing, and garnering media attention within and outside of the industry.
- A new, multi-dimensional show floor highlighted “neighborhoods” of segmented displays, creating a better shopping experience for interested buyers while generating more exposure to emerging brands.



- A new digital appointment system that empowered wholesalers and prioritized important connections. This, combined with wholesaler-hosted suites, flips the B2B meeting model on its head and changed the dynamic significantly.
- Producers gained new branding opportunities focused on and around the show floor. Retailers took a more prominent role as a critical link in the three-tier system and are invited guests, rather than hangers-on.
- Education sessions were transformed into short “bursts,” many staged on the LIVE Stage, which was on the show floor, to help maintain energy and traffic.

- “Insta-worthy” activations on the show floor helped provide photo and video opportunities.
- Backstage elements, such as speakeasies and executive lounges, helped to create exclusive experiences for VIP attendees and invited guests.
- A modern meeting app helped drive the on-site experience through interactive maps, an agenda builder, matchmaking, meeting scheduling and robust social media integration.
- A high-touch experience — pre-event and on-site — was marked by a streamlined registration process, concierge service for critical stakeholders and technology-enabled systems and processes.
- The inclusion of detailed journey mapping helped different event guests plan their experience.
- An alternative, new-wave general session format created a meaningful shared experience.
- We used our *Eight Phases of the Guest Experience™* during this entire process to help drive consistency across the entire event experience.



The **Results**

PER WSWA, HERE ARE THE BIGGEST WINS:

- New look and design were “wows”
- High energy at the entire event
- Exciting, future-focused topics & discussions
- Great networking opportunities around every corner
- Sustainability efforts implemented
- Health and wellness activities and foods were a focus
- More consolidated space
- Awards Program — More awards than ever before. Recognizing all 3 tiers (suppliers, wholesalers and retailers)
- Content at the LIVE Stage — TED Talk-style, future-focused and featured many impactful topics
- Mixology Workshop — Showcased trends
- Content Lab — Helped brands build professional-looking content for social media and website
- Brand Building Bar — brands could ask for advice and guidance from an industry expert
- Impressive, name-brand entertainment was an attractor

With greatly increased competition in and around WSWA’s space, an updated, differentiated experience created more of a draw and changed perceptions of “old-school” or “clubby,” helping to attract and engage emerging, next-gen professionals.

THE NUMBERS:

2,449 attendees — almost a 5% increase in attendance from 2019.

Greater revenue at the top and bottom lines over 2019.

“

The **Design Studio** by Maritz was an integral part of redesigning and infusing new concepts and excitement into the WSWA Convention & Exposition that has been around for over 80 years.

The Design Studio team we worked closely with dove in and easily integrated with the WSWA team. Throughout their discovery and redesign process, thoughtful and provoking questions were posed and ideas were shared.

We all felt comfortable with them, discussing new ideas and creating a unique and dynamic rebranded show for the wine and spirits industry. We could not have launched such a successful event without the support of the Design Studio team. We look forward to seeing where the show goes in the future and how we can continue to work with Maritz moving forward.

KARI LANGERMAN

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
MEETINGS & EVENTS

WINE & SPIRITS
WHOLESALE
OF AMERICA



”

INTRIGUED? LET’S CHAT!

Let’s discuss your challenges and see how we can assist you in designing a custom journey that leaves the right impression at every step of the way.

Schedule a free discovery call with a member of our team.