



Zebulon Firm Pops Out On Top Of Synthetic Cork Business

WNCN-TV

ZEBULON, N.C. - A plastics company in eastern Wake County has become a leading supplier in the growing field of synthetic closures -- fake corks -- for wine bottles. Nomacorc, which was founded seven years ago and now employs 250 people, popped out 1.2 billion synthetic closures last year and now controls about a third of the international market for the corks.

"The reaction has been very, very positive, particularly in what we call the new wine countries, being the U.S., Australia. Those markets have really embraced this," Nomacorc President and Chief Executive Lars von Kantzow said.

The company's patented technology, called co-extrusion, makes its closures different than any of its competitors. The cylinder has a foam inner core and a flexible outer skin.

"One night, my husband and I were having a bottle of wine. I think I opened it, and I realized (the cork) had a different feel to it. I wondered, 'What is this?'" said Anna Aldredge, who was enjoying a glass of vino at Raleigh wine bar Enoteca Vin.

"You can tell the material is tighter and less porous than a regular cork," sommelier Scott Luetgenau said. "Of course, they open like a regular cork."

But the plastic casing allows more marketing than a regular cork. High-resolution graphics with intricate designs, Web sites and logos can be printed on the closure, allowing wineries to complement bottle and label designs.

Cork taint -- a problem beyond the crumbs of dry cork that can fall into a wine glass during pouring -- is the driving force for 21st century technology in an industry that's been highly successful for centuries.

"Most consumers are not even aware that natural cork causes cork taint," said Malcolm Thompson, chief marketing officer for Nomacorc. "It's associated with a certain chemical that's naturally occurring. In some cases, it's extremely noticeable, and the wine can be extremely unpleasant. In other cases, it can result in the wine not being as fresh or fruity."

Kerry Smith, of Total Wine & More in Raleigh's North Hills shopping center, said he has had customers return wines because of cork taint.

"These corks certainly prevent wine from becoming 'corked,'" Smith said. "You see some studies that one in every three cases is going to have a bottle with corked wine with a real cork. It certainly happens all the time in the wine business."

That's why Nomacorc officials expect the synthetic closure industry to only get better with time -- like the fine wines they preserve.

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