

Drinks Firm Staff Enjoy Wine on Expenses

A leaked memo has left managers of a drinks firm red faced - and possibly damaged their chances of winning an £80 million contract.



Drinks distribution firm Matthew Clark, part of Constellation Europe, had been competing to win an £80 million contract to become exclusive wine supplier to the JD Wetherspoon pub group. Following their decision to use just one supplier, JD Wetherspoon had been running a trial to determine which wines were most popular in their chain of pubs.

Matthew Clark already supplies Wetherspoon with a wide range of quality wines, but with an

exclusive contract in sight, senior management at Constellation hatched a plan to temporarily boost sales figures. All Matthew Clark staff were encouraged – via an email from managing director Steve Thompson – to buy several bottles of the company’s wine from local JD Wetherspoon outlets and expense the cost. If all 300 staff did this, sales would increase by around 2,500 bottles in the Bristol area – enough to tip the balance in favour of Constellation. The plan would cost the firm over £16,000 – a small price to pay however, to win a contract worth £80 million.

All went smoothly until an employee forwarded a copy of the email to a local Bristol newspaper. The message refers to a poor take-up of the ‘invitation’ to purchase the wine on expenses, and encouraged staff to take advantage of the opportunity in order to maximise sales volumes for the remainder of the trial period.

A spokesman for J D Wetherspoon said: “If Matthew Clark staff have been specifically asked to purchase specific wines in an attempt to boost sales and that results in a distortion then Matthew Clark are not doing themselves or JD Wetherspoon any favours.... we are grateful to receive this information, albeit from a third party, and we will now need to reassess the sales figures for Bristol and surrounding areas.”

A spokeswoman for Constellation Europe denied the claims, commenting: “Employees were asked to support the trial by visiting their local J D Wetherspoon, purchasing one of these wines and then commenting on the purchase experience via a dedicated feedback form.”

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