



## CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

# VIRGIN WINES



### PAS 2060

Virgin Wines is one of the UK's largest direct-to-consumer wine retailers, supplying high quality products through online subscription and pay as you go models. Established over 20 years ago, they have sold more than 100 million bottles of wine and won a number of awards.

**In September of 2022 Virgin Wines became the first online wine retailer to achieve Carbon Neutral status, having undergone the verification process with NQA to ensure their claims were credible and accurate.**

We caught up with NQA Field Director, Steve Burt, and Virgin Wines Head of Strategic Change and Governance, Jessica Anderson, to find out about their PAS 2060 journey, and to understand some of the challenges (and solutions) they encountered along the way. **See what they had to say during a recent webinar...**

#### What motivated you to pursue PAS 2060 Verification?

“ At Virgin Wines we aim to be a sustainable company, so when putting together our sustainability roadmap, Net Zero is the big thing that everybody's focusing on that's obviously quite far down the line for a lot of companies, and it certainly is for us (as we've got a Net Zero target of 2045). With this in mind, we started looking at what we could do between now and then to try and help us to get to that point and put us in good stead. So Carbon Neutral is obviously an integral part of the journey, however we were aware people can attack it with accusations of greenwashing.

When we came across PAS 2060 we thought it was fantastic because one, you get the independent verification, - there are so

many places you can go online and spend £10 and be declared Carbon Neutral within the space of half an hour, so to know it has a thorough verification process and that it focuses on carbon reduction in the subsequent years was really compelling. Another plus point is that it really tied into what we were trying to do and it felt like a really fantastic stepping stone for us to be focusing on for the next couple of years.

#### What drew you to NQA for the Verification process?

I had so many questions at the outset, and God knows how many times I sent queries to the NQA Team who were incredibly patient the whole way through. That's why I ended up going for NQA, because it is a complicated process and if you are a single person in a company with no team, you really want a company that you can rely on.

#### Can you give us an overview of how you managed this project in the build up to Verification with NQA?

I came to manage this project as a one-man band the entire way through, so that's one thing I can say to people - don't worry you don't need to suddenly put a whole team of 10 people on this, you can do it yourself. One of the things I would say I didn't do that I would recommend is to get everybody in the business on board because what you have to do is get a lot of data from different people. There's a lot of relying on teams to be able to



feed things through to you which can be time consuming, such as invoices, so one of the things that I would do again is try and get the awareness in the business as a whole at the beginning rather than having to keep explaining to people every time I speak to them while I'm doing this project "sorry it's me again..."

I downloaded the standard and I chose to do the GHG protocol because the guides are free and online on the website so in all honesty this was a complete self-taught, I used the PDF and I used the online PDF of the GHG protocol because it gives you a guide of what's in each category and there's a separate calculation guide, so it tells you how to calculate it. There was a lot of trial and error, but it's just about being really organized and making sure you take your time and read the stuff that's there and like I said try and get a bit of buy-in from around the company so that people can give you things in a reasonably timely fashion.

One other thing that really helped is that you need to have the evidence, so logging everything and filing it in a way that you can easily get back to things. It's just a lot of data entry, but there's so many great guides and websites out there, including NQA's, which are great so that's a good place to go if you if you want to follow that because there's so many online like webinars that they've got recorded and really thorough guides, so that's a good free place to start. I think the standard to download is only a couple of hundred pounds, so in terms of resource and initial outgoings it wasn't very costly for us as well which as a smaller company again is quite important because we don't have big budgets that we can spend on sustainability initiatives at the moment unfortunately.

**How did you find the Verification activity?**

First and foremost, there's quite a lot of documentation being sent back and forth, so I knew that I had to be organised from the outset – I'd save stuff in folders, such as scope one Norwich, category five Norwich, Bolton, Preston for example. I wrote a lot of notes, because you're doing this over a long period of time and when you get to the verification and you need to remember something you did six months prior it can be tough, so I found having notes helpful.

The pre-verification was really handy and made the world of difference as we were able to sit down and I was able to show him where we were up to, explain how we're doing and how we're approaching it and at that point Steve was able to kind of point me to a few things that maybe I just need to tweak, so it gave me that extra reassurance that I had the right information. So it kind of gives you that real confident edge that you're going in the right direction and places where you're not or you haven't got the right level of data you know you can you've got time between then and the actual verification to sort it.

The hybrid format of onsite and remote was quite convenient too, so there was some on site and some off-site – I was walking around with my teams on my phone all day looking like an absolute nutter going around and showing him pictures of our radiators and stuff like that. So again another thing you might want to brief your team about before you go through the verification, but it was really convenient it was really helpful.

**What benefits have you seen, or do you feel that you may see coming out of this?**

In terms of benefits, the first thing that comes to mind is that from a staff perspective it's something tangible that people can really see and it gives me a great thing to go out and talk to everyone about and say "woohoo we've done this" and talk about how we did it and what it means and I think it's really piqued their interest.

I know people are having more conversations with me from their different teams about what they can do to be more sustainable so from that perspective initially that's great. We've gone out to our customers about it as we know this is something that they care deeply about and we put it in our annual report from an investor perspective.

We've received some really great feedback from customers emailing in and saying, "this is great", and we've also had customers coming back and asking legitimate questions which opens the door to two-way communications with them as well which is great.

So hopefully, as a player in in the wine market we could be seen as one of the leaders in trying to be more sustainable, and I think that's really important these days because people want to shop with a sustainable company, people want to work for a company that's sustainable, people want to invest in a company that's sustainable.

**How are Virgin Wines preparing for repeat Verification?**

The good thing is we have the process in the place to get the data, so that side's quite easy. What we tried to do is once we started last year, we tried to really look at low hanging fruit because there'll be some everywhere in every business and we began having conversations about how we could tackle those.

So things like getting LED lighting in our head office, switching our forklift trucks to electric, and there's lots of things that you know might seem on the surface really small but they have such a big impact, so we've just been spending time speaking to each area of the business and finding out how we can just make those tiny little tweaks that aren't necessarily really costly but can make a difference. Quite a few things, whilst they may have an initial outlay, offer savings in energy expenditure which I think anybody at this minute would be really thankful to have, so it's come at a perfect time.

The changes don't have to be costly, and we're seeing really big really big impacts just from a few small cost-effective changes so fingers crossed we will be able to hit the reductions that we have planned for this year.



To find out more about PAS 2060 Verification with NQA, visit our [Sustainability Hub](#) or contact us to speak to a member of the team.

TO DISCUSS YOUR CERTIFICATION & TRAINING NEEDS GET IN TOUCH:

**0800 052 2424 | [www.nqa.com](http://www.nqa.com)**

