



# The Wine Society Case Study

The Wine Society set for growth with secure automated payments from Encoded

The Wine Society is the world's oldest member-owned community of wine lovers. Since 1874 the organisation has been doing business differently, putting members before profit to ensure fairer bottle prices and services for all. Today, more than 180,000 members have access to over 1,400 selected wines from around the world, at everyday low prices throughout the year.

## Turning challenge into opportunity

While the Covid-19 pandemic has been catastrophic for many businesses, for The Wine Society it has provided the catalyst to strengthen the organisation. Repeated periods of lockdown and the closure of restaurants and bars have changed the buying patterns of members – more wine is drunk at home and ordering is more frequent.

Sales continue to be buoyant at The Society and in 2021, over 1 million orders were processed, up nearly 10% on the previous year; invoice sales were 11% ahead of 2020 and membership grew from 171,000 to over 180,000.

## Transformation begins in the contact centre

Even before the pandemic, The Wine Society had launched a programme to modernise its processes and infrastructure, transforming operations to meet the challenge of increased demand while maintaining a safe environment for employees.





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Nowhere does this resonate more clearly than in the contact centre, where the majority of the core 50-strong team – which can grow to 90 people at peak periods such as at Christmas, are office-based although they can work remotely. Staff help members with a wide range of queries including taking payments from members over the telephone.

Karen Coates, Chief Operations Officer at The Wine Society takes up the story: “Unlike many businesses, we welcome members contacting us and it is important that we do so securely. Encoded were our partner of choice to make us compliant over the phone. In 2021, we launched our new website and took the opportunity to extend our relationship with Encoded, and to bring on a new acquirer. We needed to offer our members both fast and secure Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) compliant payment methods and advanced e-commerce capabilities using automated technology.”

## Big technology for a growing company

As a member-owned co-operative, and therefore particularly mindful of the need to be as cost-effective as possible, The Wine Society required an all-in-one solution that combined fast, flexible service with blue-chip functionality at a competitive price. According to Karen Coates, it was all about “proportionality, a solution in our price range and in our size range that did the job well and was easy to implement.”

After thoroughly evaluating the marketplace, The Wine Society selected Encoded primarily for its responsiveness and adaptability as Karen Coates explains: “Encoded won hands down when it came to good customer service. We really liked the team and the fact they had done their homework and cared about our members and our business. They demonstrated high levels of flexibility, even suggesting additional creative ways to use Encoded technology. From the outset, it was clear they were exploring new ideas to help us work even smarter.

## New gateway services offer security and scalability

The Wine Society initially implemented a range of Encoded solutions in the early part of 2019 to support the organisation's contact centre. As for many businesses, cash flow is a top priority and this means ensuring that payments are processed efficiently and ideally first time around. Encoded's Gateway combined with Agent Assisted Payments solution give agents one simple to use interface to process members' card payments quickly and securely over any channel. Today, the solution links directly to The Wine Society's acquirer Cashflows to process over 70,000 transactions every month with the scalability to accommodate increased demand in the future.

## Fast Facts

- The Wine Society partners with Encoded to support 50-strong contact centre
- The society deploys a range of Encoded automated payment solutions to meet increased demand as orders rise 40% during the pandemic
- Encoded Gateway Services integrates directly with acquirer Cashflows to process over 70,000 transactions every month
- Agents use Encoded Agent Assisted Payments to take orders and process card payments from its rapidly growing membership without being exposed to sensitive card data
- Tokenisation boosts security for staff and customers while improving the agent and member experience
- “It just works!” – a real bonus for busy teams focused on running efficient day-to-day operations while keeping a strategic eye on the business
- Close collaboration enables The Wine Society to support business growth while driving new innovations that deliver enhanced member experiences.

## Integration holds the key to seamless service

What is more, Encoded Gateway Services provides a cohesive experience for agents and members by integrating with the other Encoded solutions, including E-Commerce Payments. This high level of integration ensures that all transaction information is shared securely internally between channels and can be administered, viewed and reported on through a single centralised portal.

Contact centre staff use Encoded's Agent Assisted Payments to take orders and process card payments from the society's rapidly growing membership without being exposed to sensitive card data. Members simply use their telephone's touch-tone keypad to tap in their card details while remaining in conversation with the agent throughout the transaction.

“We have successfully moved to a position where we take orders and card data is automatically stored for future payments without entering the contact centre environment. Repeat customers no longer have to enter their card details multiple times. This improves the agent and member experience while safeguarding security for everyone,” added Karen Coates.

## “Their adaptability is outstanding”

One of the biggest benefits of using Encoded is it just works – effortlessly behind the scenes without having to think about it. For Karen and her team, who are focused on running efficient day-to-day operations while keeping a strategic eye on the business, this is a real bonus.

Above all, it is the relationship between The Wine Society and Encoded that is most beneficial, one that reflects the society's own core values of honesty and transparency.

Karen Coates continued, “For us, it's very important to have someone we can work with and rely on to have our interests at heart and truly understand our unique business. The team at Encoded has always been extremely helpful. They are very responsive, attentive, thorough and professional. Quite simply, they just do what it says on the tin. And we keep changing the colour of the tin but happily they keep changing with us! Their adaptability is outstanding.”

These characteristics really came into their own when The Wine Society sought to replace its long-standing acquirer before signing up Cashflows. Having demonstrated the value Encoded technology could bring to the company, The Wine Society trusted Encoded to explore and recommend a new acquirer while encouraging participation in future projects.





## A future of innovation

Next on the horizon is enhancing The Society's e-Commerce capabilities. The Society is working to strengthen fraud management. Together, The Wine Society, Encoded and Cashflows are collaborating closely to achieve just that.

Karen Coates concluded: "From providing a robust and secure payments framework to building and testing our new website, and in continuing to develop our services for members, we can rely on Encoded to be with us every step of the way, not just in a consultative way but in a true partnership way."

## About The Wine Society

Established in 1874, The Wine Society is the world's oldest member-owned community of wine lovers. As a not-for-profit organisation without external shareholders, all profits are put back into lower prices and improving services for the people who enjoy wine as well as for those who make them. Today, The Wine Society has over 180,000 members and reported gross revenues of £160 million in 2021.

For more information, visit  
[www.thewinesociety.com](http://www.thewinesociety.com)

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## About Encoded

Encoded is a leading Payment Service Provider and pioneer of new and innovative secure payment solutions for contact centres. Encoded offers a range of card payment solutions designed to help organisations comply with PCI DSS, GDPR and the newly introduced Payment Services Directive (PSD2).

Encoded's solutions are trusted by many of the world's leading brands including Samsung, Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Müller and Virgin as well as a host of UK utility companies such as Green Star Energy (now Shell Energy) and Severn Trent Water.

Omni-channel solutions include:

- Agent Assisted Payments
- E-Commerce payments
- IVR Payments
- Mobile Apps
- PayByLink Mobile Payments
- Encoded Gateway Services

For more information please visit  
[www.encoded.co.uk](http://www.encoded.co.uk)

