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Wine and Coca Cola: Serendipity and Entrepreneurial success

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Starting a new company from scratch depends critically on identifying a product for which there will be enough demand to generate a profit after a reasonable time period. Many start-ups nowadays obtain early Government grants or contracts (*e.g.* the so-called SBIR programs), but until such contracts begin (if ever!) to provide positive cash flow, a source of other funds become essential. Despite contracts, venture capital, and some friends willing to "gamble," our first entrepreneurial venture ended not with a bang, but a whimper! We had chosen the wrong market. On the day before the company closed its doors, an unanticipated event occurred. We had opened a few bottles of wine for our final farewell but, as we began drinking, we decided to study their laser-scattering properties with our unappreciated and failed instrumentation. The resulting press coverage of a paper reporting that "tasting" was phenomenal, though it was published too late to save the company. Starting a second entrepreneurial venture was far more difficult as the first "angels" were nowhere to be found. A forgotten proposal by that failed first venture was suddenly funded providing, thereby, the means to start the second. As the second venture began, the success of the wine paper suggested that trying the same method with cola drinks might prove interesting. A new paper reporting on those results was immediately picked up by *Applied Optics* for an issue cover. At first, a particular cola manufacturer was not amused. However, it soon recognized the significance of laser scattering and began to contribute to the Company's support. Complemented by their largesse and the newly funded contract, the Company's instrumentation commercialization programs became sharply focused: refine the development and sale of a new type of absolute light scattering photometer incorporating a laser. We never looked back.