By Peter Blais

MERRIMACK, N.H. — A New Hampshire company is marketing a ticket that corporations can distribute to their clients who can then exchange them for a free round of golf at courses nationwide. Corporate Sports Incentives is selling the Universal Golf Ticket to national corporations in the hope they will give it to their best customers just as they distribute baseball, basketball, football and hockey tickets.

CSI contends the golf ticket is more valuable than a sports event pass because the golf ticket can be used anytime at any location and is opposed to the sports ticket that can be used only at a certain date and place. The golf ticket resembles a credit card and can be embossed with the giver's company logo to help keep record of who gets it.

"For the first time, the golf industry can obtain its fair share of corporate funds allocated to entertainment budgets," said company founder Jonathan Adams.

CSI's goal is to sign up 3,000 courses within the next two years. Fifty, mostly in the Northeast, were on board in early June.

"Our major effort right now is to contact the courses," Adams said.

It costs courses nothing to join and the tickets are not discounted. A course will be reimbursed within 10 days at 100 percent of its published greens fees when tickets are presented for a round of golf.

The program is patterned after CSI's Universal Ski Ticket. Corporations buy the ski ticket for $42. It can be exchanged for a free lift ticket at 240 of the country's 300 major ski resorts. Pepol, Coca-Cola, Hires, Seagrams, General Foods, Nestles, Campbell's and U.S. Air Force Academy are among the companies that have distributed Universal Ski Tickets to their favored clients over the past five years.

The Universal Golf Ticket works somewhat differently. The price of the $42 ski ticket was determined by the lift ticket rate at the most expensive of CSI's participating ski resorts. With greens fees varying from $85 to almost $200 in the United States, a different method was needed. Corporations buy the Universal Golf Ticket for $32 apiece. Adams anticipates one ticket will be good for a round of golf at 80 percent of the courses joining the program. But some courses require two, three or more tickets, depending on their greens fees.

For example, one ticket is good for 18 holes at Hyannis Golf Club in Massachusetts. Two tickets are needed for 18 holes and a cart at Copper Mountain Resort in Colorado. Three tickets fetch 18 holes and a cart at the Balsams Grand Hotel Resort in New Hampshire.

"If we ever sign on Pebble Beach, it might take something like six tickets," Adams said.

While CSI expects most of the tax-deductible Universal Golf Tickets will be distributed by executives to clients, Adams said they will likely be used as rewards in company sales incentive programs for employees and as gifts for relatives and friends.

"We've sold a lot of ski tickets at Christmas time as stocking stuffers," he said.

CSI has already sold its first load of golf tickets to a corporate customer. Adams expects sales to accelerate, especially as more courses sign up for the program.

More courses will join the program as it gains credibility, he said. Ski areas with golf courses, because of their familiarity with the Universal Ski Ticket, have been among the first to enlist for the golf program, Adams added.

"My only question as a golf course manager would be 'How do I know if I'll be paid if I accept this ticket?'" he said.

We've got a solid, five-year history with the ski areas. In fact, the ski areas have a greater exposure than golf courses. Kilington (Vt.) runs through something like 16,000 skiers a day. A golf course, at most, is only going to have some.

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