Course owners explore intricacies of group purchasing

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"It takes a long time to make these agreements work. It also takes time to convince people in your own company it's the right thing to do.'
— Mike Heacock, American Golf Corp.

significant on the expense side of the ledger. But we've really just started."

It's a long process, according to management company executives. Kemper Management, for example, didn't begin concentrating on group buying until three years ago — and the strategy is still evolving. "We certainly haven't been doing it since day one," explained Steve Lesnick, president and CEO at Kemper. "You have to be a certain size to make it worthwhile. We're large enough now (14 clubs nationwide) that we can get the type of buying power that a group buyer can realize."

Further, added Heacock, "It's not an easy deal. Everybody wants to do it, but the mechanics are very difficult. There are potential savings out there, but you have to manage it.

AGC had been buying rakes on a local basis. Now the firm buys them centrally for its 126 courses in 23 states — at a savings of 15 to 20 percent, according to Heacock.

Kemper buys its chemical and heavier equipment in bulk, as does AGC. In fact, American Golf has entered into several long-term exclusive contracts for golf cars, mowers and seed.

The value of such a deal is not so much the price savings. The real value lies in allowing companies like AGC and Kemper — no longer hostage to distributors — to deal directly with factories.

"This allows us to go way beyond price," Heacock explained. "It comes down to a question of 'How does say, Toro support American Golf' and vice versa."

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The NGCOA recently entered into a partnership with Truck Centers, Inc., whereby NGCOA members can purchase GMC vehicles at a savings of 2 to 7 percent, depending on the option package. The NGCOA and its 1,1125 members have also arranged for volume deals with U.S. Sprint and Alamo rental cars.

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