Higher demand fuels unprecedented growth

Ranges offering practice areas by weeks open

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice area</th>
<th>Number of</th>
<th>Chipping</th>
<th>Putting Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>weeks open</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 35</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>38.3 43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>27.5 33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 45</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>51.6 31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall avg.</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>43.6 36.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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By Rob Spiniak

While industries nationwide are plagued by recession, the golf or practice range industry has grown in all respects — geographic, number, ancillary services and revenues. A golf range association has been born. A publication for the industry has been launched. New concepts in ranges including fitness centers, miniature golf, and electronic stuff that might put Back Rogers on the Tour is appearing. An industry trade show is set for Chicago next January.

Steve di Costanzo, executive director of the Infant Golf Range and Recreation Association of America (GRRAA), reports that the number of ranges built in 1991 increased 53 percent over 1990.

Mark Grothe, golf ball marketing manager of Spalding, said, "1991 was a big jump (in range ball sales) over 1990." He estimated 50 percent.

Working to make practice more perfect

High-end, "ultimate" range facilities carve their niche

By Lisa Maki

Practice makes perfect, but what makes perfect practice? An optimum practice facility must meet the golfer's 18 hole needs — physical and psychological.

Such perfect facilities are scarce, no matter what a golfer's skill level or what caliber course he plays: cow pasture or country club.

Throughout the country, golf courses have a common problem — inadequate practice facilities.

Municipal courses often show more concern for picking up balls than hitting them.

Private courses have generally compromised their practice areas, squeezing in extra homesites, leaving small ranges with no specialty holes.

Well-meaning entrepreneurs tried to respond to this dilemma by creating "golf entertainment centers" complete with batting cages, video arcades, put-putt courses, and rubber matts. These centers sprang up at major intersections across the country. They did little to satisfy serious golfers' desire to improve their game.

An alternative to cow pastures, country clubs and entertainment centers appears to be gaining popularity — the high-end daily fee golf club.

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American Golf executive: Market runs the risk of over-expansion

By Peter Blais

The market for practice range facilities may not be as bright as many believe, according to an executive with one of the nation's largest course management companies.

The past few years, many ill-conceived projects have been built in areas with insufficient demand, said Joe Guerra, senior vice president of corporate development with American Golf Corp.

Consequently, some municipalities are overstocked with practice centers, a situation that isn't likely to change until a few go belly up, Guerra said.

For example, two practice centers were recently built within five miles of AGC's Irvine, Calif. facility. While it isn't meeting expectations, the AGC center is still earning a fair return, Guerra said. But Irvine can't support the additional 150 new hitting stations and he expects the new facilities to have a tough time surviving.

"Many new practice ranges were built on headlines rather than sound economics," the AGC executive said. "The developers wanted in on what they saw as a glamorous business.

"One of the main problems is that the barriers to entry are so low. You can build a range for $100,000 to $2 million and 12 acres of land. A lot of people wanted to get into the business and were willing to mortgage the house to do so. But the market just didn't justify the investment."

Many developers bought land when they would have been better off signing a long-term lease, the AGC executive said. Those projects performing best are generally on land the developers have owned and operated as practice ranges for many years, adding

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Aqua range delivers novelty, profitability

By Lisa Maki

One trend that may further aid the rebirth of practice facilities — even the cow pastures and country clubs — is the aqua range, which combines beauty, drama, challenge and shot value, not to mention the novelty of floating golf balls.

The notion of hitting balls into a lake may sound counterproductive.

But the aqua range generates income and offers the developer a number of advantages: increased value of neighboring homes, decreased maintenance costs, and the fill necessary for further development.

Jim Cocchi, director of golf at Glenn Lakes Golf Club in Weeki Wachee, Fla., supports the aqua range concept.

Cocchi said his clients enjoy the aqua range, and it's been very profitable.

Its success can be partially linked to Cocchi's belief in supplying good quality balls. Although floating balls are about 60 cents more expensive than ordinary balls, the initial investment will be returned in kind, he said.

The aqua range and short game practice area at Glenn Lakes in Florida.

A lot of people wanted to get into the business and were willing to mortgage the house to do so. But the market just didn't justify the investment."

— AGC's Joe Guerra

Ranges
High-end practice facilities offer challenges & the spice of life

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...complete with practice facilities. Developers are responding to the void in the industry by supplying a quality mid-market product.

The theme "strictly a golf club" and "development of the game" seem to be the wave of the future. The higher green fees these high-end daily fee courses charge have both necessitated and allowed development.

Customers are serious about practicing to get the most out of their game. Today's architects are re-warding them by mixing the majesty of classic courses and golf tradition with new creative concepts.

This combination of the past, present and future design concepts has created a surging demand for developers to provide the facilities where golfers can adapt their techniques to these modern but traditional courses.

An optimum practice facility sub-

The used market

Continued from page 34

bump-and-run, forced carry, working right to left and left to right, long ex-

Range Banners. • Naturally, they're highly visible. That, after all, is the whole idea. The bold black numbers literally pop off the 4' x 2'

bright yellow nylon banners. And unlike pennants, they can be easily read on the calmest or windiest of days.

• They're durable, too. Mounted on do-it-yourself PVC frames (our enclosed instructions show you how), they're designed to stand up to all kinds of weather.

• Best of all, they're very economical!

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